

A SINGLE BOWL OF SAUCE

Teachings Beyond Good and Evil

by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

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ANUMODANĀ

To all Dhamma Comrades, those helping to spread Dhamma:

Break out the funds to spread Dhamma to let Faithful Trust flow,
Broadcast majestic Dhamma to radiate long-living joy.

Release unexcelled Dhamma to tap the spring of Virtue,
Let safely peaceful delight flow like a cool mountain stream.

Dhamma leaves of many years sprouting anew, reaching out,
To unfold and bloom in the Dhamma Centers of all towns.

To spread lustrous Dhamma and in hearts glorified plant it,
Before long, weeds of sorrow, pain, and affliction will flee.

As Virtue revives and resounds throughout Thai society,
All hearts feel certain love toward those born, aging, and dying.

Congratulations and Blessings to all Dhamma Comrades,
You who share Dhamma to widen the people's prosperous joy.

Heartiest appreciation from Buddhādāsa Indapañño,
Buddhist Science ever shines beams of Bodhi long-lasting.

In grateful service, fruits of merit and wholesome successes,
Are all devoted in honor to Lord Father Buddha.

Thus may the Thai people be renowned for their Virtue,
May perfect success through Buddhist Science awaken their hearts.

May the King and His Family live long in triumphant strength,
May joy long endure throughout this our world upon earth.

from

Buddhādāsa Indapañño

Mokkhabalārāma

Chaiya, 2 November 2530

ANUMODANĀ

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was one of the most dedicated Buddhist monks in Thailand who worked for the society, the nation, Buddhism, and the world.

All his life, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu studied, practiced, and spread Lord Buddha's teachings honestly and accurately in accordance with Buddhist doctrine and discipline. He named himself 'Buddhadāsa' which in Pāli means 'Servant of the Buddha.'

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu established Suan Mokkh Monastery to welcome people who are interested in practicing Buddha's teachings in a convenient and comfortable atmosphere. He also established the International Dharma Hermitage for both foreigners and Thais as a place to meditate, and especially for foreigners to be trained about Buddha's teachings. From the time of the establishment of this hermitage to the present day, more than 30,000 foreigners and Thais have participated in the activities provided.

Additionally, Buddhadāsa Bhikhu provided opportunities for women to study the teachings safely and comfortably in a residence called Dhamma-Mata. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's immense contribution to Buddhism will yield merits to humanity until the end of time.

I am thankful that all of you have sacrificed your time and money to join the seminar on the occasion of the special event of the 111th anniversary of Buddhadāsa, and I take this opportunity to rejoice in your merit.

I wish you happiness and prosperity in your future.

Ven. Buddhadhammo (Ajahn Poh)
April 2017

FOREWORD

Many thanks to the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives for organizing the ‘Dhamma and Society’ seminar and conference, along with Mahachulalongkorn University and Suratthani Rajabhat Universities, and for publishing this commemorative volume. Choosing Ajahn Buddhadāsa’s 111th anniversary is both witty and reflects the reality that causes and conditions are now ripe for doing so. While he has never been forgotten in the twenty-four years since his death, a new generation of Buddhists, in Siam, around Asia, and throughout the world, is curious to learn what this brilliant and wide-ranging master of Buddha-Dhamma had to say.

Tan Ajahn was an important voice bringing traditional, and especially core, Buddhist understanding into the modern world. At the same time, he was critically adaptive to modernity, seeing beyond it and through its drawbacks. He selectively made use of modernity, while retaining a simple life at Suan Mokkh. Sulak Sivaraksa’s description ‘radical conservative’ might be paired with ‘traditional modernist’ (though not too seriously).

Now, that the drawbacks of modernity are more obvious than ever – climate disruption, vast weapons technology, the heart numbing effect of ubiquitous ‘screens,’ and the trivialization of values through consumerism – we desperately look for Dhamma guidance in order to stave off species disaster. As he sometimes put it, Dhamma is for the sake of *khwaam-yoo-rawd*, which means ‘survival’ and can also mean ‘salvation.’ Students of Tan Ajahn and Lord Buddha have a role to play in exploring whether humanity has enough Dhamma in it to survive.

The seminar and conference are testament that ‘Buddhadāsa’ remains relevant today. Bringing together

speakers and participants from Thailand and abroad, from Asia and elsewhere, demonstrates that an approach cutting to the core of Buddhayāna is still appealing and vital. Tan Ajahn lived up to his *nom de plume*. May we all carry on the torch of Buddhadāsa midst the troubled times that we inhabit.

In this volume, I am delighted to find a pleasant mix of old pieces that many people have never seen, a few old things long out of print, some new translations, and pieces that have long been on the web and were ripe for fresh, revised publication. These many-sided examples of Tan Ajahn's teaching supplement the longer works currently in print, such as the newly issued *Under the Bodhi Tree*, on dependent co-arising.

In this volume, readers will find summaries of the key themes of Tan Ajahn's Dhamma life and specific application of them to particular activities such as agriculture and economics, as befits the theme of this 111th Anniversary conference. May these introductions for new students and reminders for old students help us keep the Buddha-Dhamma Way in our hearts, words, and actions for the sake of all beings, especially those most vulnerable and threatened by out of control *kilesa*.

May Buddhadāsas continue to appear so that the world will not be empty of *arahant*, nor be empty of *humanity*.

Santikaro
Liberation Park, Wisconsin
May 1, 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This ‘Single Bowl of Sauce’ has obviously been crafted through many selfless acts by several people. On behalf of MCU, SRU, and BIA, heartfelt *wais* and bows are offered as follows:

A triple bow to Ven. Ajahn Poh, who by his blessings of this ‘Single Bowl’ has once again shown his tireless dedication to sharing Dhamma with all people, regardless of their backgrounds.

A triple bow to Ven. Dusadee, who expressed his appreciation and support for this publication.

A triple bow to Ven. Dhammavidū, who has generously entrusted BIA with his translations soon after he completed them.

A *wai* to Ajahn Santikaro, who not only agreed to the reprint of some of the teachings he had translated, but took time to lightly re-edit some of them, and as often, has been a source of inspiration and knowledge.

A *wai* to Ajahn Christopher Titmuss, Prof. Lindsay Falvey, Prof. Mongkol Dejnakarindra, and Leonardo Chapela, who all swiftly gave unconditional permission to include their interviews and translations.

A *wai* to volunteer editors/proofreaders Joanna Dupuis, Cindy Stewart, and Ralph Oertel, and to volunteer graphic designers who at different stages of the project have greatly contributed to making this Single Bowl more polished.

A *wai* to Penchai Siroros for her kindness in providing the most suitable workplace in the forest of Wat Umong, Chiang Mai.

A *wai* to the Kiatnakin Phatra Financial Group for their continuous support of the BIA International program.

A *wai* to all volunteers and supporters of BIA, and many others who are contributing in different, essential ways to these ‘Dhamma & Society’ events honouring the 111th Anniversary of Buddhādāsa.

May the taste of these Dhamma ingredients carefully prepared by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu be sweet and liberating to all kinds of beings everywhere.

The Coordinating Editor
Bangkok, Vesak 2017

EDITORS' NOTE

Some of the texts have been edited in preparation for them to be published in this commemorative book. Such editing included standardizing the spelling of a few words, for example 'Ajahn' and 'Suan Mokkh,' as well as standardizing the spelling of Pāli words. In addition, Sutta references were added as footnotes whenever needed and possible. Finally, there was light editing of several previously published texts for things such as existing typos, grammar etc. We sincerely apologize for any errors that may still exist that could cause misinterpretation of Buddhādāsa's teachings.

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THE WORLD TODAY

*Sometimes I have a chat with 'God,'
Who looks after this trembling world
With so much tolerance, kindness, and care,
Yet the world's beings still tremble and quake.*

*The world is stinking drunk on materialism,
Heartbroken with pains worse than violent death.
'Living dead' hour to hour as if life is a joke
Is worse than dying just once into the coffin.*

*Whatever they attempt, they still miss seeing the path,
Too terrified of giving up and abandoning everything.
It will happen only when Dhamma returns just in time
And the world turns towards the joy of Sri Ariya's Age.*

MESSAGE FROM SUAN MOKKH HELP, KĀLĀMA SUTTA! HELP!

An article written on 6 May 2531 (1988)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya

Translated from the Thai by Ajahn Santikaro

This article was prepared by Ajahn Buddhādāsa as part of a series of six pamphlets to be distributed at a major exhibition on his life and work organized by Ajahn Ranjuan Indarakamhaeng and other students at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Subsequently, all six pamphlets were published as Messages of Truth from Suan Mokkh.



HELP, KĀLĀMA SUTTA! HELP!

All people in the world, including the Thai people, are now in the same situation as were the Kālāma people in Kesaputta township, India, during the time of the Buddha. Their village was located at a crossroads through which many religious teachers frequently passed. Each of these teachers taught that his personal doctrine was the only truth and that all others before and after him were wrong. The Kālāmas could not decide which doctrine they should accept and follow. When the Buddha once visited their village, the Kālāmas brought up their problem with him: they did not know which teacher to believe. Consequently, the Buddha taught them what is known now as the Kālāma Sutta,¹ which we will examine here.

Nowadays, the world's people study many different approaches to economic, social, and technological development. The universities teach just about everything. Then, regarding spiritual matters, here in Thailand alone we have so many teachers, so many interpretations of the Buddha's teachings, and so many meditation centers that nobody knows which teaching to accept or which practice to follow. Thus, it can be said that we have fallen into the same position that the Kālāmas were in over two millennia ago.

¹ Kesaputti (Kālāma) Sutta (AN 3:65).

The Buddha taught them, and consequently us, not to accept or believe something for conventional reasons. He discussed ten such reasons that we should be wary of, so we can avoid becoming anyone's intellectual slave, even the Buddha's. This principle enables us to choose for ourselves the teachings that are truly capable of quenching suffering (*dukkha*). The ten examples the Buddha gave in the Kālāma Sutta follow.

1. *Mā anussavena*: Don't accept and believe something to be true just because it has been passed along and retold for many years. Such credulity is a characteristic of brainless people, of 'sawdust brains,' such as those in Bangkok who once believed that disasters would befall people born in the 'ma' years.²

2. *Mā paramparāya*: Don't believe in something merely because it has become a traditional practice. People tend to imitate what others do and then pass the habit along, as in the story of the rabbit that was terrified by a fallen mango.³ When the other animals saw the rabbit running at top speed, they were frightened too and ran after it. Most of them ended up tripping and tumbling off a cliff to their deaths. Any *vipassanā* (insight) practice that merely imitates others, that just follows tradition, will bring similar results.

3. *Mā itikirāya*: Don't accept and believe something simply because news of it has spread far and wide, whether through one's village or throughout the whole world. Only fools are susceptible to believing something because others believe it or are talking about it, for they refuse to exercise their own powers of intelligence and discrimination.

4. *Mā piṭakasampadānena*: Don't accept and believe something just because it is cited in a *piṭaka* (text). The word *piṭaka*, although most commonly used for Buddhist scriptures, can mean anything written or inscribed on a suitable writing material. The teachings memorized and passed on orally should not be confused with *piṭaka*. A *piṭaka* is a certain kind of conditioned thing made and controlled by human beings, which always can be changed by human hands. Thus, we cannot trust every letter and word we read in them. We need to use our powers of discrimination to see how these words can be applied to the quenching of suffering. As there are discrepancies among the *piṭaka* of the various Buddhist schools, care is called for.

² The years of the small snake, big snake, horse, and goat – five through eight in the old twelve-year Thai cycle – all begin with 'ma.'

³ Similar to Chicken Little, or Henry Penny, and her falling sky.

5. *Mā takkahetu:* Don't believe something solely on the grounds of logical reasoning (*takka*). Logic is merely one branch of knowledge that people use to try to figure out the truth. *Takka*, logic, is never infallible. If its data or inferences are incorrect, it can go wrong.

6. *Mā nayahetu:* Don't believe or accept something merely because it appears correct on the grounds of *naya*, what is now called 'philosophy.' (In Thailand, we translate the Western term 'philosophy' as *prajñā*. Our Indian friends cannot accept this because *naya* is just a point of view or opinion; it isn't the supreme understanding properly referred to as *paññā* or *prajñā*). *Naya* (or *nayāya*) is merely a method of deductive reasoning based on hypotheses or assumptions. Such reasoning can err when the method or hypothesis is inappropriate.

7. *Mā ākāraparivitakkena:* Don't believe or accept something simply because of superficial thinking, that is, because it appeals to what we nowadays call 'common sense,' which is merely snap judgments based on one's tendencies of thought. We like to use this approach so much that it becomes habitual. Some careless and boastful philosophers rely on such common sense a great deal yet consider themselves clever.

8. *Mā diṭṭhinijjhānakkantiyā:* Don't believe or accept something to be true merely because it agrees or fits with one's preconceived opinions and theories. Personal views can be wrong and our methods of experimentation and verification may be inadequate, rendering them incapable of leading us to the truth. This approach may seem similar to the scientific method, but it can never actually be scientific, as its proofs and experiments are inadequate.

9. *Mā bhabbarūpatāya:* Don't believe something just because the speaker appears believable, perhaps due to credibility or prestige. Outside appearances and the actual knowledge inside a person can never be identical. We often find that speakers who appear credible outwardly turn out to say incorrect and foolish things. Nowadays, we must be wary of computers because the programmers who feed them data and manipulate them may put in the wrong information, make programming errors, or use them incorrectly. Don't worship computers so much, for doing so goes against this principle of the Kālāma Sutta.

10. *Mā samaṇo no garū ti:* Don't believe something simply because the monk (more broadly, any speaker) is 'my teacher.' The Buddha's purpose

regarding this important point is that nobody should be the intellectual slave of anybody else, not even of the Buddha himself. The Buddha emphasized this point often, and there were disciples, such as the Venerable Sāriputta, who confirmed it in practice. They didn't believe the Buddha's words immediately upon hearing them; they only did so after reasoned reflection and the test of practice. We hope that other religious teachers of this world have given this highest freedom to their listeners and disciples! In Buddhism, there is no dogmatic system that pressures us to believe without the right to examine and decide for ourselves. This is the great uniqueness of Buddhism that keeps its practitioners from being anybody's intellectual slave. We Thais should never volunteer to follow the West as slavishly as we are doing now. Intellectual and spiritual freedom is best.

Understanding the ten examples of the Kālāma Sutta is a surefire defense against intellectual dependence and not being one's own person, against neglecting one's own intelligence and wisdom in dealing with what one hears and listens to (*paratoghosa*, the 'sound of others,' in Buddhist terms). Whatever one listens to, one should carefully and systematically reflect upon it. When the facts of the matter are clearly beneficial and result in the quenching of suffering, one may finally believe it one-hundred percent.

The principle of the Kālāma Sutta is appropriate for everyone, everywhere, every era, and every world – even for the heavenly worlds. Nowadays, the world has been shrunk by miraculous communications, by the easy and rapid exchange of information. People can get new knowledge from every direction and corner of the planet. In the process, they don't know what to believe and, therefore, are in the same position as were the Kālāmas during the time of the Buddha. Indeed, the Kālāma Sutta can be their refuge. Please give it the good attention and study it deserves. Consider it the greatest good fortune that the Buddha taught this *sutta*. It is a gift for the whole world. Only those who are too foolish will be unable to benefit from this discourse of the Buddha.

The Kālāma Sutta is to be practiced by people of all ages. Even children can apply its principle in order to be children of awakening (*bodhi*) rather than children of ignorance (*avijjā*). Parents should teach and train their children to know how to understand the words and instructions they receive, how to see the reasoning and natural facts involved, and whether the results will really be as claimed. Whenever teaching or telling their children something, parents should help them to really understand what they are asked to do and see the benefits

for themselves. For example, when they are told not to take drugs, children shouldn't obey merely because of fear, but because they see what the results of taking drugs actually are and thus willingly refuse addictive substances.

None of the ten examples in the Kālāma Sutta state that children should never believe or listen to anyone. They simply state that children, along with the rest of us, should listen carefully and only believe something to be true after having seen for themselves its real meaning and the advantages that will come from such belief, then practice accordingly. When a teacher teaches something, helping children to see the reasoning behind the teaching won't make them obstinate. For the obstinate ones, gently apply a bit of switch and let them think things over again. Children will increasingly understand and appreciate the principle of the Kālāma Sutta as they mature. If we train children by this standard, they will be skilled in dealing with all ten examples by the time they are fully mature adults,

Today's scientific world will be able to gladly accept all ten tenets of the Kālāma Sutta as being in line with the scientific method. There is not the least contradiction between the principles of science and those of the Kālāma Sutta. Even the eighth item, which states that one should not accept something just because it corresponds with one's own preconceived theories, does not contradict scientific principles. True scientists emphasize experimental verification as their main criterion for accepting something as true, not personal opinions, concepts, beliefs, reasoning, and theories. Due to these standards of the Kālāma Sutta, Buddhism will satisfy the expectations and needs of true scientists.

If one follows the principle of the Kālāma Sutta, one will have independent knowledge and reason with which to understand the meaning and truth of ideas and propositions heard or read for the first time. For example, when one hears that greed, hatred, and delusion are dangerous and evil, one understands thoroughly and instantly, because one already knows through personal experience what these things are like. One believes in one's own experience and intelligence rather than the speaker. The way of practice is the same in other cases. If a statement is about something one has never seen or known before, one should try to understand or get to know it first. Then one can consider whether or not to accept the newly received teaching or advice. One should never accept something just because one believes in the speaker. One should take one's time, even if it means dying before finding out. This

is how the Kālāma Sutta protects one from becoming the intellectual slave of anyone else, even in the most subtle matters and so-called mysteries.

There's a problem every time a new kind of medicine comes out and is advertised all over the place. Should we offer ourselves as guinea pigs to test it, out of belief in the advertisements? Or should we wait until we have sufficient reason to try just a little of it first, to see if it truly gives the good results advertised, before relying on it fully? We should respond to new statements and teachings in the same way we respond to new medicines, by following the principle of the Kālāma Sutta as a true refuge.

The Kālāma Sutta requires us to develop wisdom before faith. If one wants to have faith come first, then let it be the faith that begins with wisdom, not the blind faith that comes from ignorance. The same holds true in the principle of the Noble Eightfold Path: take wisdom or right understanding as the starting point, then let faith grow out of that wisdom or right understanding. This is the only safe approach. We ought never to believe blindly immediately upon hearing something, nor should we be forced to believe out of fear, bribery, or the like.

The world nowadays is so overwhelmed by the power of advertising and propaganda that most people have become slaves to it. Advertisers can make people pull out their wallets without even thinking in order to buy things they don't need to eat, don't need to have, and don't need to use. This is so commonplace that we absolutely must offer the principle of the Kālāma Sutta to our human comrades of this era. Propaganda is much more harmful than ordinary advertising or what is called *paratoghosa* in Pāli. Even with ordinary advertising, *paratoghosa*, we must rely on the principle of the Kālāma Sutta as our refuge, to say nothing of needing it to deal with outright propaganda, which is full of intentional deceptions. So we can say that the Kālāma Sutta is beneficial even in solving economic problems.

I ask you all to consider, investigate, and test whether there is found anywhere greater spiritual freedom than is found in the Kālāma Sutta. If someone says that Buddhism is a religion of freedom, can there be any reason to dispute or oppose that statement? Does this world which is so intoxicated with freedom really know or have freedom in keeping with the principle of the Kālāma Sutta? Do blind ignorance and indifference regarding the Kālāma Sutta create the lack of such freedom? Some even disparage this sutta by claiming it teaches us to not believe or listen to anything. Moreover, some actually

claim that the Buddha preached this sutta only for the Kālāma people there at that time. Why don't we open our eyes and notice that people nowadays have become intellectual and spiritual slaves, that they have lost their freedom much more than the Kālāmas in the time of the Buddha?

Dear friends, fellow worshippers of freedom, I ask you to consider carefully the essence and aim of the Kālāma Sutta and the Buddha's intention in teaching it. Then, your Buddhist qualities of awakening will grow fat and robust, rather than skinny and weak. Don't foolishly fear and loathe the Kālāma Sutta. The word 'Thai' means 'freedom.' What kind of freedom are you going to bring to our 'Thainess'? Or what kind of 'Thainess' is fitting and proper for the independence or 'Thainess' of Buddhists, the disciples of the Buddha?

Now let us look further to see the hidden benefits and advantages in the Kālāma Sutta. The Sutta can help us to avoid the tactless and narrow-minded talk that leads to violent clashes and disputes. For example, it is foolish to set up an unalterable rule for all families regarding who, husband or wife, will be the front legs (leader) and who the hind legs of the elephant. It all depends on the specific conditions of each family. According to the principles in the Kālāma Sutta and the law of specific conditionality (*idappaccayatā*), we only can discuss the proper roles of family members on the basis of each family's circumstances. Please don't speak one-sidedly and violate natural principles.

Regarding abortion, people argue until they are red in the face whether it is right or wrong, without investigating to discover in which cases it is suitable and which not. Once we follow the natural principles of the Buddhist way of reasoning, each situation will show us when it is appropriate and when not. Please stop insisting on one-sided positions.

The principle is the same in the case of meat-eating versus vegetarianism. Each side pigheadedly argues from its absolute position. Such people are attached to regarding food as being either meat or vegetable. For Buddhists, there is neither meat nor vegetable; there are only natural elements. Whether the eater or the eaten, it's all just natural elements. The situations in which one should eat meat and the circumstances when one shouldn't can be discerned using the principle of the Kālāma Sutta. For this reason, the Buddha never said decisively one way or the other whether to eat meat or vegetables, or to not eat meat or not eat vegetables. To speak so carelessly is not the way of Buddhists.

Nor should one say that democracy is always and absolutely good. Those

who insist on such views haven't considered that a democracy of selfish people could be worse than a dictatorship of unselfish people who live according to Dhamma or righteousness. A democracy of selfish people means freedom to use their selfishness in a most frightening and awful manner. Consequently, problems drag on endlessly among those people who have a democracy of selfishness. Stop saying that democracy is absolutely good or that dictatorship is absolutely good. Instead, stick to the principle that either will be good when based on Dhamma. Each society should choose which suits it best according to the particular circumstances facing it.

To say that the prime minister must always be an elected member of parliament and never someone who was not chosen directly by the people is to rant and rave as if deaf and dumb.⁴ Really, we must look to see how the situation ought to be, what the specific circumstances and reasons are, then practice correctly according to the principle of specific conditionality. The same applies to other political issues. This is the true Buddhist way, befitting the fact that Buddhism embodies democracy in the form of Dhammic socialism. Therefore, the election of members of parliament, the establishment of a government, the structuring of the political system, and even the course of social and economic development all should be carried out using the principle of the Kālāma Sutta. Please consider each example and you will discover the necessity of using the principle of this sutta.

More than ever the modern world needs the Kālāma Sutta as its basic operating principle. The world is spinning ever faster with humanity's defilements. It's shrinking because of better transportation and communication. And it's about to self-destruct because proper awareness, intelligence, and wisdom are lacking. Under the power of defilement, the world is worshipping materialism, sex, and luxury, because it lacks standards like that of the Kālāma Sutta. No one knows how to make choices in line with its principles. Consequently, the world is wholly unfit for peace, while increasing in crime and other wickedness every moment. Let's eliminate all these problems and evils by relying on the Kālāma Sutta as our standard.

Finally, there is the matter of the name of this sutta. When named after the people who originally listened to this teaching, it's called the Kālāma Sutta. When named after the place where it was preached, it's called the Kesaputta

⁴ Up until the mid 1990s, this issue was a dangerous point of contention between democracy activists on the one hand and the military and conservatives on the other.

Sutta.⁵ Whatever the name, the content and meaning are still the same. During the early part of the last century the Tipiṭaka was popularized in a series of booklets called ‘Dhamma Treasure’ (*Dhammasampatti*).⁶ Then, this sutta became well-known as the Kālāma Sutta. Therefore, let’s yell at the top of our lungs, ‘Help, Kālāma Sutta! Help!’

In conclusion, the Kālāma Sutta never forbids us to believe in anything; it merely implores us to believe with independent intelligence and wisdom. It never forbids us to listen to anything; it merely asks us to listen without letting our intelligence and wisdom be enslaved. Furthermore, it also enables us to think, consider, investigate, and decide with great subtlety and precision, so that we can find specks of gold in mountain-sized rubbish heaps.

Please come, Kālāma Sutta! Come invest yourself in the hearts and minds of all Buddhists, of all human beings in the present world.



⁵ Different editions of the Tipiṭaka name this sutta differently.

⁶ This series of books was written by the Venerable Phra Mahasamanachao Kromphraya Vachiraya Nyanarorot, the Supreme Patriarch at the time who modernized Buddhist texts and education in Thailand.

THE THREE WISHES

MAKING AN ANNOUNCEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF MERIT-MAKING IN MOCKERY OF THE MATTER OF AGE

A Dhamma lecture given on 27 May 2529 (1986)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya

Translated from the Thai by J. Ratana Nantho Bhikkhu

Three Dhamma lectures were given by Ajahn Buddhādāsa, in the morning, afternoon, and evening of his 80th 'Age Teasing Day' (birthday). Subsequently, they were all made into the book The Three Wishes of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu. What follows is the beginning of the morning lecture.



MAKING AN ANNOUNCEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF MERIT-MAKING IN MOCKERY OF THE MATTER OF AGE

Dear Buddhists and friends of Dhamma, allow me to express my pleasure in your coming here for a purpose already known, but as usual, there is some clarification to be made. First of all, I wish to thank you all for your coming here with goodwill towards me, and thank you for the present.

The merit-making on the occasion of my birthday, or my age, is strange comparatively, and the giving of gift is subsequently a strange one. Generally, people give presents in the form of material objects or whatever it may be according to the normal business of merit-making on a birthday occasion; but here our merit-making on my birthday is not to celebrate the age, but rather to kid or ridicule it. (In Thailand, a birthday is celebrated by making merit with the intent to ‘prolong’ the age of the ‘owner’ of the birthday.) Making merit on a birthday occasion with the hope for enhanced longevity is something common among the common people. That people wish to ‘prolong’ their lifespan is most probably due to the fear factor (fear of death), so they make merit on their birthday and also undergo some rites symbolic of the prolonging of longevity.

As for making merit with the intent to ridicule a birthday or age, it requires courage from within to act in this non-conforming way (which is rather ‘revolutionary’). Therefore, this unique way of celebrating a birthday is rather different from the conventional way of doing things. In fact, it can be just the opposite.

I choose making merit to prolong not my age, but that of Buddhism. Whichever kind of merit-making which is supposedly to be prolonging the age of Buddhism, I choose that kind of merit-making. Therefore, the merit-making to ridicule age comes into existence here. It is done with mindfulness (*sati*) and right knowledge (*sampajañña*).

Now, we will make a mockery of age, this crazy matter about age which has brought much trouble to most people who make a big fuss over it when there should be normalcy and peace. We should challenge the changing and turning of age to prove (that we can control it, and we are to make a mockery of age since the first day of our births from our mother's wombs. In order to commemorate the day of our birth and events ahead, we will even go without food at all for that day, but we will drink only water. This will be our present or gift for the day. It is the same today. We will not eat anything, but drink only water. The aim is to control the feelings and train the mind so that it can be brought under our own control or restrain and become firmly disciplined. Hence, the birthday gift comes in the form of abstaining from the consumption of food for one day (and night). It appears that many people come here to offer this special gift. Thus, I specially thank all of you for your endeavour.

Supposing that the food for one whole day costs ten baht per person and that there are fifty million people in all; the cost of food these people consume will total up to five hundred million baht. Therefore, if all of us would go without food for one day, we would have saved five hundred million baht. This is not a joking matter. It can be of benefit in many respects, especially in the economic field. Going without food for one day can save up to 500 million baht of 50 million people, but it is not merely economy that we are concerned with. We are more interested in the determination to restrain the mind, as the ability to control it is an important factor of all factors which will put us on the path of the cessation of suffering.

So may you all who have presented this gift to me succeed in restraining and disciplining your mind on the path that we want it to be. For how long we have been indulging ourselves in our own wants and whims is a matter known to we ourselves; but on this day, we will go against our whims for one full day and night by abstaining from taking food. This is something that can be

possibly done, but do it with great patience and care. There is no harm done in such a practice that is meant only for one day. However, cowardly people cannot do it because a lack of strong will looms over the mind, creating a feeling that nothing will be right. They would become agitated, hungry, or disturbed or whatever it may be; but if they were to truly determine that they would make a serious attempt to abstain from taking food for one day, they would actually succeed in doing it. Perhaps even the digestive fluid would stop flowing during the fasting period, posing no problem to the stomach or intestines. Even if the digestive fluid flows, it does not really matter much. Drink water as a compensating measure. To be able to overcome this physical need on this day is to be your own master over your own body for one day. It is a preparation to make us strong-willed so that we will be able to take up our duty, at whatever level, without any problem.

May each and everyone of you receive the merit of presenting this unusual gift today. This is not merely my own way of expressing my gratitude, but I do wish that all of you will be benefited spiritually.

This is what we call ‘learning about age.’ It is knowing about age – how to act in a proper way with regard to this matter of ‘age’ and how to be benefited by it. This is the initial information which is to be further examined and comprehended as has been usually done previously. Thank you for coming to participate in the merit-making occasion of making a mockery of ‘age.’ As for the difficulties or inconveniences you have to face, let it be taken as the fault on my part; but however many the difficulties there are, that much will be our mockery on ‘age’ matters. The more difficulties you get in coming to join the practice here, the more results you will get from your attempt in mocking our human delusion with age; but if you are looking for someone to assume responsibility over the entire matter of fasting and making a mockery of age, then I will take the full responsibility and I apologize for, the difficulties and inconveniences you have to face. May your overcoming of the difficulties be a form of merit-making itself.

As is customary of the schedule here, there will be Dhamma discourses delivered at three separate junctures: morning, afternoon and evening. I will adhere to the arranged schedule. Now I will begin with the Dhamma discourse of the morning session. This year’s Dhamma discourse will begin with the explanation of my Three Main Wishes.

The first wish is: try to get to the core of your own religion no matter what religion you adhere to.

The second wish is: try to provide the right understanding between all religions in order to enable a harmonious co-existence in this world and to help create peace in the context of a cooperative of religions for a joint effort in implementing our duty to help the world.

The third wish is: to pull, or haul, or drag this world out of the power of materialism. Materialism is ruling the world. It is the factor for selfishness, mental defilement and personal suffering. It also leads to disturbance and suffering on a social level. The world is now thriving with material objects and is so engrossingly developing material goods that it is now practically becoming a slave of material goods. Try to understand these words properly: becoming a slave of material objects implies worshipping material things much in the same way as worshipping God until it has become a religion of materials things; call it materialism if you like. It is a materialism that creates problems. Let us try to get out of the power and influence of materialism.



MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN RELIGIONS
EXCHANGING DHAMMA WHILE FIGHTING

A teaching distributed as a handout at the 9th General Conference of
The World Fellowship of Buddhists on 15 April 2512 (1969)
in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



EXCHANGING DHAMMA WHILE FIGHTING

Friends in birth, old age, suffering, and death, both members and non-members of the W.F.B, our world nowadays has fallen into the whirlpool of danger, so much so that we inevitably have to solve the problems arising from this situation by the method of ‘exchanging Dhamma while fighting.’ But those who are fighting have never realised this truth and they may not even be ready to listen to it. This is the point I have taken here to complain about. When things are like this, what should we do? This is the point that I want to present for discussion.

Here even among us Buddhists some may doubt and think ‘Why should we play a leading role in all the affairs of the people in the whole world? Let us be only interested in our own internal Buddhist affairs. Would not this be more proper?’

If there is anyone who thinks like this, please let him recollect the words of the Buddha who says: “*The Tathāgata is born in the world for the happiness of all beings, including gods and men*” (Bhayabherava Sutta, Mūlapaṇṇāsa, Majjhima Nikāya).¹ Again He says: “*The Dhamma and Vinaya of the Tathāgata is present in the world for the happiness of the world including gods and men*” (Catukka Nipāta, Aṅguttara Nikāya).² Moreover, when the Buddha sent the first group of monks out to spread the teaching, He emphasized this as well

¹ MN 4.

² AN 4.

saying, “Go you forth, Oh Bhikkhus ... to preach the divine life for the benefit and happiness of the world, including gods and men” (Mahāvagga, Vinaya Piṭaka).³

That He repeatedly said “*the world including gods and men*” shows that He aimed for the benefit of the whole world and recommended us to do everything for the world as a whole as well. This means that He placed the whole world in our care, both directly and indirectly. Thus, how would it be possible for us to be absorbed only in the limited sphere of internal Buddhist affairs? It is proper for us to sacrifice ourselves to play a leading role in the affairs of the whole world as the Buddha intended us to do. I sincerely feel that this matter should be discussed in this gathering of Buddhists under the leadership of the W.F.B. Therefore, we should further consider the present state of the world.

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE WORLD

It will be generally accepted by everybody, and nobody can deny it, that the present state of the world is that of a serious crisis, and it is constantly coming nearer and nearer to destruction. This is for no other reason than that the world has become too much a slave of matter or materialism. The world is progressing only as far as matter is concerned and not at all progressing spiritually. On the contrary, it is regressing. The world is indulging in the happiness of the flesh, and it has turned its back on the Dhamma; it has turned its back on Religion; it has turned its back on God, so much so that it does not attribute any importance to these things. People in the world think that they are able to bring about peace in the world without having any concern for, or taking any refuge in, these three things. The world progresses so much in selfishness side by side with material progress that we call it ‘the world of the atomic and space age.’

This kind of material progress of the world must always be controlled by a corresponding spiritual progress in accordance with Dhamma or God. Otherwise, material progress will be progress that leads the world to hell or may even transform this world into hell itself. The material progress of the world nowadays is bringing many bad results:

(1) It makes people in the world gradually become very selfish, selfish in strange new ways which brings various kinds of new evil, the kinds of evil that never existed before and which can be known very well by everybody

³ Mahākhandhaka, Khandhaka (Mahāvagga) (Pi Tv Kd 1).

from the various statistics in each country that has highly progressed.

(2) It makes people degenerate mentally in the ethics of sex, so much so that people dare to change the ethical or moral principles regarding sex which have been established for the cleanliness, peace and happiness of society. Things which are obscene and immoral have become recognized as an ‘art’ and they are being displayed before the very eyes of the younger generation to such an extent that they cannot make a distinction between art and that which is obscene and immoral. As soon as they open their eyes, they worship the happiness of the flesh instead of God or Dhamma.

(3) It creates a state of excessiveness and inflation which in many cases is so unbalanced that serious problems and difficulties arise with regard to material things themselves. For instance, birth-control becomes necessary and likewise, the throwing away and destruction of consumer goods, which in order to maintain their value, cannot be distributed among the poor people. Since there is no market for the goods or there is no more room for people to settle on, it has become necessary to find colonies or land on which to exercise influence, and there is no end to it.

(4) This material progress has made the world more and more materialistic, so much so that dialectic materialism has emerged in many forms, all of which make man a servant of matter and make him worship matter instead of God, thereby unconsciously destroying the essence of religion all over the world, leaving only the outer shell of religion.

(5) It makes modern man turn his back on religion, turn his back on God, and turn his back on Dhamma, so much so that these things remain only in the form of rites and rituals for decorating the name and fame of the people who worship matter or the happiness of the flesh.

(6) It gives rise to abnormality, defects or imbalance in the body and mind of man, so much so that man has become half man and half ghost instead of being the son of God as in old times; men have now altogether become the sons of mischievous monkeys.

(7) It gives rise to increasing and fast competition and strife among men in the sweet sounding name of ‘war for peace and justice.’

What has been said above is sufficient for us to come to the conclusion that material progress which is not controlled by spiritual progress is the root cause of the permanent crisis in the world. This is something sent by God in

the form of Satan as a gift for those who worship matter over and above God or for those who pay only lip service to God.

That which is called ‘Satan’ should be understood properly as being a part of Dhamma or God which has been created or sent for testing man so that it may serve as a lesson or as a trial for man, for punishing man, for luring man to undergo torture in order to be changed, for developing man who is unwilling to progress in the way God desires, in a way which is a match for the trickery of man. In this space age, we should understand Satan like this instead of understanding Satan like children, who take him to be a ghost who haunts men just for the fun of it without any reason or any intention on the part of anybody. I will talk afterwards about this matter again in detail.

Now man is waging war with God himself through Satan whom God has sent to test the materialistic man. When this is so, how can different organizations, which are established by people who side with only one side in the war, solve the problem of war? To act in such a way is to be merely unconsciously in a delirium. How far will this delirium go? All of you can weigh this for yourselves.

I insist again and again before you that man is waging war with God, and he is determined to do this. Without this, there is no hope that it will come to an end, prior to total destruction. The reasons why I insist on these things are as follows:

Man is running after material things and has in his possession more than God wants him to possess to meet his needs, and he denounces God as being old-fashioned and out-dated – this is waging war against God.

Man is insisting on upholding the creed of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Further, he does not care for the teachings, “If he slaps the right cheek give him the left cheek too” and “If he has stolen a shirt, then take your blanket and follow him and give it to him too.” This is waging war against God.

Man worships the happiness of the flesh far more than he worships God; he is not even ready to worship at all. Even this is waging war against God.

Nature and natural phenomena of all kinds belong to God. Man has robbed that which belongs to Nature or God and claims it as ‘MINE’: *my* land, *my* wealth, *my* wife, *my* children – all ‘mine.’ Even this is waging war against God and behaving like a thief who is looting.

Man has ‘democracy’ in worshipping the happiness of the flesh unanimously, the kind of unanimity which knows no equal. This is unanimity in waging war against God for the sake of perfecting the happiness of the flesh. As for the unanimity concerning the bringing to an end of war or not falling into the pit of Satan – they are not unanimous. They only show unwillingness and are always at odds with each other at the conferences.

To summarize, people nowadays are waging war against God. They want to conquer God so that they can do what they wish to do in accordance with their selfish aims according to their defilements by raising the defilements themselves into the position of God. This amounts to establishing themselves as God by waging war with God as it is mentioned in the scriptures. They do not understand God properly as mentioned in the scriptures to the extent that they would devote their lives genuinely to God, so they have created an artificial God in the way that they are induced to do by Satan. The God of defilements of theirs is they themselves and they trample on the decrees of the true God. This is the way modern man wages war against God.

In the results obtained from surveying the present condition of the world thoroughly, we find a fact which is most important – the world of materialism is progressing with *materialistic culture* like an epidemic disease. The materialistic culture is overwhelming the *spiritual culture* in a way that is reducing the world to a place of hell. Therefore, we must speed up our work to help the world regain Dhamma, or the spiritual culture, in the quickest way. We must exchange Dhamma even among countries which are engaged in the war at the present time. Countries on both sides in the war at present also have cultural exchange, but this is, throughout, only of a materialistic nature. Therefore, they are not able to understand each other so as to bring an end to the war. When there is proper and sufficient exchange of spiritual culture, then there will be sufficient knowledge of Dhamma or the words of God. When people know Dhamma sufficiently, the war will become something disgusting or something to be ashamed of for each side. The two sides can come to a settlement without wasting their time like small children as they are doing at present. This means they are now on good terms with each other, and then they are angry with each other, and again they are on good terms with each other, and there is no end to it. I request each of you to sacrifice your time and be more interested in the thing that is called ‘Dhamma.’

DHAMMA IS GOD

By that which is called ‘Dhamma’ for exchange, I mean what we should simply call ‘spiritual culture.’ This means the truth itself concerning peace in the individual as well as in society, which is the heart of every religion in the world. But the word ‘Dhamma’ has a very wide range of meanings which can be considered from many aspects and angles, all of which we should discuss in order to come to understand it.

There may be those who disagree from the very start by saying that what is called spiritual culture is already being propagated widely all over the world by groups of missionaries of the respective religions in their own respective ways. Why should we then concern ourselves with and become involved in this work ?

May I answer that doing missionary work is not enough for helping the world. Moreover, in some cases there is the propagation of what is contrary to the aim of what is called ‘Dhamma’ or ‘God.’ Some groups of missionaries propagate dissension among religions; they create hatred among religions anew, which is not according to the aim of their own religion, which teaches one to love others by giving one’s own life as ransom. The founder of each religion aims at benefitting the whole world collectively, but the missionaries work for their own groups. To summarize, this kind of missionary work is not up to the standard that can be called ‘spreading spiritual culture among the nations of the whole world.’ This blunder prevents men from cooperating even in the circle of the same religion. The split in the same religion is very strong, so much so that they quarrel and let Satan see this. When this is so, there is no way for missionaries to bring mutual understanding among nations.

In order to get rid of this evil situation from the world, we must understand genuinely and properly that which is called Dhamma. I request you to pay thorough and sufficient attention to the different points that will be discussed now.

(1) **Dhamma is the same as that which is called God.** We can elucidate the facts about this point as follows:

- (a) Nature itself or all natural phenomena are the physical body of God.
- (b) The great and absolute law of nature is the spiritual body of God.

- (c) Performing duties properly on the part of man according to the law of nature is the demand of God.
- (d) The fruit which man obtains by performing his duty is the supply of God.

God in this sense is the same thing as that which is called Dhamma in the Buddhist teaching. Dhamma or God in this sense must be universal; it cannot belong only to any one religion in particular. If it belongs to only one religion, it must be a fake God or a fake Dhamma, that is, it is not able to help the world because it is in itself of an exclusive nature. There is nothing strange about Buddhists calling this Dhamma while other fellow human beings call it God; that does not make it any different at all.

(2) **Dhamma in the Buddhist teaching.** When speaking according to the principles of the Buddhist teaching, the word ‘Dhamma’ means ‘each and everything without exception,’ and is divided into four kinds:

- (a) Nature itself or all natural phenomena are called *sabhāva-dhamma*.
- (b) All the laws of nature are called *sacca-dhamma*.
- (c) The duty of man according to the laws of nature is called *paṭipatti-dhamma*.
- (d) The fruit obtained from performing this duty is called *vipāka-dhamma*.

All of these four categories are collectively referred to by the single word ‘Dhamma’ in Pāli. They all are nature or belong to nature and do not belong to any particular religion or race. The principles concerning this word ‘Dhamma’ apply to all beings in the world including gods and men, and even animals indirectly. Thus, the ‘Dhamma’ has the same meaning and performs the same duty for man as ‘God.’

(3) **The Dhamma of nature.** You have seen by yourself that Dhamma in its four categories or meanings as has been mentioned in points (1) and (2) is *the nature of nature*, the property of nature. Therefore, ‘Dhamma’ is common to all. It is universal, and it cannot be divided so as to belong to any one religion. If it is divided, this is due to the foolishness on the part of he who makes the division. That is not the real Dhamma which is able to help the world. Groups of missionaries of different religions still propagate religion, dividing it and claiming it as belonging to themselves. More than that, there is the praising of oneself and the condemning of others, saying that it is only one’s own religion that is right

and good. This kind of missionary work, even if carried out all over the world, cannot in any way help the world to be free, because it is not yet up to the standard worthy of being called Dhamma or God.

(4) **Dhamma is everything.** Dhamma is ‘everything’ without any exception. It is even that which is called ‘Satan’ or ‘Māra,’ as we Buddhists call it. It is generally said that Satan is the enemy or opponent of God. To speak in such a way is to destroy the value of God completely on the part of the person himself who claims to respect God. To speak like this means God is not ‘everything,’ that is there is still something which is not God and is above the power of God. God is degraded to be the rival of evil or Satan. One who understands this in such a way is like one who knows only good and bad, and who does not know that which is beyond good and bad. He does not know all the three things, namely good, evil, and that which is beyond good and evil. Thus, ‘all things’ are really included. He has made God or Dhamma into something that is not perfect. When it is not perfect, it cannot be God who is great and real.

Satan is a part of God, the part of God which is present for testing and challenging the man who dares to challenge God. Satan is there, as both a lesson and a test in itself which God has sent in order to put His men on trial. This He does for some men at some times and under certain circumstances. This He does to “select or sort out the person to be His man forever.” Therefore Satan, or Māra, is able to or dares to put to trial even a person such as Jesus Christ or the Buddha, both before and after they were teachers. But Satan does not dare to, or there is no necessity, for him to put God Himself to the test. Therefore, to be straightforward, we must say that Satan is a part of the Dhamma or God that we have mentioned before.

At present, Satan exists in the form of war, which is spreading all over the world. War has been a chronic problem in the world. It does not show signs of coming to an end. People accept this without any question because they believe that it is beyond the ability of the different organizations of the world to deal with it. This is because the war is a challenge taking place between man and the might of God or Dhamma, which has been sent in the form of Satan in order to simultaneously test, select, develop, and punish man. We can overcome the war by only one method, and that is to understand, once and for all, the true Dhamma or God which is real. It is because of this that I say that the world has fallen into such a critical situation that we must inevitably

‘exchange Dhamma while fighting.’ We must go on doing this until all the parties that are involved in the war have sufficient Dhamma. If there is still insistence on going on taking “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” the world will have Satan issuing forth from God more and more until the world is full of Satan. The way of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” is there only for the use of God in dealing with man. Man cannot make use of this way.

(5) **Dhamma is something that is not being treated fairly.** In the present day world, Dhamma or God is being looked down upon by man who is worshipping matter. It is something which is being covered up and made to disappear by people who are selfish and who want to act according to their defilements, but they are crying to God for help. When they want to do as they wish, they themselves become God. When a critical situation arises, in their delirium they call another God, but that is the very God which they look down upon and cover up. This is unfair treatment, a great injustice to God. This fact has made God begin to challenge man by giving rise to an advance of materialism all over the world, a materialism which worships the pleasures of the flesh.

Materialism is the prime cause giving rise to competition and rivalry among nations, and it is what we call ‘war’ to the extent that there is a chronic crisis which is long-standing and beyond the ability of any kind of organization in the world to resolve, as is commonly known. This is the work and result of Satan, who has done his duty in the best way in serving God to test man and at the same time to punish those who have failed the test. Therefore, in order for us human beings to go back and become the beloved children of God again to receive real peace as a reward, we must look at the materialism or ‘materialistic culture’ that we are worshipping far more than God, as being something which is a barrier between us and God, making us hate God and causing us to establish ourselves as God.

We must find out where the ‘spiritual culture of God,’ or what we call here by the short and simple word ‘Dhamma,’ has completely disappeared to. Man is seriously lost in ceaselessly exchanging material culture. This kind of exchange takes place even amongst nations which are involved in fighting by way of a cold war. Why is there no exchange of spiritual culture according to God, even though in the battlefields, when fear presents itself, the name of God is repeatedly being exclaimed? When this is the case, the result will be Satan in the form of ‘the ghost of materialism’ who tricks the people in the

world into getting intoxicated in the pleasures of the flesh, so much so that they are trampling on the good and beautiful moral conduct of ancient religious teachings, causing them to disappear. Because of this, man deserves to receive from God ‘prolonged war’ as a reward for acting in this way. Therefore, we must make efforts to know and to have real spiritual culture in order to be rewarded in the opposite way.

SPIRITUAL CULTURE

The word ‘spiritual culture’ can be interpreted in many incredibly different ways. Eastern scholars and Western scholars interpret it differently depending on how much they worship matter. Scholars who have studied in the old way and scholars who have studied in the modern way interpret this word in different ways. Those who know religion well and those who know religion only as rites and rituals differ from each other even more in their interpretation of it. This is just as natural with regard to the interpretation of any word, and this everybody knows.

To give an example, let us take the word ‘heaven.’ Western people who profess religion in a western way will hold that heaven is a religious matter, and since it is the abode of God, it must be a spiritual matter, and not a material matter. But Eastern people, especially Buddhists, interpret it in a different way, which is the opposite of the western view. They would interpret heaven as the perfection which is endowed with the pleasure of form, sound, smell, taste and touch of the highest or divine kind. It is happiness of the flesh; it is a subtle level of sensuality of the flesh. Therefore, it is to be classified as materialism, and not spirituality. Only by something beyond that, can sensuality of every kind be conquered, no matter whether it is human or divine, and thereby the mind becomes clean-clear-calm. Only then can it be regarded as spirituality.

He who has undergone modern education, which deals with the physical sciences, regards heaven as something which is not physical and must be classified as spiritual. He who has been educated in the old way, especially in the eastern way, would explain that heaven is no doubt related to mind (*nāma-dhamma*), but the pleasure which is to be expected in heaven is the same as the pleasure experienced through matter, that is through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. Therefore, heaven is to be classified as material, not spiritual.

Those who believe in religion in the form of rites and rituals have no real wisdom of Dhamma and are childish old folks who hold that heaven is

the highest. To them, Nibbāna is also a kind of heaven. Therefore, heaven too is classified by them as a spiritual matter. As for Buddhists who are learned, they will explain that heaven is nothing but sensual pleasures of the second degree, third, tenth or even hundredth degree. Therefore, they say that heaven is related to matter or flesh and is thus classified as material. As for Nibbāna, it is quite different and on another level, and it is not something that depends on matter or flesh.

From this example, we can see that people whose minds are on different levels interpret one single word so differently that things become confused. I will now give another example, that is, the meaning of the symbol of the cross in Christianity as I have found it.

Some Christians explain that the cross is the symbol of the staircase leading to heaven. From this we can see that they have a materialistic mind aiming at happiness in heaven, as has been taught.

Some other Christians have even once explained that the cross is the symbol of the division between man and heaven by taking the horizontal bar as the dividing line. Even this interpretation is still under the influence of materialistic feeling.

Other Christians interpret the cross as the symbol of sacrificing life in order to help the world become free from misunderstanding and ignorance. This is the interpretation which can be understood by anyone at once as being of appropriate spiritual significance or beyond being infatuated with matter.

As for me, I feel that the cross is the symbol of cutting down the ‘ego.’ The vertical bar of the cross is equivalent to the letter ‘I’; the horizontal bar means cutting the ‘I’ or ‘ego,’ thereby being without ‘I’ or ‘ego,’ and this is to be regarded as the most excellent deed on the part of Jesus Christ to sacrifice his own life for other people. The heart of every religion is the teaching of the destroying of selfishness, destroying egoism and destroying egoistic ideas. The cross is but the symbol of the heart of every religion. A good member of any religion has no self belonging to self; but if there is to be ‘self,’ then it must belong to God, or to Dhamma, or to Nature, without behaving as a robber robbing nature, as has been said before.

Therefore, please reflect upon the fact that the same word or the same symbol can be interpreted differently, in many ways, on many levels, depending on the individual feeling and understanding regarding the things

in question. For this very reason, I ask you to observe in advance that what is called spiritual culture has incredibly different interpretations in various ways, to the extent that they are conflicting.

In order to come to a mutual understanding with regard to exchanging spiritual culture, we must now give the following definition to this phrase, bearing in mind that the result to be obtained should be the opposite of materialism in every way.

(1) Spiritual culture is the way through which man reaches God or Dhamma. Specifically speaking, it means a method by which man is to make his body always part of the body of Dhamma or body of God. This is to enable man to get the best things that man should get.

(2) Spiritual culture is that which frees man from the problem of Satan, which is present in the form of war and is an ever-present crisis of the modern world, and which occurs in other different kinds of forms.

(3) Spiritual culture is the only way that is able to resolve the various kinds of conflicts of the human beings of different nationalities in the present age, for example the unsolved problem of disarmament, etc.

(4) Spiritual culture is like medicine to kill the germs of war in the world, no matter whether it is war about ideologies, or war about territory, or about vested interests, etc.

(5) Spiritual culture is that which makes this world have neither capitalists nor proletarians, but only father and son.

(6) Spiritual culture has the objective to destroy the selfishness of every man, thereby freeing the world completely from any trace of selfishness.

(7) Spiritual culture is the only way of acting appropriately in a spiritual way for man of each age and of every nationality.

(8) Spiritual culture is that which must go side by side with materialistic culture in order to control the material progress of man so it does not become poisonous.

Only this much should be enough for us to recognize that spiritual culture is a vaccine which is able to give protection against the bad effects that man encounters due to behaving wrongly in relation to his environment and other related things such as God, Dhamma, Nature, fellow human beings, things

invented as a result of research in the atomic space age, etc.

In order to understand the difference between materialistic culture and spiritual culture more clearly, we may compare them side by side as follows:

(1) Music which is hot, which is sensually tempting in nightclubs and bars is materialistic culture or culture of the flesh. Conversely, music which has calming and cooling effects as we would feel while going to the temple is spiritual culture.

(2) Dancing which is exciting and makes one behave like a whipped monkey or a drunken demon, is materialistic culture. Dancing which is cool and graceful like a pine tree touched by the breeze calming the mind, this is spiritual culture.

(3) To eat, sleep, and live for pleasure attending to one's senses luxuriously, this is materialistic culture. To eat, sleep, and live just to be able to do the work of God or the duty of man according to the laws of nature, this is spiritual culture. To put it in the shortest way we can say that *to eat abundantly and to live well* is materialistic culture; *to eat frugally and to live modestly* is spiritual culture.

(4) To marry for the purpose of sensuality or for the preservation of the lineage, this is materialistic culture. As for marrying in order to pass on the path to be always followed without any interruption until man reaches God, or until there is a reaching of God or the transcendental state of man, this is spiritual culture.

(5) To desire to go to heaven which is full of brilliant colours, dazzling light, enchanting sounds, this is materialistic culture. To desire to go to the kind of heaven which is clear-clean-calm, or which can make one weary of the brilliant colours, dazzling lights and enchanting sounds of heaven as quickly as possible, this is spiritual culture.

(6) A political system which is designed to suck up the benefits of others for the sake of men who belong to this system by hidden, roundabout and clever ways, that is materialistic culture. As for a political system which aims at creating peace in the world without considering its own gains, if there is such a system, that is spiritual culture.

(7) To help and support those who are undeveloped in order to buy them over as one's allies as one would do in trading, this is materialistic culture. As

for helping with a pure mind and in line with the aim of Dhamma or God, this is spiritual culture.

(8) To study religion or even to be ordained in a religion as a means of livelihood or as a device for one's own advantage in the future, that is materialistic culture. As for studying or becoming ordained in a religion in order to raise one's position spiritually according to the standard God prescribes, this is spiritual culture.

(9) To make arrangements for the wide distribution of religious books for the greatness of one's own respective religion, this is materialistic culture. As for efforts to point out the way and persuade people to really attain to Dhamma or God, that is spiritual culture.

(10) To make efforts to make man rich and intoxicated by the latest inventions so as to compete with the gods in heaven, that is materialistic culture. As for efforts to make man obtain the best thing which man should really get, that is the real *summum bonum* according to the standard of God, that is spiritual culture.

All the examples given here should be enough to show what the spiritual culture of those Buddhists who are devoted earnestly to the Dhamma is like.

All of you should not take for granted that everything concerning art, literature, philosophy, psychology, etc., has to do with spirituality. These things deal with both material and spiritual things. However, at present, all of these things have become the servants of matter. They are entirely used as instruments for pursuing matter or for material progress, and they are no longer related to spiritual culture.

The significance of spiritual culture lies in aiming at making man perfect both bodily and mentally, which means to be really human both as far as body and mind are concerned. Spiritual culture will help man to be properly spiritual, and together with this, it will help to make material culture bring about the complete bodily soundness of man. Man does not have to be like a tree which seems to be beautiful from far away but which one finds hollow or burning inside in a pitiful state as one approaches it.

That which is called culture is a plough for ploughing the land; it must be pulled by two oxen, one of which has the virtue of leadership and is clever and understands the order of the owner very well, while the second which follows is not clever but is endowed with strength. When both these oxen work

in good co-ordination then the result will be excellent. In the same way, the cart of the life of man should be pulled by both kinds of cultures, that is, by both the spiritual and material cultures in a well-coordinated and harmonious way – the spiritual culture always being the leader and the materialistic culture that which follows it.

Thus, once we have understood that the spiritual culture is the only thing that can really put an end to the troubled age of the world, we should further consider the method of the exchange of spiritual culture amongst the war-faring nations.

EXCHANGE OF SPIRITUAL CULTURE

The principles which form the essence of every religion are to be regarded equally as spiritual culture. Therefore, no matter what religion individuals profess, they are all in a position to exchange spiritual culture.

Each and every religion, even if it differs in the outer form of practice, has nevertheless the same inner aim, that is, to first of all destroy the evil of selfishness and then finally to destroy the feeling that there is a self belonging to self. Anybody may have self (conventionally), but it must be the self of Dhamma, the self of Nature or of God and not one's own, which is due to a misconception or which is too conventional. Therefore, every religion is actually the same religion, but people professing a religion do not take it in this way. They take it in the way that there is 'I' and 'my' which is superior to others. This point leads to the division of people into different groups and religions. When one has actually realised the essence of religion, then one will feel that this is all the same, so much so that everybody can practice any religion.

Nowadays our world is in the state of being completely divided on the principle of people's different personal interests without taking the truth of religion as the criterion of importance. War can break out even for the sake of religion itself. The striving for and exchanging of knowledge and understanding of the principles which really form the heart of religion is very much needed for the peace of mankind at present. We must speed up and find out ways and means to exchange spiritual culture quickly.

We must have a system of spiritual culture which is appropriate to the modern world and which can accord with the principles of every religion,

even though judging from the outward appearance they seem to be following different ways. Otherwise, they may seem to be as different as the earth and sky. Still further, it must be a system of culture which can be exchanged even on the battlefields. Still further yet, it must be a system of culture which accords with science, which takes the natural phenomena as criteria of judgement.

Creating this system will be easy provided that people have a mutual understanding with regard to the three things, namely, Dhamma, Nature, and God, and that they know that these are one and the same thing.

There may be those who have a doubt that if Dhamma is abstract, Nature is concrete, and as for God, he is a person, so how can all these be the same?

May I answer that this is a misconception or misunderstanding with regard to these three things, on the part of the person who has such a doubt. The law of nature, about which man knows still too little, is itself God viewed in a personal way. But if we view it from the absolute point of view, we call it Dhamma. If we speak in scientific language, it is the law of science. Therefore, no matter whether people believe in a religion which has a God, or in a religion which has no God, or believe in no religion but believe in science – this means they all really believe in the same principle.

Although some subscribe to dialectic materialism, and do not believe in religion or God as others do, they nevertheless must accept and believe in the laws of science or in the laws of nature, and have God or religion in their own way. If they cannot deny the four principles regarding nature, the law of nature, the duty according to the law of nature, and the fruit obtained from performing the duty according to the law of nature, then they are bound to have God which is real, and that is the law of nature itself. When they have the problems of birth, aging, pain, and death in the same way as others, they also have the means of solving the problems in their own way as well. For this very reason, communists also, have a spiritual culture to exchange with free democracy concerning the laws of nature and in which way these laws of nature are to be applied to solve the problems of birth, aging, pain, and death. If each party always tries to exchange knowledge concerning this matter, there will be better results than if they incessantly accuse and blame each other, even though in fact, both sides have equally the law of nature as God. They only differ in that one side calls it ‘God’ and the other side calls it ‘the law of

nature' or 'the law of science,' as pointed out before. For this reason, those who subscribe to matter and those who subscribe to mind can still share God, the only difference being that of names, and along with them, most modern scientists can also share God. Therefore, we can exchange spiritual culture even among those who subscribe to matter and those who subscribe to mind, such as scientists, psychologists, philosophers, etc. Finally, each side will share one single God, the only difference being in the name.

There are still many other kinds of spiritual culture. For example, everybody has the question or problem of controlling himself, or being unable to control his mind. If people want to get good results in solving this problem, there is no better way than exchanging knowledge concerning the method for getting this result, in the form of spiritual culture which is universal. This is better than it would be if it were in the form of religion, in which case people are set apart and are hating each other to the extent that some may even abandon religion altogether. Among young Western people who come to visit Suan Mokkhabalārāma, there are even as many as 80% who admit with a straight face and with an air of pride, that they do not have any religion. This fact shows that people do not know that which is called 'religion,' 'God' or even the word 'Dhamma.' But as soon as they are given an explanation of nature, the law of nature, the duty according to the law of nature, and the fruit which one is certain to obtain as a result of performing that duty, they are without hesitation ready to accept religion or God. They are pleased to study mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) according to the Buddhist teaching, for the purpose of controlling their own minds according to their wishes. But authorities on both sides do not allow them to have enough time for studying or for practising this kind of spiritual culture so as to be well versed in it. They have to go back before the exchange of this kind of spiritual culture fully takes place.

If the men in the world can control themselves, then that means that they can control the defilements which are the cause of their hating religions or God. Then the people will be established in good moral conduct and will have loving-kindness and compassion which is pure, will love others as they would love themselves, and will have all things as required by religion. The controlling of oneself is therefore the spiritual culture which is universal in the widest sense for every person living in the world who is being tempted and aroused by modern inventions for the pleasure of the flesh, and which is

the source of the decline of moral conduct, war and many other things. This includes even the problem of the arising of hippies in the modern world.

As for the spreading of spiritual culture in the present world, we should first of all ask questions or make enquiries, which should be done in these ways: how does self-centredness, both in the form of capitalism and proletarianism, arise in the world? How can we come to love others in the same way as we love ourselves? How can the capitalist regard the proletarian as his son? Why does the proletarian not believe in the law of *kamma* yet is ready to accept the result of whatever kamma he has made? Why does the capitalist not believe in God who requires him to seek and possess as much as necessary (for his livelihood) and use what is left over to support others, as parents would support their children? What can be done so that all men can feel that they are the same, or at least that they came from the same parents such as Adam and Eve? Finally, the last question is, what is to be done so that man is no longer deceived by Satan? Such questions are the questions which should really be discussed or may just be talked over in passing, even in the battlefield, which is full of pitiable and disgusting scenes. The result would thus be that the exchange of spiritual culture would take place naturally. Acting in such a way would be better than to use our time in abusing, accusing and spreading wrong information instead of correct information in a subtle and crafty way making the mind become unthinkably soiled and degenerate.

It is extremely necessary for the exchanging of spiritual culture nowadays to be done while fighting in the same way as it would be when we play games. *War comes about because the world is in need of spiritual culture*, and it is progressively losing it. We cannot envisage the time when the war will come to an end, because of the very fact that the world is progressively losing spiritual culture. Even if there is a time when war halts for the time being, we always spend that time to adding to materialistic culture. Therefore, let us make efforts to exchange spiritual culture while fighting. Let us discuss the question of spiritual culture while fighting. This is the only method that will make everyone, whether he is a capitalist or proletarian, realize clearly that we have one and the same God. Everyone is inevitably the 'son' of God, who is real.

In our Buddhist teaching, there is spiritual culture in every letter of the Tipiṭaka. The Buddha says that all the teachings which He taught can be

summarized in one short sentence only: “*Sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāyā*” – meaning ‘all things should not be grasped as “I” and “mine”’ (Mūlapaṇṇāsa, Majjhima Nikāya).⁴ The mind which is free from clinging to anything whatsoever, that is the mind which has the highest spiritual culture. To train oneself not to cling to anything with the feeling of ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ that is the highest system of spiritual culture. The result of not clinging is Nibbāna, which is the final fruit of mental culture. When there is no feeling of taking anything as ‘I’ and ‘mine’ that means that one is not a robber robbing nature or God of anything and claiming it to be one’s own. This is the highest mark of a gentleman according to the spiritual culture.

As for that which is called Nibbāna, we must co-operate so as to make people of other nations or other religions have a proper understanding once and for all. Nibbāna is not nothingness or annihilation, but it means the state which is completely free from suffering. If we take the meaning of Nibbāna according to the Pāli language into consideration as it appears in the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-paṇṇāsa, Majjhima Nikāya), this word means ‘cooling down of hot or evil effects.’ When burning coal has cooled down, we say that it is ‘Nibbāna.’⁵ When the hot food cools down so that it can be eaten, we say that it is ‘Nibbāna.’⁵ This is the Nibbāna of matter. As for the animals, when they have been tamed, they are no longer dangerous in any way, and they are then called ‘Nibbāna.’ As for a man whose defilements or evil passions have been eradicated completely, we say that he is ‘Nibbāna.’ Nibbāna is not death or nothingness as is misunderstood. Nibbāna is coolness or peace which everybody aspires for, and it should be regarded as the highest stage of the spiritual culture of man.

Buddhists have Nibbāna as spiritual culture for the exchange with others who do not as yet have any understanding regarding this, as being that which Nature or God has prescribed for every man who wants the perfection of humanity. The Eightfold Path, the Threefold training, Non-clinging – all these things are directly concerned with Nibbāna. To develop the mind until it reaches Nibbāna is the highest aim of all cultures, and it is something that

⁴ See Cūlataṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta (MN 37).

⁵ Actually if Pāli grammar were followed here the form *nibbuta* would have to be used. Both *nibbāna* and *nibbuta* are derived from the same root verb: the former is the neutral noun while the latter is the past participle and adjective. There is also *nibbuti*, the feminine noun form. [note by the translator]

can be naturally accepted by all, but the only thing is that they have not yet heard about it correctly. This is something which can even be discussed in the battlefield, which is hot like fire and needs coolness. Communists want coolness, free democracy too wants coolness in the same way, but neither of them can get coolness because of the very fact that they lack the exchange of spiritual culture.

May I once again sum up the meaning of this part of the speech: to exchange Dhamma means to create mutual good understanding among people who still have misconceptions about God. To exchange knowledge gives rise to the knowledge of the truth, that each man is of the same God. To exchange Dhamma makes man attain to that part of God which is not Satan, and this will finally cause the wars of the world to melt away and disappear, because there will be no Satan to lure man into becoming deluded to wage war, which is to challenge God with the result that man is further punished heavily. Thus, let us speed up the work of exchanging Dhamma, even in the battlefield.

THE DUTY OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE W.F.B.

Look here. The organization of the W.F.B. has sprung up among the people who live in the land which is rich in spices. Therefore, even though it is small, it is strong like a small bird pepper. We must perform our duty to the best of our ability, in the way the Buddha intended us to by assigning this duty to us. We must recollect three points from the Buddha's words as has already been mentioned in the beginning. Now the time has come for us to prevent these three points that come from the Buddha's words from becoming sterile and devoid of meaning. Their sound must be ringing loudly all the time in our ears: "*The Tathāgata is born in the world for the happiness of all beings including gods and men.*" "*That the Dhamma and Vinaya is present in the world, that is for the happiness of the whole world including gods and men.*" "*Go you ... and wander forth to preach the divine life for the benefit of gods and men.*"

The W.F.B. has the duty to tell the war-faring countries that the price of only one big aeroplane is enough to use as capital for advertising so as to let all the people in the whole world know about peace and the root cause of war. But the advertising and spreading must be done in the correct way. We can advertise and make people ready to die by the thousands and millions; why

can we not then advertise in a way so as to stop them from killing each other? It is said that Einstein calculated that if able-bodied men lost only 2% of the energy they use for fighting, the waging of war could not take place. If these words are true then it is not at all difficult to make them reduce their energy by 2% by means of spreading the religious and spiritual culture. But it is still something which is not possible if we spread it in the wrong way, not as Nature or God wants it to be done.

The organization of the W.F.B. must enlarge the concept of 'Buddhist' both as far as words and as far as meaning are concerned. As far as the name is concerned, it is desirable to expand it like this: 'All Around the World and Every World Fellowship of Buddhists.'

In 'the World Fellowship of Buddhists,' the word 'Buddhists' should not be limited only to the circle of the members who are registered as such. The word 'Buddhists' must refer to every man who correctly understands Dhamma, Nature, and God. It is not important to what religion one belongs according to official registration, but what is important is that he should realize Dhamma in his own religion, realize God in his own religion, and attain to Nature in the nature of nature, in the truly correct way. All these three things are really the same, they differ only in name as has been said earlier.

Furthermore, even if at this time a person has not yet attained to Dhamma or God, but he is in a position where he may attain to it when there has been sufficient exchange of spiritual culture, then we must regard him as being a Buddhist as well, in the same way as we regard ourselves, even though he is our opponent in the war.

The organization of the W.F.B. must be the host or leader in making arrangements for exchanging spiritual culture on an international level and among war-faring groups, or on the level of the whole world as the Buddha has instructed us.

Buddhists, and especially the organization of the W.F.B., has the responsibility and the duty to give evidence to every man convincing him that Dhamma, in its capacity as God, is the only thing which everybody must have and which can help the world. Dhamma is not of any one religion, or of any race, but it is of nature, of God, of the whole world, it is of Dhamma itself. Let us strive in every possible way so as to bring about the exchange of Dhamma, of 'exchanging Dhamma while fighting' as has been said.

I thank all of you very much. This lecture may have been slightly boring because I have mentioned Dhamma, God, and exchanging spiritual culture repeatedly, maybe one hundred times in one hour, and you have patiently listened to me. Please forgive me for that.

I must now conclude this lecture with sincere thanks to you all.



WHY WERE YOU BORN?

Hey, tell me, why ever are we born here?
If you're still selfish, you won't believe anything I say!

How about a hint, so I can float my boat in the stream?
Basically, naturally, we are born simply to be people!

Come on! Is that really all there is to it?
If one fully lives up to the name, it's abundantly fruitful!

What sort of born is called 'inhuman'?
The birth that wastes the life one's been given!

How is one born so that this life isn't wasted?
Do not in any way transgress the duty of being human.

How is one born to the fullest standard of humanity?
Firmly commit to the duty of Dhamma people!

LITTLE DHAMMA BOOK

THE BASIC NATURE OF HUMAN LIFE

A lecture given on 1 January 2526 (1983)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya

Translated from the Thai by Dhammavidū Bhikkhu

The original Little Dhamma Book series of Māgha Pūjā discourses were delivered to the monks, maechis, and laypeople at Suan Mokkh in 1983. What follows is the first of the twelve lectures composing the series, which has only recently been translated into English.



THE BASIC NATURE OF HUMAN LIFE

This collection of talks I intend to be special, aimed at solving the problem of finding a comprehensive book, a ‘Little Dhamma Book’ to aid in the study and practice of people generally. The required information, being scattered about in an enormous number of publications, can be difficult to track down, so the intention is to produce a single yet complete book for general use. Hence, we’re calling this collection of talks the *Little Dhamma Book*.

These talks will proceed step by step, covering those subjects necessary for general study. On this first occasion, the subject will be ‘the ordinary, or normal, condition of human life’ – so we’ll be talking about people, talking of people to enable them to get the most out of being people. To do that, we’ll need to consider life in such a way so that what will result is an all-around, fundamental understanding of what it is, of how it can be developed, and of how far that development can go, the intention being that one who studies and practises will then be able to develop their life, cause it to prosper in the Dhamma way, and ultimately meet with success by putting an end to all of their problems.

We really don’t have anything much to do other than that. Everyone has problems, and has them continually: these problems, those problems, problems without end. However, people can, gradually, bring themselves up to the mark

and be able to dwell above all of that, that is, they can be *arahant* (a perfected human being). But if we say this sort of thing, it makes people nervous. They have a certain fear of being arahant because they think it is too much, too elevated, and not really useful. Suggest becoming arahant and few will want it because they'll see it in that way, so they remain stuck, stuck fast in the midst of trouble and strife, always with problems.

The human world has its problems. Ascend to the heavenly worlds and there'll be problems there too. Reach the *Brahma* worlds and there'll still be problems. Even though the mind might be in a heavenly condition, there'll still be problems.

The biggest problems of all are those of 'me' and 'mine.' The ignorant understanding that there's a 'me' and a 'mine' brew up almost endless desire for those things which cause us to have problems in the first place. People have endless problems to deal with, but that, it's said, is normal, is human nature.

If we could put an end to our problems so that life became problem-free, that would represent the ultimate, the highest attainment. Then our struggles would be over, which would represent the end, or culmination, of the system of practice known in the Pāli language as *Brahmacariya*, after which it wouldn't be necessary for us to deliberately practise anything anymore. We'll only know this culmination when we become arahant, become one who's stopped, who's completed the task, because then, when there aren't any of the usual problems left, it will mean that life has been freed from all the forms of *dukkha* (distress, dis-ease, suffering).

If we're interested in this, not afraid that it will be too much, perhaps we can look at it, consider it together and come to an understanding. If it's too much and we aren't interested, which, in truth, will mean that the mind doesn't want to be interested, we can still talk, but it will be a waste of time for both parties.

That's a problem we come up against, particularly in my case – me (Buddhadāsa), who's had the duty of talking about Dhamma for years, it feels like this, feels like a problem that we're not able to lead people to the high range, to solve all their problems for the several reasons we've mentioned. The majority see it as too goody-good, as being without flavour, not being fun, not an amusement. Such people can't resist the ups and downs of the baser levels of life.

Even those who don't live that way still see this as not for them – the best

thing Buddhism has to offer doesn't interest them! It's this way with both monks and laypeople. The monks in the monastery – observe them, they aren't really interested. Their whole minds aren't focused on the Dhamma that could raise them to the highest level, that could put an end to their problems, and although they endure having to listen, they sit abstractedly, letting their minds wander. They sit dozing off and nobody much is interested in following and paying attention to the details. There's more interest in playing around. Go and look at the books some of today's monks invest in. Go and look at the books they read. They aren't about the quenching of dukkha, about ending the defilements at all. There's a lot of fiction, books on general knowledge and such. They want to be sages, philosophers, famous people with special knowledge of this and that sort. Hence, the genuine Dhamma, the Dhamma on the highest level remains sterile, and the people who try to teach it become frustrated because what they teach isn't really what the people listening to them want to hear.

These problems are met with all the time, so we intend to create a book designed to solve them. For that reason, we'll try to deliver this series of lectures, but whether we meet with success or not, there'll be more problems. I still don't believe that we'll be successful – wait and see.

Anyway, now we'll look at the basic nature of human life, what the points are that we ought to be aware of, in terms that will be, hopefully, easy to grasp and to study.

The first point to grasp is that this life can take many forms, depending on the prevalent conditions. Life as we live it certainly has, and we need to see that it has, causes and conditions that make us experience being alive in, for instance, this particular manner at this particular time. Other lifestyles can come about in the same way, and a life, for instance, which is worse than this can easily be had by someone who behaves accordingly. A higher lifestyle, a good, a superb form of life, that of an arahant, can be developed in the same way, and can be had by someone willing to make the necessary effort. We should recognize that, generally, life can take many forms and is more or less different depending on how it's lived, on how it's managed, each lifestyle having its own peculiar conditions to act as its concocting agent.

Normally, we won't know this, so we just allow life to float along as it will, we let fate take a hand, as it were, and then how our life is at any given time will depend very much on our passing desires.

For instance: the novice monk ordains but doesn't really know what he wants to do, so he lets things go along as they will. He sees his friend studying for the examinations so he does the same, sees his friend studying Pāli so does the same. He doesn't really know why he does, but studies in case it's good, or in case it might be the way to something useful. In reality, this novice doesn't know why he does what he does. Now, someone who doesn't ordain, who stays in the world, also allows things to go along as they will, to go along as defiled desire dictates, and they do that because their knowledge isn't complete too, that is, they don't know how to cut the defilements (*lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha* – greed, aversion, and delusion) and thus are unable to bring the best thing they could have into their lives. They don't know that if only they could understand the causes and conditions necessary for that to become a reality then it would happen. If we want to have a certain kind of life, then we need to know what sort of causes and conditions will 'concoct' it, will bring it into existence.

Grasp this point: life can take many forms depending on prevalent causes and conditions. Hence, instead of just allowing things to drift along as they will, we might have the best kind of life, providing that we know how to make it happen.

To sum up: we don't know why we were born, what we were born to do. We don't have this knowledge, so we allow life to go along as it will, we let 'fate,' let 'destiny' choose our lifestyle for us, which is unwise. We sympathize with all those in this plight, hence we try to point out the fact that there are underlying causes and conditions involved which concoct life in a particular way, in such a way that we always get what we deserve. So take an interest, study what's being said and then choose the most appropriate lifestyle, but choose with knowledge present and not while half-asleep. We might have the best, most pleasant sort of a life, but not if we don't know how to make it happen: we might live a life full of happiness, a life without any dukkha, if we know how to manipulate the mind.

There's a *dhamma* in Buddhism which can make the mind smart and clear, make it able to know things as they truly are so that there's none of the clinging which makes life burdensome, which makes life dukkha. That *dhamma* (teaching) is the ability to see that whatever is held by people to be dukkha, to be unpleasant, is really 'just like that.' For instance: we try to understand the things that we have to do to make our living as being 'just like that.' If we

know how to manage life so that we can be happy in our work, then there's no dukkha involved in such activities. If, for instance, we're disappointed on some occasion then, instead of getting upset, we try to see it as being 'just like that,' as being 'just the way it goes.' If we're tired, if life is being difficult then, again, we try to understand it as being 'just like that,' 'just the way it is.' If we can look on the bright side, as it were, there'll always be happiness. Hence, we can be happy in our labours and get the result, the benefit in our lives. We need to make enough of a study of the Dhamma to be able to improve the mind so that our tasks, our duties, no matter what they are can be properly done. Although something is sweaty, wearisome, troublesome, we can improve the mind so that there's no dukkha involved.

For comparison's sake, consider the butterfly, which makes its living by taking the nectar from flowers, thus spreading the pollen around and helping to make nature beautiful. The butterfly operates in such a way that it has no dukkha. We, too, can operate, can perform our tasks without dukkha, but to do that, we'll need to know how to improve the mind first. We can't just emulate the butterfly and do our duty. We'll need to know how to improve our minds before we can do that. Please, take an interest, because this is important, it's the way to safety. We might be an employee, a washer of clothes, of dishes, and if we don't look on our work as difficult, as troublesome, then just by looking on our tasks in the right way, we can perform them without having to be the 'me' who's bitter, resentful, disappointed. If we're employed to wash the dishes or the clothes, to clean the house, to cook and prepare the food, anything that we have to do we can turn into a work of art and make it enjoyable. Even with sweeping the house, sweeping the floor, sweeping the yard, making things clean and tidy, we can try to understand such things anew so that we can sweep with love, we can sweep as if it's an art form; then we'll find satisfaction in such a task. If every time we have to sweep we remind ourselves of this, then there'll be contentment every time, not just once the sweeping is finished with, but while we're actually doing it, because then we'll be able to sweep artistically, as it were.

However, generally speaking, people aren't properly mindful of their work so that their minds wander, and they aren't able to give proper attention to the task in hand. And perhaps there's the feeling that the sort of work we've mentioned here is plebeian, slavish, beneath one's dignity, but if we know the truth that there isn't anything which is really common or base, then, if it's work, no matter what kind it is, it becomes something that can help to feed,

to sustain life. It's all in our minds anyway. If we're smart enough, we can find satisfaction in doing any kind of work – which is the right way to look on such things. However, some see certain kinds of work as base, and thus for inferior people to do, but if we don't have the knowledge to take us higher in the workaday world, then we have to find a way to be happy with what we've got, and we can, gradually, gain knowledge and thus earn our living by performing better, easier, more elevated tasks. But, whatever we do, we need to learn to do it in such a way that it breeds a feeling of satisfaction. If we're willing to approach everything we have to do in that way then, for us, to work will be a kind of paradise.

To sum up a little: life can take many forms, can develop in many ways, some of them quite amazing, involving miraculous powers, the miraculous powers here being the knowledge of how to make the mind experience satisfaction no matter what we happen to be concerned with. However, we're not talking about dishonest activities here, but about decent, law-abiding people being able to derive satisfaction from performing their tasks in the right and proper way so that they produce good results in the here and now, and don't cause any problems later on.

So make a choice: life can take many forms and we can choose, but we shouldn't be dull enough to make the wrong choice. We should always try to choose the form that best suits us. If we can be satisfied with what we are and what we have at any given time, then we can be happy.

If we could take that as a basic principle, then there wouldn't, for instance, be anybody to do wrong, to be a bad lot. There wouldn't be any unemployment, everybody would have work and would do it with pleasure. People would be happy in their labours, and then the places of entertainment, the liquor shops, cinemas, play houses, and the like would close, would disappear because there wouldn't be anyone to go to them. Nobody would want such things. Being happy with their lives, with their work, with their duties, they wouldn't feel the need to spend extravagantly, wouldn't feel the need for escape, for excitement, for stimulation. Hence, people would be able to dwell in sufficiency, in peace and happiness: when resting, relaxing, there'd be happiness, when working there'd be happiness, so how could there be any foolish desire? That would be finished with if people could find satisfaction in every activity.

Nature gives us the ability to choose our way of life, but mostly people aren't wise and can't choose – in fact, they never choose, they don't know how

to choose, they can only think in shallow ways. Here's an example: making offerings to spirits and suchlike is believed to bring great rewards and doesn't involve doing anything wearisome. There are those who do that sort of thing in the hope of getting rich – or perhaps they buy a share in a lottery ticket but don't get rich that way either – although in a sense they do get rich, rich in nervous diseases.

This is the first point to take an interest in, that we can choose to live our lives in many different ways, but whatever form we choose, if it's going to be sustainable, then certain particular conditions will have to be present and correct, and we're going to have to make sure that such is the case.

Now, to continue, we want to look at another aspect of nature, that is, at the senses. Because we have eyes, ears, a nose, tongue, a body, and a mind there are problems. Don't be careless where the senses are concerned, because that's the prime cause of life's problems. People have the six senses and each of them will produce feelings capable of concocting all manner of problems, if we let them. If we were talking about a stone this wouldn't happen because stones don't have any senses, but people aren't stones and have the six senses complete, each of which has its particular duty to perform. All six senses create their own peculiar problems. If we didn't have any senses there wouldn't be any problems, while if our senses were less effective we'd have fewer problems to deal with. That's probably the case with trees, for instance, which don't have obvious sense organs, that is, their organs of sense can't be easily determined. Animals have the same sense organs as human beings, but with, in some cases, a lesser functionality, hence their problems are also less. Human senses, however, have wide capabilities which, given ignorance, can be enhanced even more: the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind can have their spheres of experience greatly expanded, which is something people the world over like to do, and by so doing increase the problems which can arise during life by creating the 'delicious,' the 'fun,' the 'beautiful,' and so on, objects for the senses to connect with. Hence, the senses pull life into problems, into trouble. The Buddha said that our problems begin at sense contact, that is, with contacts at the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind.

The senses are the well-spring of all things because they receive the contacts which give rise to feelings.

For example: because we have senses we must naturally acquire more knowledge with each passing day. Once we're born from our mother's womb,

then the six senses will increasingly perform their duties. Hence, a child will come to know more and more things as time passes: knowledge will expand because the senses meet daily with new and different things. Correct knowledge, but also incorrect knowledge, *micchādiṭṭhi*, comes from sense contacts. That happens because, usually, wisdom doesn't get the chance to intervene and force a proper response, so that any contacts are of the sort that necessarily create an increasing fund of wrong understanding, of incorrect knowledge. This happens because people aren't able to control their reactions to sense experience.

When we go wrong, perform bad *kamma*, as they say, there arises a bad result, which is called a *vipāka*. Good *kamma* gives rise to good *vipāka*, bad *kamma* to bad *vipāka*. Both come from contacts with the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Hence, it's said that heaven and hell arise at the senses, that heaven and hell are results of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind contacts. However, people don't usually think that way and instead give attention to other things, not to the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. So preferring to look elsewhere, to place our faith in other things, we go further and further from truth and, more and more, have to blindly believe in the opinions of others. Even the study of Nibbāna requires that attention be given to the contacts taking place at the senses. If we know how to use the eyes, ears, etc. so that benefit arises, then we'll know everything, because in reality everything comes from feelings arising from sense contacts.

However, we don't usually possess that sort of knowledge; we study other things. Truth is to be found at the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, but if we're not interested, then we aren't going to be able to deal with them properly and won't be able to manage them for our benefit. Anyone who wants to know Dhamma, first of all has to be interested in studying everything concerning the senses. If the question should come up as to what the ABCs of Buddhism are, then the reply should be that the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind are the ABCs. Begin to study at the ABC level, make a study of the senses. The Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha can keep for later, they aren't the cause of our problems, of our dukkha, that lies in wrongdoing where sense contacts are concerned. The Buddha can't physically come and help us to quench dukkha, he can only advise us on how to manage our reactions to sense experience. In revealing dukkha and its quenching, he points to the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, which means that the teaching is really all about getting to know the senses so that we can control our responses to them,

then dukkha doesn't arise.

Hence, the Little Dhamma Book encourages us to be interested in the eyes, ears, etc. as being the most important of matters, one that we have to know about, one that a human being should know about, otherwise our problems can't be solved. The senses are the root of everything that happens in life, are the 'doors' through which the mind contacts the outer and inner worlds. If there wasn't a mind, there wouldn't be anything. It's because there is a mind that everything exists: this and that sort of feeling, *sukha* and *dukkha* (happiness and suffering), death, anything and everything happens because the mind exists. The mind, however, can't do anything if the five physical senses aren't around, so there has to be the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and the body surface – these five contactors – to allow the mind to know the external world, to know the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. If these things didn't exist there'd be almost nothing, and if there wasn't a mind, there would be nothing. But people generally aren't much interested in the mind, being more interested in surface matters, in the variety of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches, an interest which manifests as defiled desire for the fun, for the stimulating, the delightful experiences available by way of these organs. So we go about worshipping, making sacrifices, and aren't interested in the mind and its *sukha* and *dukkha*. We are interested only in surface matters, in the deceptive appearance of things which can so easily give rise to infatuation, to love and hate, and can expand into the areas of fear, anxiety, longing after, jealousy, and so on. We don't see what causes these problems, don't know that they come from the ignorant mind whenever it meets with certain forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mind objects.

These are the ABCs; but this, it's said, is *paramattha*, ultimate truth, and *paramattha* isn't appropriate for people generally, so it isn't made available for study. People don't need to study ultimate truth? Children don't need to know this? In truth, if we go and look in the Pāli, at what the Buddha said, he pointed out that this was something that needed to be studied at the outset, studied in the guise of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, dependent origination (the formula that deals with the arising of *dukkha*), the teaching of which is frowned upon because it's said to be too elevated.

So be interested in the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, as the first things that we need to know about, to understand. When we know all about them, we'll know other things too: we'll know how we ought to act as

human beings, and then it won't be necessary for anyone to tell us how we should behave because we'll know the deep truth of life. At present, we don't have this knowledge so we get led astray, and even if someone tells us not to misbehave, we don't listen; we act wrongly towards ourselves and others because we don't know how we should operate as human beings. Think again: if we don't fully understand the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, we won't have any way of understanding the Dhamma deeply enough to get the most benefit from it, that is, to become human beings of the best sort, those who can quench dukkha.

Now, continuing on: it's quite possible to have a body and mind without there needing to be a 'self.' This will probably sound very strange to people used to the feeling that there is such a thing, that there routinely is a 'me.' This body of ours is a physical system; the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body surfaces represent the physical senses, and there are the various nerve systems which are part of the body too; then there's the mind which feels through the body. We just have these two things, which is enough – they're known as *nāmarūpa*, but can also be called 'mind and body.' In the Pāli texts they're referred to as *nāmarūpa* and, together, they form a pair, however, *nāmarūpa* isn't separable into two things. So we have *nāmarūpa*, that is, mind and body, and this is enough; there's no need for a third member, an '*attā*' or 'self.' If we feel that there is a 'self' or some other thing which is the owner of the body and mind, which owns the mind and controls the body, that's really just ignorance. The Buddha taught differently from what had gone before, in that he taught that there wasn't anything that could be called a 'self,' that there were the things called mind and body, *nāma* with *rūpa*, and that was enough. When the 'self' thought arose, it was wrong understanding, wrong thinking coming from a mind which had made mistakes following contact with some outside object. This is what has, and will, cause big trouble for us right up until we die. It's what will stop us from quenching dukkha, stop us from improving, stop us from putting things right.

Get a firm hold on this basic point first of all: we have a body and a mind, but there's no need for a 'self.' There are just two components, and together they make what we call a 'person.' We suppose that there's 'someone,' but in truth there isn't. There's just the body and the mind pooling their resources to carry out the operations of life in accord with the promptings of nature. The body is the physical part, the shell, the thing that serves, that's used, while the mind is that which thinks and feels, rather like the overseer controlling the

body. They must dwell together; whenever they don't then both die. There's a body because there's a mind, and there's a mind because there's a body, they perform different functions but they dwell together. Therefore, when we're born from the mother's womb, there's both, all set and ready to go.

However, all things are concoctions of nature. One such is called 'body,' another is 'mind.' They aren't permanencies, they don't endure but they can do what they need to do. The bodies and minds of generations of human beings have sensed and experienced different things over many tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of years, so that now mankind can do anything, can do wonderful things, can fly off into space, can create computers, etc., things the ancients couldn't do. Who taught us? It was the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and, of course, the mind, which, experiencing so much, eventually brings it all together as accumulated knowledge, so that now even flying through the air cannot be seen as supernatural or miraculous anymore.

There's no need for a 'self,' there's just a body with a mind as nature intended, combining, concocting, naturally developing, and progressing. There's no need to cling to them as something amazing, superb, as being more than they really are, because they're really quite ordinary. They're just what they are, 'just like that' as the Buddhists say. That's why we don't cling to anything, because whatever it is, it's 'just like that' too.

But usually the mind clings, it's infatuated and led astray into clinging: infatuated with knowledge it clings to knowledge, clings to work, to wealth, to fame, to happiness, to stimulation, to delight, until it becomes extreme. There's no need to look outside at anybody else, because our own problems are so extreme. Consequently, our actions disturb others, which is a world problem at present. Some, thinking only of what's to their own benefit, and because they have the power, cause trouble for others. Hence, this world is divided up between those on the left and those on the right, struggling with each other endlessly, between those in power and those without it, struggling for possession of the various lures and temptations, for possession of what will become the 'bait' by which the human population of this world will be hooked and reeled in.

There's the body and mind, there's no need for a 'self.' The one point, the one fundamental principle to be aware of is that there's only *nāmarūpa*, mind and body. There'll be the many and various experiences of life to continually deal with, but whatever happens, there won't be any need for a 'self' to be

involved, only the body and the mind – and perhaps, the mind which has been trained and improved so that proper knowledge is around to deal with any experience, so bringing about the arising and development of real intelligence.

At first, a person doesn't have any knowledge of Nibbāna, but when they come to experience a lot of dukkha, they'll perhaps start to move in its direction. They meet, meet, meet with trouble and strife until they reach the limit of their endurance. Then, perhaps they realize that there's trouble and strife, there's dukkha because the mind has been poorly maintained, wrongly established. Subsequently, it gets trained, comes to operate properly, and there's no more dukkha.

There's no need for a 'self,' for God, for anything from anywhere to interfere here, because the mind can do wrong or can do right all by itself.

In the body and mind combination, it's the mind which is the most important, it's like the heart of the matter. The body is the substantial part, the outer shell, but it's the mind that's the most important component. Hence, it's the mind we'll need to really understand, because anything and everything is experienced by the mind, so we'll need to make a particular study of it. Hence, we now come to look in that direction. The succeeding points will let us get to know the mind better.

The natural mind is without *kilesa*, defilement (basically greed, aversion, and delusion), without mental pollution, and is known or referred to as 'luminous.' Mind is a natural element, the 'mind element,' the *cittadhātu* – it could also be called *manodhātu*, or even an *arūpadhātu*, as we prefer. It's a natural element in the same sense that earth, water, fire, and air are natural elements. However, this particular element concocts itself and becomes the 'mind' that we're familiar with. The mind, while still on the fundamental level, isn't in a 'good' or 'bad' mood, or state. It is without any form of defilement – hence, it's described as being 'luminous.' It's the nature of this luminous mind to be undefiled, but it can concoct defilement by way of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. The mind can cause the arising of the *kilesa*, the defilements, which will then temporarily overwhelm it, cover over its luminosity for a time. However, once the conditions supporting the defilements change, come to an end, they then quench away and the luminous mind re-emerges. The mind is like this, this is its true nature. It's naturally luminous until there's the wrong kind of concocting and the defilements come to cover it over and deprive it of its luminosity. While the mind is luminous, it's without dukkha, it's trouble-

free, but in the moment that the luminosity vanishes, there's defilement, there's depression, distress, there's dukkha, confusion, turbulence. The point to grasp is that the original mind isn't defiled, that the defilements are things that just arise, which means that they can be prevented from arising.

The defilements aren't the mind. Mind arises without defilement but gets overwhelmed by it, that is, defilement is able to dominate the mind because experiences coming in via the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind itself are carelessly dealt with. When we really believe and can clearly see that the mind can be kept away from the influence of the defilements, we can then arrange matters so that it stays defilement-free, so that it retains its luminosity. That's the job of *vipassanā*, of mental training.

Training, or cultivating the mind means developing it so that nothing can cause it to be defiled or depressed. Before this, it was much too easy for anything to make the mind lose its luminosity and experience dukkha, but now we'll cultivate it, and when that's been done, its condition will be such that, because it's become smarter, become sharper, the defilements can't re-arise. Once this has been accomplished, we should then go about protecting the mind, taking care of, improving it, not allowing it to depress, to become defiled again. Hence, if one has knowledge of the nature of the mind, knows it as it is, as it has been described, they'll also know that they can train it, that the mind can be trained, and that they themselves might be able to do that. Then they'll be happy to study for that purpose, and when they're happy to do that, then for them, there can be successful mental cultivation.

At present, we probably don't see this quite clearly enough so we won't be so sure that we can train the mind. Perhaps we try to sit in *samādhi* but can't hold the mind still, so we give it up, we accept defeat. Many people who come here (Suan Mokkh) ask how long they'll have to train the mind for. They can't reach mental stillness, and when they see that the mind is distracted and doesn't submit, they give up, they're defeated. Most are like this, nobody much persists in their struggle to train the mind, to bring it increasingly under control until the task is completed, until the defilements can no longer arise. There's only a too easy submission and acceptance of defeat. So don't give up – struggle on twenty times, thirty, fifty, a hundred times. But people don't want to do that.

Know that the mind is naturally undefiled, that something enters and causes it to become defiled, depressed. Therefore, we can separate the defilements from the mind by the simple method of learning to behave

properly, by doing the right things – the method which is known as *citta-bhāvanā* (mental cultivation). *Samādhi* and *vipassanā* together are referred to as ‘mental cultivation,’ ‘mental training.’ This is something we should know about.

The next thing we need to know is that because the mind is difficult to understand, because we can’t understand it properly, it gets taken to be, for instance, the ‘spirit.’ It gets described as something strange, wonderful, supernatural – all of which can be filed under ‘superstitious beliefs.’ Superstition is the incomprehensible, the irrational, that which is blindly believed in and appears because we don’t understand the true nature of the mind. If we were able to know the mind as it really is, then superstitious beliefs couldn’t arise, and nobody would ever think in such a way. At present, we don’t know the mind as it really is. It’s a mystery to us, so we place our faith in superstition-based knowledge, in knowledge which lacks reason, which is based in blind belief, and which has given rise to a profusion of ideologies and religious sects.

Born from a lack of understanding of the mind as it really is, superstition has great power over people even to this day. It’s been around for ages, since time immemorial, since mankind first began to think about the mind, thought about it wrongly, misunderstood it, and, in that way, gave rise to superstitious belief. Such belief has the advantage of not having to be logical, not needing to be explained, it’s all about believing, and because it’s usually mysterious in nature, people take to it all the more. If something is open, and frankly, clearly explained, it won’t be accepted so easily, but if anything smacks of the mysterious, the incomprehensible, it will be more willingly received, which is a big advantage of superstition. What’s laughable is that practically everybody is fond of it because it’s often cheap: superstitious belief can involve just a little investment: a pig’s head, a bottle of some liquor, anything offered to the spirits, to the celestial beings. Those are the advantages of superstitious belief which have kept it alive and kicking right down to the present day. When people take to the superstitious path, it tends to obstruct truth yet in this world it’s accepted and maintained. It’s become firmly established because it’s suitable for those with weak knowledge, and in this world there are many such people. But don’t think that in a developed, prosperous country there isn’t any superstitious belief, because it will be there too: God-belief, calling on our God for assistance, this will still be around, because ignorant human beings, no matter where they are, will have an instinctual desire to take the easy way out, to get somebody else

to do for them what they should do themselves. In the end, it all gets mixed up, confused, and the superstitious beliefs that people create come back to be their lord and master – superstition created by their own ignorance comes back to rule them. How amazing is that?

This is superstition, something we'll need to understand clearly: because we go wrong, misunderstand the mind, that misunderstanding then opens up the way for ignorance, for blind belief, for superstition – for the opposite of truth – to become dominant. Those of a superstitious inclination have insulted and reviled us until they've exhausted their vocabulary, but we remain undaunted and continue to point out the truth. If we can know the mind as it really is, any superstitious beliefs will dissolve away of their own accord.

Now superstitious belief has reached an amazing level, the most astounding level, and people 'mark,' that is, they make an auspicious mark on the Buddha image so that it can *be* a Buddha. Buddha images are caste and then brought out of the foundry as such, but a Buddha image can't be used until someone comes along to make an auspicious mark on it, and only then can it be a Buddha. Think about this: people really make an auspicious mark on the Buddha image in order to make it into a Buddha! This can happen when superstition reigns, and that little mark is then good for life. Take cement powder, some powder, put a little dab on the forehead, and that's good for life – true or not? Think about it.

Wrong understanding where the mind is concerned gives rise to superstitious belief. If we're still under the power of superstition, we won't be able to connect with Dhamma; for us the Dhamma will be sterile and we won't be able to use it for our benefit. We misunderstand the mind, put our faith in superstition, and that creates a great obstacle, one that stops us from connecting fully with the Buddha's teachings, because superstition inhibits, opposes, it covers over and doesn't allow a true understanding to arise. If mankind doesn't know about this, superstition is going to dominate more and more, and this world will become increasingly peculiar. Dukkha won't be quenchable because the true nature of the mind and body won't be understood. So, make enough of a study of the deep and complex mechanisms of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind, and then we'll know the real, the ultimate Dhamma. We'll attain the path, fruit, and Nibbāna, be able to live above dukkha, and the mind won't be defiled, it will be luminous all the time.

We're naturally without knowledge in the womb. We don't have right

knowledge, knowledge which accords with nature. The mind only has the knowledge of sense contacts at the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind itself, only this sort of knowledge. Hence, it doesn't know what truth is, doesn't know about deliverance of the mind through wisdom, doesn't know what dukkha is, what the cause of dukkha is, what the quenching of dukkha is, or what the way to the quenching of dukkha is. The mind is without this sort of knowledge from birth. Once born, the child is surrounded by a variety of things capable of leading it into understanding in an unreal way, in a way opposite to truth. It thus grows up in the midst of delusion regarding what it experiences through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. It doesn't know the truth of such things, doesn't know the way to safety, doesn't know Nibbāna. This is our 'original sin.' Other religions have this concept too, but talk about it in different ways. We explain it thus: when we come from the mother's womb, we're immediately surrounded by many and various sense objects which allow us to forge wrong understanding. Those who raise us bring delicious things for us to eat so that we become infatuated with the delicious. They bring the pretty, the beautiful to tempt us into infatuation, so we're led astray into clinging to 'me' and to 'mine,' and we, clinging to the 'self' view, then regularly go wrong.

This problem doesn't decrease as we grow into adolescence, and is the kind of wrong view we'll have until we're old and grey. Try to observe, examine yourselves and see whether that wrong understanding decreases or not with the passing of time. Actually, it only increases, becomes firm, strong, and very difficult to get rid of. When we can't get rid of it, we have to bear with dukkha, and bear with it until we really, really feel the need to be free of it. Once we do feel the need, we can start to try and turn things around, to put the problem right. Hence, if we've been lucky enough to come by the necessary knowledge and we're convinced that we can do this, we can apply ourselves, make the necessary adjustments, lessen the dukkha we have to experience, and perhaps, come eventually to live without it.

All people, family groups, societies, countries, the whole world living without dukkha, that would really be the ultimate. But how could that become a reality? We'd need to let the Dhamma help us, let the Dhamma become dominant in the world, it could be dukkha-free.

We don't have knowledge from birth; hence, we load up with wrong knowledge, right knowledge not being taught. Children aren't taught about

the quenching of dukkha. There's only indulgence, pampering, and habitual spoiling. This is the way it is. Whose fault is it? We're naturally without any proper knowledge at birth. We emerge from the womb void in that sense, and once in the world, we load up with wrongs, with selfishness, becoming infatuated with delightful, stimulating sensual experiences until we become worshippers of the 'fun,' the delightful, the stimulating, eventually arriving at the point when we can't earn enough money to sustain the habit. There's this much of a problem because a tendency, or inclination towards this kind of behaviour has developed. This 'tendency' is known as *anusaya*. Every time defilement arises, the tendencies, the *anusaya*, increase. Defilement arises in dependence on cause and conditions and is a temporary affair: the defilements of *lobha*, greed, *kodha*, anger, and *moha*, delusion arise, and when they do, a tendency towards them starts to develop, thus allowing them to re-arise more easily in the future. The defilements push, press to arise because there's a tendency towards defiled behaviour which we find difficult to resist.

So now, make the mind into a Dhamma fortress, fight the defilements, don't let them arise, combat them with mindfulness and clear comprehension (that is, be aware enough to be able to apply the right kind of response to any potentially meaningful sense contact). If we can prevent their arising once, then the familiarity with them will decrease by so much, and the power of the defilements will decrease. So, we're careful, we control them, we don't let them arise and their power lessens, the familiarity with them diminishes. This is the way to safety, the better way. So don't give in, don't be discouraged, and we'll be able to control them more and more until perhaps, we can control them completely – then the tendencies will disappear altogether.

We've taken to worshipping the defiled as something good, something wonderful, which is much the same as worshipping the *kilesa*, the defilements themselves. We worship the *kilesa*, that is, we want what the *kilesa* want, want what the defilements want, we want the 'fun,' the delicious, the stimulating. We worship the *kilesa* as our God. 'God' means the ultimate, that which we have faith in, which we fear, and in accord with whose principles we regulate our behavior. But we put our faith in the defilements, we fear them, we habitually behave in accord with their promptings. We have the *kilesa* as our God. So now we try to change. We put our faith in the Buddha and try to behave in accord with what he taught, which is difficult because we've been worshipping the God of defilement almost since birth. It will depend on whether the proper causes and conditions exist, on whether the opportunity

arises, etc. but if everything comes together in the right way, we can change. It can happen if there's enough of an inclination towards the Dhamma, and if there's good instruction available, things can change. We can turn away from the defiled, stop associating with the defilements and join with the Dhamma, become interested in practising the Dhamma way.

Then the 'light' will have arisen, we'll have seen the light of safety and turned towards it. Then we won't worship the defilements anymore; instead we'll turn our face towards the real, the true, we'll turn towards the Dhamma, towards *sacca*, the truth of truths.

This will mark the arising of 'Buddhology.' Before this, it was all superstition – 'sleepy' knowledge is called superstition – but now that changes, starts to become the knowledge of one who's awake, whose eyes are wide open, who sleeps no more. Thus, we enter into the Buddha's way, and slowly, gradually, we follow the path to its end, to the attainment of path, fruit, and Nibbāna. We should find it interesting that there is such a way as this.

We'll need to know all this for ourselves, to really know it in our own minds, to just accept what someone tells us wouldn't be right, so follow the advice of the Kālāma Sutta.¹ Don't go against the tenets of the Kālāma Sutta, that is, don't just believe blindly. Have faith in anything only when it's been clearly understood, and then we can gradually change and come into the straight way. Respect the Dhamma, the ultimate truth, do the right things and attain the highest, Nibbāna, which is where it ends.

All things felt by the mind are to be *sandiṭṭhiko* (personally experienceable). *Sandiṭṭhiko* – this word is significant, highly significant, because if Dhamma isn't *sandiṭṭhiko* it won't be properly beneficial. Dhamma matters have to be *sandiṭṭhiko*. We might go to the trouble of memorizing things like "*Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo sandiṭṭhiko akāliko...*" (chanted every day by monks and nuns) and so on. We might mouth this daily but still not get the proper benefit from it because it won't be *sandiṭṭhiko*. Think about it – if it isn't *sandiṭṭhiko*, it's just mouthing of words because the mind won't 'see' the truth of it. Thus, anything we say or recite, let it be *sandiṭṭhiko* too. If we talk about dukkha, let it be felt, let it be known by the mind how dukkha actually is. The defilements are the cause of dukkha, so know the defilements themselves, know how it is that they are the cause of dukkha. Let everything be *sandiṭṭhiko*.

¹ Kesaputti (Kālāma) Sutta (AN 3:65).

The things that need to be a sandiṭṭhiko experience before anything else are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, plus their opposite numbers, their helpmates, the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental objects; then there's the arising of contact, feeling and so on. All of this has to be *sandiṭṭhiko*, personally experienced, to be really useful. It's the first thing, what the Buddha described as the starting point of the Brahmācariya. In *pariyatti* study, the intellectual exploration of the Dhamma, the senses have to be tackled first. When practising, the sense operations come first, and the result of practice, the penetration into truth must initially concern direct sandiṭṭhiko experience of the senses and their mode of operation.

Making the refuges, coming to know the as yet misunderstood Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha (something, again, chanted daily by monks and nuns) is hard, so we have to, at least at first, just blindly recite the words and receive the refuges as we would ordinarily do. Although that will be akin to superstitious belief, we'll have to let that pass for now and continue to accept the still mysterious versions of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha as our refuge. Subsequently, we can study and practise to add knowledge until the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha become sandiṭṭhiko experiences too.

Quench dukkha first and we'll know the real Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. To just read about the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha in books isn't sandiṭṭhiko knowledge; sandiṭṭhiko on the intellectual level isn't yet the real thing, but we can hold onto it in lieu of the real thing. So, it's "*Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*" (I go to the Buddha for refuge, I go to the Dhamma for refuge, I go to the Saṅgha for refuge) for now. Then we, slowly, gradually ascend; we watch and wait until we know. When the mind quenches suffering, when we first feel that we don't have any dukkha then we'll really know the Buddha, we'll really know the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. At that time, the sandiṭṭhiko Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha will appear. We're afraid that for years and years understanding of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha hasn't been sandiṭṭhiko, consequently, we'll be, until the day we die, ignorant of the truth. The monastics needn't boast; they don't have sandiṭṭhiko knowledge of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha either. So, Buddhists, don't be lazy, don't neglect that which can make the Dhamma sandiṭṭhiko.

What we're about to say will probably be considered presumptuous, but when we can quench dukkha, when we can understand it properly and put an

end to it, at that time we are Buddha. Some will see this as an affront to the Buddha, but in truth that's what happens – the mind becomes Buddha, assumes a little of the character of a Buddha. The mind which can quench dukkha, can know the quenching of dukkha, that mind is Buddha. We can say the mind 'attains' Buddhahood, or the mind has Buddha 'nature,' because it comes to the same thing. The mind displays the characteristics peculiar to *Buddhas*, hence, we call that attaining, 'being Buddha.'

Make the effort, make the experience of dukkha and its quenching *sandiṭṭhiko*. All the *dhammas* connected with the quenching of dukkha have to be *sandiṭṭhiko* too, that is, they must be seen clearly by oneself, and they must also display the characteristic of being *akāliko* – timeless, of being beyond the realm of time; of being *ehi-passiko* – inviting, inviting one to come and see; of being *opanayiko* – leading one ever deeper into truth; and, finally, of being *paccattam veditabbo* – immediately experienceable by the wise.

There are the many things we need to know, some of these concerning the Dhamma, concerning the understanding of Buddhism that we've looked at in this first chapter of the *Little Dhamma Book*.



DISADHAMMA

THE MEANINGS OF THE SIX DISAS

A lecture given to temporary ordained monks on 10 October 2513 (1970)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya

Translated from the Thai by Mongkol Dejnakintra
Edited by BIA volunteers

Six special Dhamma lectures were given to temporary ordained monks by Ajahn Buddhādāsa during the rains retreat of 1970. Subsequently, they were published together as Disadhamma : Mankind's Pathway Dhamma. What follows is the second lecture of the series.



FOREWORD FROM THE FIRST THAI EDITION

This 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 will 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 needs 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 with what he presented on the *disas* for the monks to think about. 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 will 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

THE MEANINGS OF THE SIX DISAS

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* (directions, directions to be followed) in an ethical sense. Suppose that the position we are standing at is the centre 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. Thus, 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. For example, we will try to find out all about the philosophy of the words 'parents,' 'children,' and 'wife.' 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, reproducing and creating 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, from 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 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, after 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 can see how contrary they are. This real-life story took place in Bangkok. It should be frequently told but, to prevent

irritation, the names of those involved should not be mentioned.

The story goes well with the previously mentioned 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. A materialistic view like this can exist in many more forms.

A second viewpoint, which is more elevated, is that socially or anthropologically – the exact term to be used I am not so sure – parents are those who take responsibility for their offspring. Socially, children are under parental care. Parents have to be responsible for their children, dutifully taking 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 very good children.

In the 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 *arahants* (perfected ones). These ideas are higher than what is socially accepted in general. The ultimate meaning is that parents are life givers, that our lives are given by our parents, that 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 described 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. People consider it as an object more beneficial than its face value. Idealistically, it represents the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. 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 arahants of the family, if you consider them from the Buddhist ideal.

Remember that parents are sources of merit for their children. The word *arahant* is intended to be used in this meaning. Children can get merit from their parents by treating their parents respectfully and gratefully. This means that parents are bases for receiving 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 arahants 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, that 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 be in front you.

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 Pāli scripture,¹ 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 the results from reproduction, just like the offspring of animals and plants. They are just this, 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 Pāli word *putta* or the Sanskrit word *putra*. These two Indian words, which have been in use since ancient times, give

¹ See Sigālovāda (Siṅgāla) Sutta (DN 31).

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 receiving what they want most, one who would carry on their genes and dedicate merit 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-centred 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 will preserve their pedigree. Now the situation seems to have worsened. Children have become merchandise. 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 a social perception like this is rather morally low.

From the third viewpoint, which is an idealistically spiritual one, children are more than those who lift their parents from hell. They are supposed to continue the 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 a person would like to have a child in the idealistic sense, that person should not think low morally but should instead 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 instead think like this so that you will not be stressed but will be happy and make progress.

Thinking it over, you will see that materialistically, a child is the result from the 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, for showing off, or for having a status symbol. A man works terribly hard to complete his studies just to find a wife who is rich, beautiful, or whatever quality it may be, for the purpose of showing off. In this way, a woman becomes a toy-like object or something exploited by a man. This is not idealistic. It follows a common perception influenced by the defilements and causes women to get obsessed with bodily beautification, thinking of nothing more than that. The wives 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 the progress of the family, then the situation is good.

In a more profound sense, being spiritually idealistic and freed from the control of the defilements, husband and wife are companions on the journey toward Nibbāna. We have much to say about this, but in 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 includes 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 matters 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 poorly, you are not tired of it and still are affected by it. Therefore, a good husband and wife have to help each other so that both are spiritually illuminated, having no delusion here in this world. A wife should be a good companion for her husband toward Nibbāna, and 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 with whom he will have bodily enjoyment with, this should be temporary. They should know the full meaning of natural evolution, that humanity must go to Nibbāna as their 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 a husband and wife are companions who go toward Nibbāna together instead of getting stuck here in this world. This is how you should look at it, 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 the 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 the 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 for 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 in the countryside alike are those who give basic education to students and who, most importantly, 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 of their parents or of the government, which is supported by their parents' tax money, thereby indirectly being the students' teaching employees. So they do not pay respect to teachers as their venerable persons. Long ago, 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 make them 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. This is the meaning of the right *disa*.

The left *disa* is relatives and friends. Directly, ‘relatives’ means people who are in the same family blood line and indirectly, means people who are related Dhammically, namely, those who help one another in Dhammic matters or those who share the same ideology. The key meaning of relatives is helping one another. A blood relative who does not help others in the same family cannot be Dhammically counted as one. People who are not blood-related but are helpful and acquainted with one another become more meaningful relatives.

In the Pāli language, the word for ‘relative’ is *ñāti*, 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, friends do not have a materialistic meaning, but they do 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 a world full of work and duty, which weighs 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 will 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. This is the ideal of friends. But friends who drink liquor together or go to a brothel together are devilish 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 *samaṇa-brāhmaṇa* (the monastics). Some of you may not have heard of the Pāli word *samaṇa-brāhmaṇa*, so I shall give its short definition for you to easily memorize. 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 person called a *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 *samaṇa-brāhmaṇa*. 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, as do some other groups of monastics. They all do the same work of raising people's spiritual level or of helping to solve problems on that level. *Brāhmaṇas*, who are also householders, cannot go so far up the spiritual ladder. Maybe this is because they held onto a misconception from ancient times. 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 sacrifices, 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 *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas* 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 food and other things from people without doing any real work in return, thereby exploiting others. There is a sutta, called *Kasi Sutta*,² in the Pāli 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

² *Kasibhāradvāja Sutta* (Sn 1:4).

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, *hiri-ottappa* (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 just 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 *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas* 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 *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas* just for paying homage to and for performing rites. They are not interested in following Dhammic principles, but turn a deaf ear when told to do so. More people in the world are becoming like this, and some *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas* have reduced their role to just accepting respect and performing rites.

In an idealistically spiritual sense, *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas* are supposed to be spiritual leaders who help raise people's spiritual level to the highest level, so they are placed overhead in the upward *disa*. We have to reach such a spiritual height like this, which all human beings should strive to achieve, and 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 do not use them anymore because of their ignorance. However, what is meant by those 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 the 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 many other kinds of power that can be used, such as money power and intellectual power. 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 their 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 on 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 the use and exploitation at their bosses’ disposal. This shows a 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 become servants. Socially and generally, people have servants for serving them, enhancing their status, seeking of benefits, or in other words, taking advantage of others. An intelligent person knows what to do and when to do it to get things done. He knows what product can result from applying intelligence, when this will happen, and what individual or what group of persons should contribute labor. Servants, laborers, and slaves fall 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 other 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 merit. To be meritorious, we have to help poor people and those who cannot help themselves. Without these people, nobody can make merit, so the deprived, the disabled, and the helpless are

themselves sources of merit. Even the blind and other handicapped people are in this category. When others come to you to be accepted and to help you as your servants, you should consider that they come to give you a chance to make merit. So don't oppress them or take advantage of them. Consider even your employees and your subordinates like this so as to follow the spiritual ideal.

We can make merit on a low level by being generous and showing loving-kindness. Merit on a higher level is for us to use to destroy our selfishness and control defilements. Servants are unavoidably subject to our emotions – 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 consider servants as 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 actions generally not tolerated by anyone.

If we are determined not to succumb to a 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 lesson, for normally their masters are not tolerant of them. Their masters have to train themselves to be tolerant and unselfish toward their servants, starting from helping them, looking after them, and taking care of them, to loving them as their 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 be 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, be stopped because the handicapped and the helpless are always present in the world. We have to help them, and when we take 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 merit. 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 instances, 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 merit and practice Dhamma together. The servants were happy. They did not want to be freed, for they were not capable of supporting themselves on their own.

In brief, whoever comes to stay as your subjects are to be seen as being in the downward disa. You have to consider them like this, not as ones to oppress, take advantage of, or treated in any other similar way – 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 Siṅgāla³] 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 samaṇa-brāhmaṇas 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 provide a means of going toward Nibbāna. If we venerate them by treating them rightly, we could reach Nibbāna.

Today I have not talked 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 *arahants* at home.

The low-level meaning of the word 'children' is that they are the results from reproduction. A higher-level meaning of this word is that which pleases the parents by continuing their lineage. Its ultimate meaning is heirs

³ See Siṅgālovāda (Siṅgāla) Sutta (DN 31).

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 refers to 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 the study and understanding of 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 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 increasing defilements. They are supposed to help one another in mankind's duty. The ultimate meaning is that they continually accompany one another until they reach Nibbāna.

Samaṇa-brāhmaṇas are not beggars who consume people's food for free or take advantage of others, nor are they social parasites as some would 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 individuals 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, that all beings are divided into castes and classes, which cannot be eliminated. Don't be so arrogant as to suggest the 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 special class and makes them live differently from others. If one tries to make all people live at 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 the realization that they too have kamma, and then help them

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 pay homage to them.

These are the meanings of 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. Anyway, they are unavoidable; you have to treat them rightly, of course. If you monks are afraid, don't return to laity, but 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.



AGRIDHAMMA

THE DUTY OF PROFESSIONAL AGRICULTURISTS

A lecture given to agricultural teachers and officials
on 25 March 2534 (1991) at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya

Translated from the Thai by Lindsay Falvey



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND COMMENT

This booklet is the product of many persons who contributed time, criticism, ideas and motivation, sometimes unwittingly, towards its completion. It had its origins in research about the Buddhist underpinnings of self-sufficient agriculture in Thailand as a form of sustainable agriculture, which took Professor Dr Charan Chantalakhana, Ms. Pakapun Skulman, and me to Suan Mokkh. The existence of audio tapes in the Thai language of Buddhādāsa's own teachings stimulated the idea to render this lecture into both written Thai and English for a wider audience, particularly agriculturists and those studying the field. Mr. Lerchat Boonek, a lecturer from Kasetsart University completing his doctorate at the University of Melbourne, kindly agreed to undertake the Thai transcription from the variably distinct tape. His sister, Miss Noppagoa Boonek in Bangkok, similarly gave of her time and expertise in typing the Thai manuscript. Its translation into English led to calls for assistance to the respected monks Ajahn Santikaro and Ajahn Kalyano who responded helpfully and quickly. Once the document was near completion, the Dhammadana Foundation at Suan Mokkh clarified indistinct parts of the Thai text and agreed to publish it, and kindly handled all arrangements including printing at their expense. The product has been an act of mutual assistance.

The Thai text is the most precise rendition of Than Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's words that is possible from the tape. It contains his earthy expressions and engaging and intelligent use of language in a manner that does not fully flow into the English version. Translation of puns, personal idioms, and circuitous incremental descriptions that form part of the masterful lecturer in the Thai language, must lose much of the original impact. In an attempt to retain the flavour of an outdoor lecture, with dogs and chicken wandering among the gathering, the English text retains some colourful and down to earth expressions that have some equivalence in Thai and English. Expressions or words specific to the Thai text that have been rendered literally are presented in parentheses in sentences that attempt to faithfully render their intent. Endnotes appended to the English attempt to clarify terms or concepts indicated by the relevant superscript in the text.

The lecture may be best approached as significant religious teaching using agriculture as an example, rather than as a discussion on agriculture for religious persons. Nevertheless, the key role of agriculture as a means of illustrating such traits as acquisitiveness and separation from the natural environment form part of the extensive Buddhist learning with which Buddhādāsa had been imbued by a lifetime of study and spiritual practice. One hopes that at least part of this genius shows through these pages.

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AGRIDHAMMA

THE DUTY OF PROFESSIONAL AGRICULTURISTS

Good persons who serve as teachers and officials concerned with agriculture, I am so pleased that you have come here to Suan Mokkh seeking knowledge of Dhammaⁱ to incorporate into your continued personal development and professional responsibilities.

Let me introduce two ways in which this thing called ‘Dhamma’ is so useful as to be essential to life. The first is Dhamma fulfilling the potential of being human; regardless of our individual characteristics, professional and other responsibilities, and the various other differences between us, we all require a correct understanding and moral base if we are to use this life properly. The second way in which Dhamma is essential to everyone is in assisting the quality of our actions in our work and other responsibilities in life while incidentally making them enjoyable, satisfying and valuable. At the very least, these two aspects of Dhamma provide the essential foundations to make you a moral person who in turn is best able to discharge responsibilities effectively.

On the other hand, if Dhamma is absent, one’s life will be painful, as if it is biting its owner – ‘a life that bites its owner’ is worse than a dog’s, for who has ever seen a dog bite its owner!ⁱⁱ This type of life is a living hell, dominated by constant bites, from such feelings as hurt, love turning sour, anger, hatred, fear, concern for the future, yearning for the past, being hurt by the past,

excitement, envy, worry, and jealousy. Such lives that have lost their way are so intolerable, bitten by their owners to such an extent, that suicide is frequently considered as a means of escape, even among the wealthy. All this occurs because the essential foundations of life have not been laid correctly. Where life turns and bites you there is no calm or peace, joy or happiness, and it is most difficult to be useful to yourself or to others.

In terms of being useful, the Buddhaⁱⁱⁱ spoke of three types of utility, which you should remember well and apply in your lives:

1. being of use to yourself
2. being of use to others
3. being of use to all things in the world – incorporating the first two types within an understanding that everything in the world is mutually supportive.

It is our responsibility to observe these three types of usefulness in our lives. If we do not, an underlying lack of peace will prejudice all our acts, even those aimed at benefiting ourselves. The ups and downs of life, experienced as sometimes laughing, sometimes crying, sometimes seemingly crazy, are the result of life lived incorrectly, not in accord with real nature.

Your work and other responsibilities must be consistent with Dhamma. Whatever your role, be it rice farmer, horticulturist, merchant, government official, artisan, committee member, or beggar,^{iv} your responsibility is to do the best to your highest personal satisfaction. If conducted with sufficient Dhamma, your work will be enjoyable and easy; if you sweat profusely it will be as blessed holy water, not the hot water of the restless and ignorant. This enjoyable, cool and holy sweat of satisfaction arises from the correct performance of your duty, no matter how hard the task.

Now, consider this question carefully. Is it necessary to conduct your duty, any duty, to the extent that it is foremost in your life? You might say that ‘it depends on capabilities and weaknesses of others involved – not just me,’ and make excuses that ‘I have made all the inputs I had to and should not be responsible for the outcome’ – ‘that I was not put on this earth for this purpose!’ – ‘that I didn’t even ask to be born in the first place!’ – ‘and anyway, why am I being forced to do this, do that?’ Such modern personal democracy! So, if you think like this, just try not doing your duty to your utmost – it surely will be a ‘life that bites’ back severely.

You should worship your work, your duty, as the highest action, because it is salvific in various ways depending your outlook. One way to view it is as the ancients who believed, as a principle derived from Buddhism, that life was borrowed from nature.^v Your life is not your own property as ignorant persons think today. Our ancestors saw it as a combination of soil, water, fire, wind, air, and spirits and this encouraged them to care for and develop^{vi} themselves spiritually so that they could return their borrowed lives to their owner in the best condition when the time came.

To consider any aspect of your life as your own and to do as you will is to rob, to embezzle, and such action will surely come back to bite you. Treating this borrowed life as if you have created it yourself is to live a lie and leads to lustful desires replacing moral actions. Just compare the difference yourself, between considering life as pleasing yourself, or as an entrusted, unconditional, interest- and depreciation-free loan from nature to develop as skilfully as you can. Nature’s loan of life allows you complete freedom to choose – developing your life for your own benefit will cause it to bite you. The alternative is to develop your life morally to your highest satisfaction, caring for it as a borrowed good to return to its owner on demand. Nowadays there are few persons older than 100 years, so we might say that 100 years is the duration of the loan. To return it, metaphorically, as a ‘stinking, rotten dirty mess like a corpse in a coffin that even ghosts wouldn’t accept’ is not the correct way to repay the loan. Yet this is what life developed only for self-satisfaction is like; it contains no inner quietness or calm, it is ruled by fear, subject to oppression, and plagued by unsavoury problems that are eventually so overwhelming that they cause untimely death.

How can we develop or improve ourselves spiritually when we act in total opposition to nature, destroying forests, watercourses and waterholes, and roads and canals built by our forefathers? In fact, today we don’t tend to develop anything personally because we have allocated that role to the government, or have manufactured other reasons for our lazy inaction. We don’t personally care about maintaining natural beauty and its integrity; nor do we seek to co-exist with nature in the manner of our grandparents. However the fact is, there is no need to bother the government for such community matters. For example, the traditional annual processions of Buddha images along roads and canals once prompted communities to say ‘we will be proceeding along the roads and canals with the respected image, we should extend, repair, beautify and maintenance them out of respect for the teachings

and ceremony.’ In this way infrastructure was developed and preserved without any recourse to government.

Nevertheless, today we prefer to rely on government out of selfishness and laziness. We seek advantage over competing persons and envy those who attract assistance before us rather than develop local facilities ourselves, and in so doing we foster ingratitude, waste, dishonesty, and crime to such an extent that it is now almost impossible to find a safe place. Many decades ago, I went to Bangkok and felt that it was safe everywhere, anytime of the day or night; but in recent times it has deteriorated to the extent that one is constantly aware of crime. In addition to such unskilful development, we further damage ourselves through vices and the allurements that lead to them in such forms as amusement halls, excessive alcohol consumption, and undesirable nightlife. One of the resulting problems is drug addiction, which may now be seen worldwide – it is much more than a national or personal problem. Such problems make modern society’s pride in its progress laughable when one considers that primitive man had no such social problems.

Similarly, while disease is an ever-present human phenomenon, we are now globally subject to diseases that humans should not be, and from which even ‘dogs do not suffer.’^{vii} You will have all heard of the global efforts to control such diseases. All these are products of our misguided development, which makes us the laughingstock of ‘ghosts, monkeys, and primitive man.’ This is all ignorant development.

Today’s education is highly developed for health, politics, economics, and technology. Computers appear to be everywhere in the world. So, why is the world not at peace? Why does it have rising and intractable problems associated with crime? The answer is clear – because each development has been oriented to our greed or lust for a selfish benefit. By not developing in a manner that suppresses greed, we have increased selfishness in a self-feeding cycle where development is for selfish ends – because it is devoid of Dhamma. It only has cleverness, cleverness that allows travel to the moon and stars as if strolling in the backyard. Such cleverness produces no peace or happiness because it lacks Dhamma and because the education oriented to such cleverness is mad, and this madness is global yet Thailand, a small country, follows the behind of the foolish larger countries. Education produces such cleverness that graduates do not know how to use it except in seeking selfish ends. And so everything is oriented to selfishness^{viii} – the poor, the rich, beggars, labourers, employers – all think of themselves first, even the election

of political representatives involves payments – all totally inconsistent with Dhamma. Selfishness pervades and everything crumbles; that is why it seems we can never have enough jails, police, or courts.

Try being unselfish. Just that one thing, not being selfish, eliminates all wrongdoing. We could then do without jails, police, courts, laws, and even religion. Please remember this, and if you don't agree you're free to reject it all! Without selfishness, we can do away with laws and religion, because the essence of religion is to teach unselfishness, so if there is no selfishness, what need is there for religion? However, today's society is selfish and no number of laws can ever be sufficient to control its effects; religion assists in maintaining order but is insufficient. So society has become riddled with wickedness and greed – just take a look!

From this perspective we can say that we have not developed or progressed correctly. Education teaches irresponsible cleverness, not Dhamma. In contrast, back in the early days, Dhamma was integral to education, as we can see in the basic and advanced education that was once conducted at the temples. In the past, young temple boys were trained in Dhamma, including not being too selfish. You may not know the detail of the life of temple boys – they had to serve the senior monks from preparation of the two meals of the day to cleaning duties, especially the accommodation, but also the various religious and administrative function rooms of the temple, rising before and retiring after their teachers. After five or ten years of disciplined and unselfish attention to their duties, as ordained monks they were allowed out of the temple and overall they remained unselfish, because they had learned and acted the Dhamma. Their academic knowledge was not great but they were unselfish, honest, expressed gratitude, and reciprocated kindness. And so life in the villages, cities, and all social gathering points was peaceful and happy.

As far as we know, today's separation of education from Dhamma, or if you like, religion, derives from the great universities such as Oxford and Cambridge. Before this, education was conducted through the respective religions and was based on self-control prohibiting greed. Later, schools progressed with society to the extent that they became independent of religion, and education changed. The gentlemanly products of the past who looked to the Dhamma, have now replaced by seeming gentle-men and -women who look only to themselves as a result of an education system separated from religion and freed of morality – students were once refined in the Dhamma, now they

are refined in selfishness. The system reveres cleverness, which in the absence of moral context, is applied to selfish ends rather than to the benefit of the community, religion, the world, and society. This selfishness is now so deep that it would be difficult to control or solve, and this product of separating education from religion is what we call ‘secularisation’ – a devilish cleverness used to gain personal advantage over others. I call this type of education wrong, a crazy cleverness, the opposite of applying knowledge to the benefit of others.

The world today is as it is because it does not have Dhamma. I have spoken this way in order to have you understand that Dhamma is essential to being completely human. It is necessary for the best performance of your work and other duties, and for the whole global society to have peace and happiness. It can redefine the shape of the world, in contrast to its current shaping by selfish desires. This crazy, ignorant selfishness has created a world defined by money. Some people misunderstand and think that if they do not look out for themselves, then no one else will. Please don’t think this way, it is wrong! Selfishness produces no good at all, it seeks only its own reward; we can roll all of the words related to lust and desire into this one word, selfishness.

With the wisdom of insight, no action related to ourselves is selfish, but may rather be termed ‘self-control,’ ‘self-respect’ or ‘self-development.’ Don’t worry that being unselfish means that you will not accomplish much, in fact when you will act with the correct feeling of responsibility and respect for yourself, you accomplish more while at the same time developing to your highest potential. This life is but a fixed term loan from nature, so our time should be used wisely not frittered away – to do otherwise would be wasting the privilege of having been born.

So how should we develop our life? From ancient times, there has been a style of instruction based on listening to stories about the life of the Buddha.^{ix} One such story relates to successful development of life. It concerns a self-satisfied successful man who had followed the social rules of morality and retired from his profitable business, with honour, power, and general good fortune. Having passed responsibility to his children so that he could relax, ‘dress in white clothes, wear white shoes, and carry a white umbrella’ while leisurely strolling in the forest, he was the very epitome of a successful man of his day. The story continues that, one day he met the Buddha who had also entered the forest, and boasting to the Buddha of his success, looking down on him – as if he was a beggar for he was dressed in simple monks’ rags – as one who had not conducted his life successfully. The Buddha showed no anger

or hatred, but simply asked ‘when the children of such a successful merchant die, how would he feel?’ Eventually the boaster replied that he would weep with unhappiness. The Buddha then replied that such a life is still subject to suffering and has not been successfully developed.^x

There is no need for problems to occur, for life to retain worries such as those of the retired merchant who didn’t fully understand himself. The story continues – the retired merchant realising that he had not developed his life correctly, asked the Buddha what to do. The Buddha taught the Dhamma to him at a higher level than the normal moral precepts, noting that developing life in accordance with the basic principles of Dhamma is only the beginning. He then explained how living in accord with the Dhamma banishes worries, frustrations, anxiety and all such concerns that may be grouped as suffering. He explained the causes and relationship of death and separation from Dhamma in terms transcending the ordinary world until the retired merchant saw the truth that his life had been developed in ignorance, and with that knowledge, the retired merchant realised the real meaning of successful spiritual development of life, above and beyond any worldly sense.

To summarize, Dhamma first provides us with the basis for being a moral person and for developing our lives in the everyday world, and it then provides for a higher level of development beyond that world as well. This is the story of Dhamma that I would have you all understand. I personally know this Dhamma as the truth to my complete satisfaction. Use your time here to find the path of Dhamma so that you may apply it in the conduct of your life as you perform your professional and other duties to your fullest capability at all times, for your life is but a borrowed good.

Now I will talk about the meaning of Dhamma in the performance of professional duties. From our first school teachers through, we have been told that Dhamma is the teachings of the Buddha, but just think of the various different meanings that are given to ‘Dhamma.’ The real meaning of Dhamma in the original Indian Pāli language^{xi} according to the dictionary is ‘duty.’ Our Thai meaning of Dhamma as the teachings of the Buddha is limiting, because the Pāli meaning encompasses the teachings of all religions, from anywhere. If there are ten other alternative religions to Buddhism in the world, their teachings are all considered to be Dhamma – choose whichever you like, it is Dhamma.

No, Dhamma is duty, and duty is Dhamma; it is an escape or saving

mechanism that guides into moral thought, deeds and all facets of life from birth to death. It is like a system of behaviour, a systematic method for the execution of your duty that is completely appropriate for both body and spirit, as it provides a release from the cycle of death^{xii} and suffering throughout life to the benefit of ourselves and others. It especially benefits others, for no one lives alone in this world. Who, if the whole world was given to them, could abide living alone? It is unnatural. The Dhamma of life did not create the world for one person to live alone, but for large numbers of persons to live together, with large numbers of trees and animals. Living alone cannot save you from death or suffering; the release from these requires us to think about ourselves and others within the Dhamma as the essential duty. This is life at its highest level, where lust and desire are extinguished, where there is no thoughtless laughter, no crying, no birth, old age, pain or death;^{xiii} one no longer feels that suffering is an unavoidable part of life. Even, the world of money has its own limited dhamma, in its accepted truth that suffering is inevitable, but the true Dhamma requires us all to actively develop ourselves spiritually for the benefit of those trapped in such suffering.

Now I want to talk about the Dhamma for agriculturists. You are university students, teachers, professors, and government officials concerned with agriculture with diverse responsibilities and life experiences. Agriculturists' duties are important in terms of self-reliance and self-determination, and there is also an important association in the Sanskrit and Pāli languages from which the Thai word for agriculture is derived – it concerns the land and its produce. The historical progress to agriculture, which included such innovations as ploughing, is used by archaeologists as an indicator of the beginning of civilization and culture. Prior to this, humans were naked, lived in the trees or holes in the ground, yet they had few of what modern persons consider problems. They didn't cultivate plants and they didn't hoard, and they didn't have the problems we worry about today.

The advance of agriculture led to organization of work oriented to a productive agricultural output. This required management and coordination by a local leader of each agricultural community, whose role gradually expanded to that of lord of the land with command over all matters of the community. These roles were at those early times invested in that one person, but today in Thailand require thirteen or so ministries. The evolution of small cultured agro-city societies and increases in population eventually led to major cities and countries developing. The ability of one person to control all matters in a

larger society or a country was soon exceeded and required delegation through formal administrative structures. The utility of the approach was probably highest at its early stage when agriculture was the primary focus of a local ruler and the pivotal role of farmers was recognised.^{xiv}

This development of agriculture is an allegory for spiritual development. The land may be seen as the body developed into a rice field with its canals, which in turn represent the flow that calms the mind and leads to the bountiful harvest of nirvana.^{xv} Nirvana may also be seen in the act of working the rice field, what the Buddha called an undying^{xvi} rice field, with faith that there will be a bountiful harvest, with the perseverance of sustained growth-giving rains, and the wisdom of well-ploughed furrows that produce the undying harvest – each stage in its sequence. Nirvana in this sense is farming, and as farming is no small thing, neither is the spiritual abstraction in this analogy of nirvana and rice farming. Rice is not really produced in this way these days, because selfish production objectives have intruded, and these are necessarily lacking Dhamma. Failure to understand the essence of duty as Dhamma in rice production has removed the enjoyment of farming’s hard work. If we undertake our human duty properly, recalling that duty means Dhamma, then we will cultivate ourselves spiritually as our primary action.

The Dhamma in rice farming, with its dutiful ploughing in the hot sun behind a buffalo,^{xvii} is enjoyable and conducted with a felt smile. The early rice farmers knew such satisfaction because they felt their duty as their most important moral responsibility and action. The most important thing that we can do is our duty. We can call it ‘farming’ using the ordinary materials – natural resources – to produce the harvest, which when we commit our minds and spirits, is nirvana.

Nowadays we notice obstacles to the successful production of ordinary rice resulting from selfish desires. There is no love of the Dhamma, so there can be no love or committed execution of duty – as soon as the sweating starts, they say ‘it would be easier to steal’ – they seek a short cut to wealth out of selfishness. If it is the true rice produced with a pure heart, then there is delight when the sweating starts and the farming is fun and productive. Pure hearts don’t get drunk or use other drugs, they don’t seek out allurements that lead to ruin, and they don’t contract diseases from unskilful behaviour – ‘diseases that even dogs don’t contract.’ If farmers and you agricultural specialists understand that farming seen in this spiritual way has been humanity’s highest duty since

antiquity, this would be a great thing – your harvest would be a useful life, it would be a profitable harvest that may be considered timely development of this borrowed life from nature.

Today, the failure to apply Dhamma to professional and other duties is not due to its absence, but rather to an insufficient understanding resulting from the most cursory study of Dhamma. Farmers still revere the traditional holy water ceremonies, observed according to ritual but without commitment – I say, there is no holy water in that, go and work until your sweat becomes the real holy water, but they prefer the ceremonies and so there is no sweating because of selfishness, they want to put themselves to the least effort. They look to themselves rather than looking to and loving Dhamma. Those who love the Dhamma, don't fear sweating, in fact they fear nothing, they commit themselves to following the natural law – morality, rather than selfish ways. Selfishly looking to yourself can never coincide with looking to Dhamma, and precludes your looking to other persons. Looking to the Dhamma and therefore others gives satisfaction, even when sweat floods from you, for you see it as holy water that is the symbol of having executed your duty correctly. When you don't look to that sweat, you do not look to Dhamma but to yourself, preferring idle sensual pleasures, which is in fact looking to or lusting after your own desires.

These days, the whole world worships such idle sensual pleasures in the materialism that promotes existing and new desires and excesses, such as superfluous fashions in housing and decorative items – even to the extent that medicines are used recreationally and to excess. The engine of development within this system is greed, which is promoted to further the selfishness that fuels the engine. Such development has no orientation to the suppression or control of greed. Education does not serve to reduce greed; it only encourages cleverness which better equips persons to look to their own gain, making them just self-centred educated slaves to greed who respond to desires with more desires, causing all the problems that I have mentioned.

Let me emphasize that the highest Dhamma is that of unselfishness; if you pursue this highest Dhamma, you will see that the reality of selfishness is laziness, lying, cheating, taking advantage of others, envy, wastefulness, destruction of communal values, pollution, and the cause of car, fire, and other serious accidents such as reported in newspapers. Accidents arise from self-centred actions that lead to carelessness in matters that may not seem to benefit the self; this can extend to wrongful actions, such as in cases where a

person who should not be driving becomes a danger to himself and others. Thus, ego-centricity causes accidents. Such self-absorption extends to destruction of public facilities, taking ‘short cuts to riches,’ resulting in robbery, cheating, and standover tactics with everything serving a lust for personal gain and ego; the same causes are active in serious sexual and other crimes, drug addiction, and ‘diseases that even the dogs don’t contract.’

No matter how many jails are built in such circumstances, it is never enough – alternative means of curbing excessive behavioural cannot replace jails and in any case, no matter how many devices are created, it will never be enough. Self-centredness continually increases itself. There are not enough psychiatric hospitals either, because selfishness in the form of ego crises produce madness as people lose their way, even to the extent that some kill their parents, spouses, children, and themselves as well. When the ‘final curtain falls’ like this, it is madness, and if we look at all the patients in psychiatric hospitals, the root cause of their various complaints is excessive selfishness. This leads people to lose their way to the extent that they either go crazy or die.

Let’s help each other. Whether we are rice farmers, horticulturists, or whatever, don’t sacrifice yourself to selfishness – it is the evil I have described. We should commit ourselves completely to correct actions by looking to the Dhamma and to others. We should perform our duties usefully for others, not for ourselves alone or in a manner that exploits others. Without selfishness, there would be no murders, stealing of other’s wealth, lying, cheating, drunkenness, or effects from evil deeds. However, the current pervasive wrong and unskilful behaviour leads to criminal courts being overloaded. If anyone can find any criminal act unrelated to selfishness, I would be willing give you your choice of a prize – I am sure it would be donated if I asked for it! Because all evil is sourced to selfishness.

If there was no selfishness, evil acts and criminal cases would disappear. If the populace, elected representatives, the government, civil servants, monks – everyone – ceased to act selfishly, their would be no need for law, religion, or government oversight because a populace not centred on self would not require overseeing; there would be nothing to oversee. Thousands of years ago, Lao-Tse said this when he described the best form of government as a system that requires no governing, where all persons behave morally, look to their work as their duty, and where selfish desires are subordinated to work and helping others. When such persons meet someone, they ask straight away – ‘how can I help?’ – not thinking ‘how can I steal from this person?’ or ‘what advantage

over them can I gain?', or envying the other party.

Unselfish behaviour does not require laws or religion, because the unreality of self is, in fact, the highest teaching of religion itself. So please, commit yourselves to looking to the Dhamma and fellow humans and beings, and then your various types of work will progress, not only in agricultural fields. The highest teaching of the Dhamma is therefore to not be self-centred. If you have come here seeking the Dhamma, you must study the essence of such unselfishness – read books, listen to tapes, look at the instructional pictures^{xviii} to gain the understanding of non-self as Dhamma.

Look to the Dhamma, look to the very detail of correct behaviour, and whenever you think of yourself with Dhamma, raise your hands in a *wai*^{xix} to yourself immediately, but if you think of yourself without any trace of Dhamma and cannot face yourself, do not *wai* for there is nothing there. When you think of yourself, look at the morality of your body, speech and mind, then you can *wai* yourself – that is Dhamma. The essence and totality of Dhamma may be summarized as unselfishness in the sense that the self does not exist,^{xx} so study it and look to Dhamma. Behave just as if you are on loan from nature – don't think in terms of a self existing, of things being of one's self. Beware the ever-demanding ego! We are a loan from nature to develop spiritually to know the experience of nirvana – this is what is called Dhamma.

It is Dhamma that you have come in search of means of integrating these truths into your duties, work and life to make your lives worth living, your work worthwhile, yourself a moral person, and to work to the benefit of humanity. Dhamma is duty to act morally, which leads only to correct outcomes, including release from all the sufferings of worldly life, both physical and mental for yourself and others. May all of you know and understand the Dhamma, receive Dhamma, act with and for Dhamma, and find beauty in the complete success of your professional duties and your whole life. May your life not 'bite its owner' but proper with Dhamma, may it be happy, calm, and cool – and thus nirvana, as you develop yourself while helping others on their paths and living within the understanding of the interdependence of all things.

Let me finish here.



NOTES

- i 'Dhamma', being the Pali language form of the more common Sanskrit 'Dharma', refers to the essential truth of life, which is able to be known through insight. However, the word is variously used, as explained in a Thai example in the text of the lecture, and its definition is often limited to the teachings of the Buddha. The original meaning appears to be 'to hold' and relates to holding the essential truth or way, and need not be limited to the Buddhist or Hindu religions. Written without a first capital, dhamma is also sometimes used to mean the delusions that pass as 'truth' within worldly situations.
- ii One can imagine the dogs wandering unhampered through the gathered audience - Buddhadasa Bhikkhu commonly used expression such as 'a life which bites itself' to describe the self-inflicted suffering common to worldly persons, and emphasised his point by comparing this to a dog's life - a comparison with greater impact in the Thai language in which relating humans to dogs may, in other cases, be considered insulting.
- iii In the Theravada Buddhist tradition common through Burma, Cambodia, Lao-PDR, Sri Lanka, and of course, Thailand, such references are to the earliest texts, the Tipitaka, which were written at the first meeting of Buddhist elders centuries after the death of the historical Buddha (Sakyamuni Gotama) in order to promote common understanding of the insights and teachings of the Buddha. Their detail and length is a testimony to the discipline of the oral tradition of the era.
- iv Cultural attitudes to beggars may confuse the intent of the teaching. It is not meant to be a comment of 'lifestyle choices' as begging may sometimes be represented in some Western cultures; rather it is one in a list of sample situations in which persons find themselves for whatever reason, and assumes the Buddhist teaching of contentment with one's situation, provided it is not immoral in terms of Dhamma, as the context in which one practices the Dhamma.
- v The Thai word 'Thammachat' is usually translated as nature, although this fails to capture its full meaning and, in particular, the meanings drawn out by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Many of his writings and lectures use 'Thammachat' to express a concept of Dhamma (Thamma) as natural law and moral actions towards all beings and 'chat' (birth, life incarnation, nationality [modern]), to provide a series of meanings that range from the natural environment to the behaviour of an enlightened being. In this context, the analogy of life being borrowed from nature may be seen to be self evident if one accepts the origin of the word Thammachat as relating to Dhamma and life incarnation.
- vi 'Develop' or 'development' has a deeper meaning than these English words. Elsewhere Buddhadasa has explained that the Pali word used in Thai language as 'phatana' to translate the English word 'development' is a recent innovation in the social and economic context, and that its original usage related to spiritual progress or development. This provided the basis of his comparisons of, and puns on, economic and spiritual development in this lecture.

- vii This may sound euphemistically diplomatic in English as a means of not mentioning specific diseases, but the reference to dogs in the Thai in fact emphasises baseness of human society.
- viii 'Selfishness' or 'looking to oneself', or 'ego-centricity', or 'self-centredness' are used throughout the lecture to describe an attitude or orientation of individuals that is so pervasive as to have influenced the structure of society to serve selfish ends, thereby redefining selfishness into various socially accepted guises, which in turn obscures understanding of the Dhamma. Buddhadasa's emphasis seems to be that the intention of an act determines its effects, and a general intention to look after oneself above others, referred to here as self-centredness, leads to effects unforeseen in the narrow-minded actions of the selfish. Refer also to note xx.
- ix Such stories, some apocryphal, others with probable historical origins, are contained in the Jataka and other texts of the Tipitaka, or sometimes are later inventions. They have been used as a means of relating moral behaviour and explaining the operation of natural law including karma, in everyday terms.
- x Refer to note vi.
- xi The common language of the time of Buddha in northern India and the language in which the original texts, the Tipitaka ('Three Baskets' of texts) were recorded.
- xii 'Death' may be understood as referring to the sorrow of loss of attachments ranging from ideas to possessions of one's self (refer to note xx). This relates to the central Buddhist insight of Dependent Origination, which is the cycle of 'birth' through consciousness, attachment, disappointment and 're-birth' common to everyday existence. In this context, 'death' is not necessarily meant to refer to the end of a biological life.
- xiii The concepts of birth and death, for example, may be interpreted according to other Buddhist teachings to mean the arising and decline of new and illusory ideas and material objects of desire in the ordinary mind that is ignorant of the Dhamma. See also note xii.
- xiv This historical view is close to the current knowledge of the region that became Thailand, which emerged from hunter-gatherers to agriculture with migrating rice growers who established small communities united through shared irrigation schemes in river valleys with the water-controller being allocated the most important and powerful role. Codified responsibilities of the controller were retained as communities merged and more powerful local leaders arose, and this trend continued until local kings emerged, still retaining names, positions and responsibilities related to agriculture. Today, vestiges remain in the public ritual roles expected of the King. (Refer to the book 'Thai Agriculture: Golden Cradle of Millennia', Kasetsart University, Bangkok - 2000; 495 pages).
- xv 'Nirvana' ('Nipphan' in Thai and Pali) refers to a state of absolute calm or enlightenment, and seems to have literally meant 'to cool down', possibly by wind blowing on a hot object. It is the objective of spiritual development, possibly the original intended meaning of being in the Kingdom of God or Heaven in Christian references.

- xvi 'Undying' might also be rendered as eternal or immortal, although the Christian uses of these terms can lead to confusion. The intent here seems to be to relate actions to the undying or omnipresent true nature of existence, which is the Dhamma.
- xvii Agricultural analogies all refer to wet rice cultivation, which is a critical component of the food, culture and history of the region. Refer also to note xiv.
- xviii The complex at Suan Mokkh has a large collection of tapes of lectures by Buddhadasa, a bookshop with a range of his and other Buddhist books, and a gallery of thought-proving murals and pictures used for instructional purposes.
- xix 'Wai' is a cultural gesture of respect, performed by placing one's hands palm to palm against the upper chest and raising them toward one's head.
- xx The teaching that the self does not exist is perhaps the most difficult, for a culturally Western reader, of the concepts related in this lecture. It derives from the insight of spiritually advanced persons, commonly referred to as mystics in the West, that the mental construct which arose to aid communication in the material world is usually erroneously and subconsciously extrapolated to assume that each person, particularly while alive, is a separate and continuing self. Various intellectual arguments against this illusion are propounded in Buddhism, and the essential realisation of this truth beyond intellectualisation through experience is the objective of meditative practices.



BUDDHADĀSA ON ECONOMICS

AN INTERVIEW WITH BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU

Interviewed by Leonardo Chapela in January 2534 (1991)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya

Translated from the Thai by Ajahn Santikaro

The translator participated in the discussion quite a bit, sometimes amplifying on Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's statements, sometimes adding his own observations. These have been allowed to stand for they were an integral part of the discussion and for the most part repeated ideas Ajahn Buddhadāsa has expressed elsewhere (in his writings, talks, and personal comments). Longer comments by the translator are attributed directly; shorter comments are in {brackets}.



GLOSSARY

anattā, not-self, not-soul. *Anattā* is an inherent characteristic of everything, there is nothing which is truly 'self.' Even Nibbāna – as well as 'God,' Eternity, the Absolute (or whatever it is called in different systems) – is not-self.

dukkha, dissatisfaction, pain, misery. In Buddhism, the essence of *dukkha* is attachment to things as being 'me' and 'mine.'

hen kae tua [Thai], selfishness, egoism; lit. 'to see regarding oneself,' to view things in terms of oneself. The term is generally used in the sense of caring only for oneself while disregarding the needs and feelings of others.

kilesa, defilement: greed, hatred, and delusion, and other related reactive thought-emotions.

lokiya, of the world, bound to the world.

lokuttara, above and beyond the world, unattached to the world.

Nibbāna, coolness, the quenching of *dukkha*, the end of lust, hatred, and delusion.

satipaṇṇā, mindful wisdom, spiritual intelligence, the correct understanding of life that allows one to do what is needed without concocting *dukkha*.

seṭṭho, (adj.) best, excellent, pre-eminent.

seṭṭhī, (mas. noun) wealthy merchant, treasurer, cashier, millionaire, the foreman of a guild.

seṭṭhatā, (fern, noun) superiority, eminence, excellence.

seṭṭhakica, (from *kicca*, duty, obligation, service) applied economics, business.

seṭṭhasastra, (from *sastra*, knowledge, science) theoretical economics.

vaḍḍhanam, (n.) increase, enlargement, growth.

vaḍḍhati, (v.) to grow, increase, multiply; to prosper.

BUDDHADĀSA ON ECONOMICS

DAY ONE

Leonrdo Chapela [introducing himself]: Thank you for your time and the opportunity to interview you. I would like to include this interview with an article I wrote, ‘The Defilements of Western Culture.’ It is an essay towards a political economy of Buddhism.

Ajahn Buddhādāsa: And don’t the defilements (*kilesa*) of the West (*farang*) come down to just selfishness?¹ No matter what defilement, of whoever, wherever, we must accept that they all come from selfishness – every defilement.

◇◇◇◇

LC: Various social scientists in the West claim that religion has an influence on morality which, in turn, influences economic behavior. Sometimes the influence is great and other times small. For example, in Europe, after the Protestant Reformation, Protestant beliefs joined certain economic ideas and promoted modern capitalism. The question is: What influence has Buddhism had on human behavior and economics? Have you seen any interesting indications that Buddhism has influenced human social and economic behavior?²

¹ The word ‘selfishness’ (in Thai, literally, ‘seeing regarding oneself,’ to care about oneself, to think in terms of oneself) appears throughout this interview and any of Tan Ajahn’s discussions of morality (*sīladhamma*). It should not be confused with ‘enlightened self-interest’ or ‘duty.’ Tan Ajahn will develop this distinction later in the interview.

² As the written questions were quite long, they were translated in summary form.

AjB: The problem is that the majority of human beings in this world, even in the so-called Buddhist countries, have not actually received Buddhism and so it is difficult to say much to your question. The current issue is how to make Buddhism available to people, so that is what we're thinking about. When we speak about Buddhist economics, the problem is how to help people to get the most valuable thing in life. This is our job now, which is a spiritual economics rather than a material economics.

LC: Is the thing which has the highest value Nibbāna?

AjB: There should be two objectives in Buddhist economics, one worldly and one spiritual. The spiritual objective or final goal is Nibbāna.³ When speaking of material economics, the objective is right here, namely, peace in this world, a kind of peace which we can use in a worldly way. The highest good in this world and the highest good which is above the world must be distinguished in this way. Material economics and spiritual economics have different objectives.

Part of the difficulty is our vocabulary. I'm not even certain what the word 'economics' means, but *seṭṭhakica* (economy as activity), *seṭṭhasastra* (economics as 'science'), and *seṭṭha* mean 'utmost excellence.' The Thai words (from Pāli and Sanskrit)⁴ mean 'utmost excellence,' but I don't know what the English term 'economics' means.

Santikaro: *Seṭṭha* is a Pāli word which means 'most excellent.' Here, of course, many modern Thais use the word *seṭṭha-kica* for economics, mainly in the modern Western sense, because this term was coined by Thai academics who had gone to study in the West and then returned with Western ideas. If you go back to the Pāli, the meaning of *seṭṭha* is 'excellence.' In modern Thai, a millionaire is called *seṭṭhī*, but the Pāli term refers to inner or spiritual excellence more than material wealth. The latter is, at most, a reflection of the inner excellence.

What are the linguistic roots of 'economics'?

³ The end of all greed, hatred, and delusion, of all concepts of self and egoism, thus, of all suffering (*dukkha*).

⁴ In modern Thai, the spelling of these terms is derived from Sanskrit but they are pronounced pretty much as if spelled according to the Pāli. Here we use the more simple Pāli spelling.

LC: It's a Greek word: *oikos* and *nomos*. *Oikos* means 'house' and *nomos* means 'administration.' So economics means 'the administration of the house.'

AJB: To say that economics is the 'administration of the home,' or even 'administration of the world (*loka*),' is not adequate. Economics should be extended to *lokuttara* (above and beyond the world, supramundane), that is, the 'administration of the transcendent.' There are two distinct levels: {the administration of the mundane (worldly) home and the administration of the supramundane (spiritual) home.}

The tools we use for success in spiritual economics can be applied to material economics. The highest tools can also be used on an ordinary level. Amusingly, it's the same principle for both: for the highest spiritual economics we must use the utmost scale of unselfishness, that is, transcendence of self, while ordinary unselfishness is for success in worldly economics.

SK: As long as our economic system is based on selfishness, encourages selfishness, supports and protects selfishness, justifies and legitimizes selfishness, it will fail. Buddhist economics, therefore, must overcome selfishness in both the worldly and spiritual spheres.

LC: Does self-interest mean the same as selfishness or is there a difference? Is there a 'safe selfishness' and a 'dangerous selfishness'?

AJB: Selfishness involves *kilesa* – defiled, low thinking. But we don't call 'seeing in terms of oneself' through good thoughts 'selfishness.' We must call it by another name. {Perhaps 'self-interest.'}

Think of 'self-development' and 'self-respect.' In both of these, one cares and thinks about oneself, but they aren't *kilesa*, they aren't evil, low, or wrong. So we can't call them 'selfishness.'

SK: This distinction is important for understanding how proper spiritual practice is not selfish, but is caring about oneself in the right way, in a way that doesn't harm anyone. To satisfy genuine needs – whether physical or spiritual – in the right way is not selfish. Of course, incorrect practice can be very selfish.

AJB: There are two kinds of caring about oneself: with *kilesa* and with wisdom (*satipaññā*). If it's with wisdom, don't call it 'selfish.' Use

another word. Buddhism teaches self-respect, self-development, self-responsibility, and self-reliance. None of them are selfish. They may be beneficial for oneself, but they are correct. So they aren't called 'selfishness.' If we speak more comprehensively, have the kind of self which isn't selfish.



- LC: Do we have any problems with the economic system known as capitalism? For the most part, capitalism stresses personal property.
- AjB: That is totally selfish, it's just for the individual, for the self. If capitalism is like that, it's totally selfish. To be 'selfish' for the sake of others isn't selfishness, it's for correctness. One is for our own benefit, the other is for the benefit of others or of everyone, {including oneself}.
- SK: Is there a way to harmonize capitalism and unselfishness? Capitalism stresses that humans have the rights to possess property, wealth, commodities, the means of acquiring them, entertainment, etc. If individuals don't protect these rights, the powerful will accumulate wealth to the detriment of others.
- AjB: This is a new subject. But if we think in terms of having happiness, health, and comfort, can't they be for others, too?
- SK: The stress that capitalism places on personal property is selfish, because property is used solely for the benefit of the self – 'my property.' Buddhism emphasizes the use of things for the sake of correctness, something that benefits everyone; this value is entirely different from selfish benefits. Often, when we talk about private property in the West, we have the idea that people should have the basic physical means to earn a living, to protect themselves, and so on. This attitude is considered a right to be protected so that powerful segments of society do not accumulate too much and oppress others. That is a different matter, but can we ask how all of these tools, even personal possessions, health, and happiness would be used for the benefit of others? Do we always have to stress that they are for one's personal benefit?

- AJB: There are two [Thai] words which we have spoken of often: *seṭṭhī jaiboon* (good-hearted philanthropist) and *naitoon kradatsap* (blotting paper capitalist). They will help us understand easily, *seṭṭhī* is a wealthy person, but her wealth is for the benefit of others. {Her business is actually to provide employment and livelihood for others. She shares her wealth and benefits society.} The other's wealth, that of the *naitoon kradatsap*, is for himself alone. The blotting-paper capitalist sucks up everything he can touch, so that nothing is left. {One is a Buddhist ideal and the other is completely immoral.} In the West, do you have a term like 'blotting-paper capitalist'?
- SK: We have the term 'blood-sucking capitalist.'
- LC: Is the first one compatible with Buddhism? Is that kind of capitalism acceptable?
- SK: Yes. Although we need not call them 'capitalists,' having wealth, even having a great deal of wealth, is not incompatible with Buddhism. Whether one has a lot or a little wealth, the fundamental issue is how that wealth is used. Is it used for the benefit of others, for society? Or is it used solely for one's personal benefit?
- AJB: Perhaps you don't yet have this term 'good-hearted millionaire' in English, a person who is wealthy for the sake of others. If someone is wealthy for his own sake, he's a capitalist or investor, not a *seṭṭhī*.
- SK: In English, we have the word 'philanthropist.'
- AJB: Correct. That could be the same as *seṭṭhī jaiboon*.
- SK: Sometimes, however, this philanthropy is merely a kind of show, where somebody who has accumulated wealth through immoral means then gives some of it away to get tax write-offs or ease his conscience.
- AJB: That isn't what we are talking about here, but it's possible that somebody who obtained his wealth through immoral means could have a change of heart and then use his wealth for others.
- SK: King Asoka is the traditional example of that. After violently expanding his kingdom, he had a change of heart and thereafter tried to run his kingdom morally. So we must carefully distinguish between wealth (or power) for the benefit of others and wealth for one's own benefit.

AjB: Selfishness leads to being wealthy for ‘my sake’ and unselfishness leads to being wealthy for ‘the sake of others.’

SK: Therefore, in Buddhism, whether one has much wealth or little, has much property or little, is not the issue. The issue is how the wealth and property is used. Correct?

AjB: A big *setṭhī* has many almshouses, a small *setṭhī* has only one almshouse.

[A short part of the conversation was not recorded when the tape was changed.]

The capitalist will treat his employees like employees or even like slaves, but the good-hearted wealthy person, the *setṭhī*, treats the workers as his children, grandchildren, or relatives. Therefore, there is a significant difference between the owners and managers who treat their workers and employees as being workers and those who treat the workers as their own children or relatives.

You should find clear simple terms in English comparable to *setṭhī* *jaiboon* and *naitoon kradatsap*.

SK: How about philanthropist and blood-sucking capitalist?

AjB: I’ve heard of ‘philanthropist,’ but I don’t know what it means.

SK: *Philos* means ‘love’ and *anthropos* means ‘people,’ thus ‘one who loves people.’ Nowadays, philanthropist is only used for rich people who give to charities and start foundations.

Tan Ajahn, what must we do to bring about the kind of economics which you describe? How can we get both ordinary people and the leaders to have this kind of economics?

AjB: This has to do with religion, it depends on the kind of religion that they follow, whether it’s a religion with self or a religion without self. What’s unique about Buddhism is the teaching that there is no true, abiding self;⁵ not-self (*anattā*) is the basis of Buddhism. So there’s nothing to be selfish about. Religions like Hinduism teach that there is a self or eternal soul. Then they must deal with that self, must control it, so that it doesn’t become selfish. When one doesn’t feel that one

⁵ More precisely: “Everything is not-self.”

has a ‘self,’ one loves others automatically. So it isn’t necessary to teach about love. There is automatic love.

Nowadays, people aren’t concerned with correctness or about others, they only care about themselves. They’re all selfish. To study Buddhism, we must study the story of ‘not-self’ (*anattā*), the fact that everything is not-self: the self which is not-self.

SK: Then to establish the kind of economics we’re talking about, or socialism, we must...

AjB: Must bring in unselfishness. Where it will come from is another question. We must set up unselfishness. So we must ask – from where will we get it? The way to do it is through education, the kind of education which is unselfish. We must teach our children so that they aren’t selfish from the time they’re little. Then they’ll grow unselfishly. {This education includes the family, culture, and religion, not just the schools.}

If we look around the world, we’ll see all kinds of crises. And every kind of crisis comes from selfishness. There’s no exception, all the problems come from our selfishness. Drug addiction, AIDS, pollution, destruction of nature, highway accidents, and crime all come from the same source: selfishness. All the low, evil, and undesirable things come from selfishness. If we teach this a lot, it ought to help.

Education must teach this matter as a central principle, repeatedly and at every level, from nursery school through primary and secondary, and including university and graduate. With all levels teaching unselfishness and destroying selfishness on higher and higher levels, the world will have peace.

LC: This is what should be taught, but it’s not happening. The different religions teach people to be good and to love their neighbors, but they don’t really practice what they preach.

AjB: We must accept that modern education in this world is wrong. The more clever they are and the more they learn, the more selfish they are. The more educated, the more selfish.

SK: Has there ever really been a kind of education in this world which doesn’t make for selfishness?

AjB: We must say that when education was still correct, when education was still in the hands of religion, {it didn't make for selfishness}. But now education has been taken away from religion, it is in the hands of worldly people.

SK: Has it ever happened in reality?

AjB: I believe so. I've heard that originally Oxford and Cambridge were private schools attached to monasteries. The monks set up the monastic schools. They started as small schools and later grew into famous universities. Is this true?

SK: It is partly true, but the problem was that the monasteries weren't very pure, weren't that interested in religion.

AjB: Oh. But if it was a matter of religion, there was less selfishness.

SK: If one studies the history of Christianity in Europe during the medieval ages, you'll find a lot of corruption. Monks and priests weren't that interested in religion. They messed around in politics. The most powerful cared mostly about money and power, even some Popes were like that. And they had a lot of blood on their hands, because of worldly goals, not religious. Religion was merely a tool for worldly ends.

AjB: But if any religion has survived, there must be a part which is correct.

SK: Maybe five percent. The Vatican was filthy.

AjB: The Vatican doesn't have much to do with it. This concerns religion. We're talking about 'gentlemen,'⁶ those who are unselfish. Now all the gentlemen are selfish, the more a gentleman the more selfish. Now it's the 'selfish gentlemen.'

SK: Tan Ajahn has heard that Western universities originally had the purpose of educating gentlemen.

AjB: I'd like to ask an easy question: Whether in England, or wherever, are the gentlemen of three or four hundred years ago and the gentlemen of today the same?

SK: In Pāli, there is the word *sappurisa*. Its original meaning seems to be

⁶ Gentle, originally meant 'noble, of noble birth.' A gentleman was one of good breeding, honor, worthy ideals, and refinement of thought and action.

the same as the old meaning of ‘gentleman,’ a truly noble person.

AjB: *Sappurisa* is a good gentleman.

SK: The Buddha then even used *sappurisa* as a synonym for the *arahant*, the perfected human being.⁷

AjB: So it has become the {false} gentleman who is selfish and the {genuine} gentleman who is unselfish.

LC: Regarding education, what is the role of meditation?

AjB: Meditation is for studying to see that there is no self, that everything is *anattā* (not-self): impermanence (*aniccam*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkham*), selflessness, voidness (*suññatā*), thusness (*tathatā*), and so on.

LC: From the perspective of Buddhism, should the people practice meditation?

AjB: It’s a tradition. Now we’ve thrown out the traditions, but in the past it was a tradition that to be a Buddhist one must meditate. They used to like daily meditation. It was a tradition going back a few hundred years ago, it still existed when I was young, but now it’s been abandoned.

SK: What kind of meditation? *Ānāpānasati*?⁸

AjB: That depends. *Ānāpānasati* was widespread and well-known.

SK: Do you have any evidence?

AjB: Evidence? This is what I was told. When I was a child, there were still some old people who said how things had been. In the wats, that is, in the genuine ones but not necessarily every one, there was a place for meditation. In back, a grove of trees was set aside for meditation, for *ānāpāna*. There were good ones, bad ones, even crazy ones.

⁷ Someone who has abandoned all ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ thus all greed, hatred, and delusion, who has realized Nibbāna and transcended all *dukkha*.

⁸ *Ānāpānasati* or ‘mindfulness with breathing in and out’ is the name for a system of meditation practiced and taught by the Buddha before, during, and after the Great Awakening. While the Buddha taught it as a series of lessons or contemplations leading to liberation, it is often watered down to merely being aware of the breathing. *Ānāpāna* is a popular term for these simplified versions.

My uncle once explained to me about the way he meditated. He did *ānāpāna*. We can't accept his way now because there was too much ritual involved and not enough Dhamma. {Nonetheless, meditation was common once, then abandoned later.} They called it *ānāpāna*.

Young men practiced it in order to fly. They wanted to be able to fly. They learned with selfishness, so what will they get? What's the purpose of training selfishly? It's no good.



LC: I'd like to ask about right livelihood. Some Buddhist scholars in Sri Lanka suggest right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) as the doctrinal basis for Buddhist economics. Do you agree? What is the relationship between right livelihood as a doctrinal teaching and Buddhist economics?

AjB: That's too literal. The scholars are too attached to their books. Although theoretically correct, it won't work if people are selfish. You can't call it *sammā-ājīva* if there is selfishness. Full of selfishness, it becomes *micchā-ājīva* (wrong livelihood). This doctrinal point isn't the real source of right livelihood.

You must find the doctrinal basis in *sammā-ditṭhi* (right understanding). Don't just look at right livelihood by itself. The starting point is right understanding.⁹

SK: Otherwise, you just get righteous groups saying 'we're pure' or 'our livelihood is better than yours,' which is full of attachment. That never leads to peace.

LC: [A question about 'Buddhist businesses in ordinary life' that didn't record clearly.]

SK: Don't let this concept become narrow or materialistic. A business isn't Buddhist because of external or physical factors, but because of its spirit. It is natural that people engage in business. What makes it 'Buddhist' is the unselfish spirit, and ultimately the overcoming of self, that is, 'selfless business.' starting with the right understanding of unselfishness and developing the ultimate right understanding of

⁹ None of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are correct when taken in isolation. Their correctness is in working together as a single path guided by right understanding and aiming for Nibbāna.

selflessness or not-self, right livelihood will follow naturally.¹⁰

LC: And right understanding requires meditation?

SK: Meditation helps develop right understanding.

AJB: Now, education helps teach selfishness. All the new kinds of education cause more selfishness. The smarter people are, the more selfish.

SK: I think it's time to end today. Another group has come.

AJB: Are you coming again? If you would like to discuss this more, you can come back tomorrow.

If we use the word 'capitalist,' there's a way to make it non-selfish, that is, to be good capitalists who do not carry blotting paper or sponges.

DAY TWO

LC: We have been talking about Buddhist economics. Some people speak of Buddhist economics as being the 'Middle Way.' One thing I would like to know from Tan Ajahn is whether Buddhist economics calls for a middle way between Western style development and a spiritual path. It has been difficult to integrate Western style development and economics with spiritual values. So Buddhist economics is trying to find a middle way. How can we work it out? Can the Buddhist 'Middle Way' integrate the two?

SK: I'm not sure how to translate that question. When the Buddha spoke of 'Middle Way,' he didn't mean a compromise between two things, such as you imply. Rather, he meant the middle path that avoids all extremes, such as indulgence in pleasure and indulgence in pain. Is your question, 'What is the Middle Way of development?'

LC: What is his point of view about this? This question is by a Buddhist scholar from Sri Lanka who thinks this question reflects the position of most Buddhist scholars.

¹⁰ Tan Ajahn likes to talk about the Pāli term *jīvita-saṃvohāra* (the business or commerce of life). This life or mind-body is our original stake or investment, lent to us by nature. If we invest wisely, we can make the best profit – Nibbāna. If we invest foolishly, all we get is *dukkha*, no matter how much material wealth we have.

SK: Tan Ajahn, how can the principle of the Middle Way be applied to national development?

AjB: If we translate the word *sammā*, *sammā*, *sammā* correctly you have the Middle Way. When all eight are correct, you can develop everything. Right Understanding, Right Aspiration, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration: these eight kinds of correctness can develop everything. The Middle Way, as a principle in Buddhism, implies eight kinds of *sammā* (rightness or correctness). {In Buddhism, both practicing the Middle Way and development mean developing these eight aspects of correctness or rightness.}

SK: But isn't that just for individuals? How does it relate to the collective? How can it be a principle for developing the country?

AjB: If correct, it works, when the individual is correct, his work is correct, then material things are correct, and so the body and mind are also correct.

The word *sammā* has two essential meanings. The first is correctness or rightness. The second is moderation or 'the mean':¹¹ sufficiency or non-extremism (neither too much nor too little), adequacy (enough to get the job done without being excessive).

SK: The difficulty with the way you phrased the question, just now, is that speaking of an intermediate 'middle way' between, for instance, Western economic values and spiritual values, is not the Middle Way as understood in Buddhism.¹² Such a definition is more in line with Western thinking than with Buddhism.

AjB: There is no contradiction between the Buddhist way and the material, economic, and industrial kinds of development if these later areas are approached correctly. When the heart is correct, material things are correct and the body is correct, {resulting in sufficiency rather than the present extremism.} When our actions are correct, the results of

¹¹ Although the term 'Middle Way' is widely preferred, the term 'mean' or 'way of the mean,' from the Latin, is closer to the Buddha's meaning. While 'mean' (as noun) can also mean 'middle' or 'intermediate,' it has the desired meaning of 'absence or avoidance of all extremes, moderation.'

¹² We do not mean to imply that there are no spiritual values in the West. We are speaking of the dominant trends, especially economic.

our work and actions are also correct. Thus, everything is correct.

SK: There is no reason why this should limit development, if the development is correct.

The Middle Way is not just a compromise, as many people try to interpret it. Thoughts such as ‘the Western values are these, Buddhist values are these, the Middle Way is some way between them’ are not representative of the Middle Way. The Middle Way is to avoid dualistic extremes.

AJB: Neither too individualistic nor too socialist, but to be correct both for the individual and the collective: {this is another meaning of the ‘Middle Way’}.

LC: One of the main assumptions in Western economic theory is that resources are limited and that human wants or needs are unlimited. They define human nature not as greedy but as the need for satisfaction of wants or needs. And that brings up the problem of limited growth while we have unlimited desires. Thus, the ideology of more and more appears. So that is one extreme. But it is based on the definition of human nature.

SK: Which involves a confused understanding of what human needs are. The problem in the West is that people see material goods as values in themselves and just seek more and more of them. One of the basic motivating factors is greed and that is the problem. As long as the West wants to focus on greed as the major economic factor, it will have problems with the Buddhist perspective.

AJB: Obviously, our raw materials are not enough for unlimited desires and unlimited growth.

LC: What is the Buddhist perspective on human needs or wants?

AJB: Just right.¹³

SK: I’d like to suggest that there are two kinds of needs: needs for the sake of survival (survival needs) and the needs of the defilements (defiled needs).

¹³ The Thai word used here is *paw dee*. *Paw* means ‘enough, adequate, sufficient,’ and *dee* means ‘good, all right, favorable, well.’ Together they mean ‘just right, the proper amount.’

AjB: Fine, but we still must distinguish further whether it is a physical matter or a mental matter. We want a profit, but is the profit material or spiritual? This is the question. {It is natural that} we want good results or profits, but is the profit material or spiritual? Buddhism aims for the spiritual profit. Buddhism seeks spiritual satisfaction rather than material or physical gratification. Further, we should ask: Which way will create peace? Can physical gratification bring peace? Can spiritual satisfaction create peace? Or does peace require a mutual sufficiency of the two? In the end, not materialism alone, nor mentalism alone, but a mutual sufficiency between both is needed.

So there is the principle: 'Do not view Buddhism as being only physical or only mental.' Buddhism is both together.

SK: For example, in religious history there are instances of people who mortify the body and of those who got carried away with meditative states. These misunderstandings result from individuals focusing solely on the mental, to the extent that they ignore the needs of the body. We can call that, 'mentalism,' which is the opposite of materialism. Proper spirituality is sufficiency for both body and mind, supplying the genuine needs of both adequately.

AjB: So when both body and mind are correct, we use a new word, 'Dhamma.' Something is Dhammic when both the physical and the mental factors are correct.

SK: It seems to me that this point is very important. In the West, as soon as we talk about non-material values, people will try to push us to the other extreme and discredit us as being airy-fairy or impractical. So we must make it clear that the mental extreme is also incorrect.

AjB: The meaning of 'Rightness,' or 'Dhamma,' includes both aspects of life. Neither pessimistic nor optimistic, it is never extreme.

SK: Which means that the mind and body are right and proper, balanced and integrated, neither being turned into an extreme. Some Buddhists get carried away, denying the reality of the body or denying that there are physical needs which leads to another extreme, one which is more Hindu than Buddhist.

AjB: Therefore, things must be right both physically and mentally. That the world will have peace merely through materialism or solely through

mentalism is impossible. The world will have peace when both material and mental are correct. Spiritual wisdom integrates them. This is what we need.

LC: So avoiding extremes – the Left and the Right – that means the Middle Way, right?

SK: Of course. It's not just a compromise, as many people try to interpret the Middle Way. 'Material values are like this and Buddhist values are like that, so the Middle Way must be somewhere between the two.' Such a geometric compromise is not what is meant by the Middle Way. The Middle Way is the avoidance of all extremes.¹⁴

AjB: Another way to look at it is that matter and mind cannot be separated; they always go together.

SK: Separate them and you die. In fact, the Buddhist term for body and mind is actually mind-body (*nāmarūpa*) which is singular, not plural, thereby signifying the necessary unity of body and mind.

Currently, the worst problem is the purely material emphasis in Western economic theory. Only material things are considered, while the mind and moral values are totally forgotten. Everything is broken down into physical units: chemicals, molecules, atoms, barrels, pounds, dollars.

AjB: Nothing but matter.

LC: They call it 'positive science' as opposed to 'normative science,' which has value judgments.

SK: Western science doesn't consider good and evil, or what leads to peace and what leads to violence. They think only of knowing, knowing, knowing, and of certain personal benefits. It isn't possible to agree on all value judgments in modern society, so to maintain a facade of objectivity they just eliminate values.

AjB: Then where is peace?

SK: It is hard to find because of the difficulty in finding agreement on moral values. If we use that difficulty as an excuse to eliminate moral values,

¹⁴ 'Middle' here does not mean 'between,' rather it means 'above and beyond,' transcending both poles of the duality.

then where is there peace? Many Western theorists are abandoning the only valid means to achieve peace; as soon as moral values are eliminated, then you are saying ‘I do not care about this.’

AjB: For the social part to be correct, for the individual part to be correct, for the physical part to be correct and for the mental part to be correct: this is what we are looking for, so that there will be peace.

LC: Thinking like a Western social scientist, I would like to ask: How can we measure correctness?

AjB: Peace is the way to measure it.

SK: Can we say that the amount of crime, insanity, drug addiction, family breakups, etc. are also measures of correctness?

AjB: Yes. They depend on correctness or incorrectness. If correct, there won't be such things, just peace.

SK: Things like these are the material results of human beings not living correctly. Any of these kinds of social abnormalities or human abnormalities are signs of a lack of correctness, that is, of selfishness.

AjB: There is a Thai expression which means to speak in a way that can't be wrong: ‘Fist pounding the ground.’ To speak pounding one's fist on the ground means that there's no way this statement can be wrong: What we need is no problems; peace means that there are no problems.

Nowadays, there are more and more problems. Thus, there is less and less peace. We have got the kind of development and progress that creates more problems. If we have too much material progress, then we will have many material problems. If we have too much mental development, then we will have many mental problems.

SK: It is interesting to note that *vaḍḍhana*, the Pāli word from which the Thai word for ‘development’ or ‘progress’ is derived, is neutral, although we now tend to give it a positive value. In its original meaning, this word can be positive development or negative development, good development or bad development. However, our modern mind has forgotten this fact and now assumes that any development, any progress, is good and is a value in itself.

AjB: There are English phrases we hear often: ‘no problem’ and ‘all

right.’ These are better than just saying ‘no *dukkha*.’ To say there’s ‘no *dukkha*’ doesn’t sound like much to most people, but to say ‘no problems’ is better. Because happiness has its problems and *dukkha* has its problems, not having any problems is the best.

So Buddhist economics must be both spiritual and physical. We also maintain that the mind leads or guides the material. So make the mind correct first, then the material will also be correct.

SK: Many people seem to believe that the material must come first. If we arrange material things properly, the mental part will be fine. Some yogis also think like this. They are very concerned with exercising the body, are scrupulous about diet, are very health conscious.

AJB: If the mind is not correct, one would walk the wrong way. No matter what you do to manage the body, you will walk the wrong way if the mind is not right. If our mental economy is correct, it will make the material economy correct.

The leadership of society must also be correct if they are going to lead the rest of society in correctness.

LC: I have been collecting modern works on modern applications of Buddhism and I have found that there has been a development of Buddhist law, Buddhist ethics, Buddhist psychology, Buddhist sociology, and Buddhist economics in the last fifteen years. I believe that monks who know Buddhist philosophy could afford many insights in these areas.

AJB: All of those things come together in the word ‘correct.’ Everything is joined in the simple word ‘correct’ (*sammā*).

SK: In the history of Europe, when there first appeared the academic subjects of political science, sociology, humanities, etc., the academics and scholars were mainly Christian monks and priests. So Leonardo is asking you if it is appropriate for Buddhist monks to help in the development of Buddhist law, ethics, psychology, etc. The monks are the ones who understand ‘Buddhist philosophy’¹⁵ well, but nowadays mostly lay scholars are working on these subjects, and very few monks.

¹⁵ Tan Ajahn doesn’t approve of the term ‘Buddhist philosophy.’

AjB: Monks can help make correctness happen. The thing in which monks can seriously help, can really help, is in helping make these things correct. Then there will be peace.

Now, the social sciences go along according to the desires and inclinations of the social scientists, so they never come together in peace. Thus, we have no peace. We need to pull all of them together and collect them in correctness for the sake of peace.

SK: The whole character or trend of modern social science is just to please the researchers themselves, and the people who pay them, rather than looking for peace.

AjB: The word ‘correct’ is ambiguous. It can be correct in terms of other things as well. Our correctness is for peace alone, just for the sake of peace. Buddhists will be correct for the sake of Nibbāna, the highest peace.

LC: In the universities, they teach you sociology or economics but they don’t teach you Buddhist philosophy. I have been in Mahāchulalongkorn Buddhist University (Bangkok) and the monks only study Buddhist philosophy. The monks don’t study economics, sociology, or even psychotherapy. Why is one group just training in Buddhist philosophy (religious subjects) and the other group in only social sciences (worldly subjects)?

AjB: If not for the world, then it can’t be correct because the problems are of the world. Since they are the world’s problems, the monks must understand the world. Now they study in the new fields ‘chasing after the rear ends of the *farang*,’ not correctly.

SK: The secular universities in Thailand are copies of Western universities, and the monks’ universities are copies of the secular universities, so they are far from complete. There are many things lacking and out-of-balance.

AjB: To study it as philosophy using the principles of philosophy is never really Dhamma. It is just philosophy, which is a completely different word. If philosophy, it uses the reasoning of speculation. If Dhamma, it uses the reasoning of direct spiritual experience.

SK: This so-called Buddhist philosophy is merely thinking about the

Buddhist teachings using logic, rational arguments, and modern critical techniques. It can never be Dhamma. It is merely philosophy.

AJB: One approach learns from hypotheses; the other approach learns from reality (or truth).

SK: I think he is suggesting that in some of these Buddhist universities the monks aren't really learning Buddhism. They're learning about Buddhism, but in non-Buddhist ways. It isn't practical, so it ends up being philosophy. They use a foreign methodology that is inappropriate for the lesson.

AJB: It uses thought or the reasoning from thought rather than reality or truth, rather than the reasoning from experience. So it doesn't relate to reality. It's not in line with truth or with nature. It just uses thought and speculation. It must use the experience from nature, the truth from nature, directly from nature, to be correct and in line with the truth.

SK: This empirical approach is so direct that it doesn't require any hypotheses. The Western scientific method is indirect because of its dependence on hypotheses, which can bias observation. The truly Buddhist approach is merely empirical.

AJB: The conclusions are much different when some come merely from thinking and speculation while others come from direct observation, investigation, and experience of reality, that is, from actually doing it, from learning by doing. Philosophy has no end. There's no way it can be completed or reach a genuine conclusion. Because it's based in speculative reasoning, the reasons come endlessly. But if we learn from Nature, we have the right to finish, to reach a satisfactory conclusion. This way has an end. To study in a philosophical way never reaches an end. It constantly sprouts and proliferates new assumptions, new questions, new hypothesis, new opinions.

SK: With the Buddhist or Dhammic approach of learning from nature – always referring to and in the terms of nature – there are certain data that repeat themselves. The field of data is constantly changing, but more or less repeating itself, so there is the possibility of finding a final conclusion.

AJB: To study Dhamma in a philosophical way is not worth the trouble. It

is not practically worthwhile. To learn in a philosophical way can be a lot of fun, stimulating, and interesting, but it is not really worth the effort.

We accept that economics is for the sake of getting good results, is for making a profit. The question is what kind of profit – material or spiritual or both together?

Most foreigners categorize Buddhism as being psychological, as being about the mind. But we say, ‘No, it’s about both the mind and the matter.’ Buddhism seeks to solve the problems of both the mental and the material. We have the term ‘mind-body’ (*nāmarūpa*) which is grammatically singular. We don’t separate the two. We can only separate them in words: body *and* mind. In reality, the mind-body is inseparable.

Economics must be for the mind-body as a whole. And we must aim for correctness, which means ‘no problems.’ When there are no problems, there is peace.

The United Nations talks about peace, but there’s never any peace because there’s no correctness. Rather than have a U.N.O. it would be better to have a U.R.O.¹⁶

Peace is hard to understand. Peace of the body is merely material peace; peace of the mind is merely mental peace. To be correct, there must be peace of both.

If you ask a small child what peace is and then ask an older person, the answers will be vastly different. If you ask the employers and then the workers what peace is, you will get different answers that will never meet.

SK: Any more questions?

LC: I’d like to thank Tan Ajahn for his help. Your teachings these two days will help me to see things more clearly.

AjB: You must be able to answer the question ‘What is peace?’ correctly.

LC: Lastly, I’d like to ask for your blessing of my work. This is a custom in the Tibetan tradition which I have been studying.

¹⁶ United Religions Organization: Tan Ajahn thinks such a group would have a better chance to overcome the selfishness which dominates international bodies like the United Nations.

AjB: The ability to make everything correct: that is the highest blessing!
It's funny that at one time in Thailand they taught that peace is being prepared to fight. If we aren't ready to fight, there won't be peace.

SK: When was that?

AjB: During Rāmā VI's reign (1910-1925). If our soldiers are ready, that's peace.

SK: They probably thought that Thailand could then defend itself.

AjB: Yes, they meant mainly for defense, but that isn't peace itself. It will never create peace. The more prepared to fight, the easier it is to fight. The easier it is to fight, the less there is peace. It takes nothing to start fighting once you're ready.

Study unselfishness, practice unselfishness, this will bring about peace.

The teaching of not-self leads to unselfishness easily. When we know that it isn't really self or me, then it's easy to be unselfish.

I'd like to say that the Christian cross renounces or sacrifices selfishness. The cross is a symbol of giving up selfishness. It is a tool for peace.¹⁷ If we are to redeem ourselves, we must be unselfish. If we are to redeem the world, we must be unselfish. Unselfishness is the redemption of everything.

Now, nobody wants that. All they want is selfishness: to be selfish and to accumulate. They're committed to being bloodsucking capitalists or parasitic capitalists. That is the greatest selfishness: to suck the blood of something until it dies, just so that one will live.

All the universities in the world study selfishness {and not in order to get rid of it}.

SK: Are the monks' universities any different?

AjB: No different, just a little more profound and subtle. But still the same subject matter, there isn't any other. The monks' universities should guide the secular universities.

SK: Instead, they're just chasing after or imitating them. Lay people have

¹⁷ The upright represents 'I,' the ego or self. The crosspiece cuts the 'I.'

status because they have a ‘Dr.’ on their names, so now all the monks want to get a ‘Dr.’ too. It isn’t enough to be ‘Venerable’ anymore.

AjB: It’s fashionable, it looks good. The old Thai word for doctor is *maw*, which implies cunning. {To be a ‘*Maw This*’ or ‘*Maw That*,’ whether medicine, spirits, crocodiles, or whatever was to be expert at it.} Then there’s the word *hua maw* (‘head-doctor’) which is to be incredibly cunning, totally cunning, to think like a doctor. *Hua maw* means to be able to find loopholes in the law and exploit them. And they say that any ancient city, such as Chaiya (the local town) or Nakhon Si Thammarat (the next province to the south), has many of these ‘doctor heads.’

[The tape ran out. The following is reconstructed from memory.]

Lastly, I would like to mention that the economist’s attitude and approach should be that of a ‘spiritual farmer’ who follows the principle of the seven factors of awakening (*bojjhanga*). The seven factors of awakening are mindfulness, investigation of *dhammas*, satisfaction, effort, tranquility, concentration, and *upekkhā* (looking on with equanimity).¹⁸ Details can be found in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*.¹⁹

These seven factors can be applied to any activity, such as, ordinary agriculture. The conservative Buddhists get upset when I say this, but a farmer needs all seven factors to plow his field. First, he must be attentive to what he is doing the whole time he is doing it. Then, he investigates what to do, how best to do it, and what knowledge should be applied. Once he is confident about what to do, he can put effort into the enterprise. Through balanced effort, happiness and satisfaction will arise. Then, the body will calm down and the mind will become tranquil. With that tranquility, the mind can stabilize itself and concentrate properly. Otherwise, he couldn’t plow a straight furrow. With even-mindedness the farmer looks on, making sure that everything goes correctly. Regularly applying these seven factors the farmer has an excellent harvest.

¹⁸ The usual translations of *upekkhā*, ‘equanimity’ and ‘indifference,’ are not sufficient here. As concentration (*samādhi*) does the work of ‘seeing things as they really are,’ *upekkhā* looks on that concentrated mind with perfect equanimity, that is, without any bias, without being influenced by anything positive or negative that occurs.

¹⁹ MN 118.

While plowing and harvesting are physical enterprises, there is also a spiritual enterprise. The ‘spiritual farmer’ must use the same seven factors, but now on a higher level. First, she is attentive to the flow of events in the mind. With this mindfulness, she chooses and takes up the most appropriate Dhamma principle for each situation. Knowing what principle to practice, she arouses energy and puts effort into that practice. Through correct practice, non-sensual satisfaction and joy arise. This satisfaction has a healthy effect on the body and mind; they both calm down. Then, the mind is finally able to stabilize and focus. And with *upekkhā* watching over that concentrated mind, it looks deeply into the nature of the things until it understands how to make everything correct. Continuing to develop and perfect these seven factors of awakening, the spiritual farmer eventually reaps the finest harvest, the highest blessing: the ability to make everything correct.

So this is a last principle for you and your fellow economists and social scientists to consider. In addition to the material things which you study, integrate the mental or spiritual side. Then, it will be possible to make everything correct and we will have peace. That is the best blessing there is.



HEY, IT CAN CHANGE!

*Whatever must be done, do it joyfully,
No need for even a hair's breath of suffering.
Why foolishly gnaw on life like an old bone,
Making human birth nothing but misery!*

*Incompetent at adjusting one's mind to the facts,
Making life torture and assassinating the joy
One ought to find every moment everywhere.
Roasting oneself to a crisp - what fun is that?*

*Come on folks, give this some intelligent thought:
This human birth, in what way is it any good?
It ought to be good at freedom from suffering -
Suffering itself will never amount to anything of value.*

MESSAGE FROM SUAN MOKKH

A SINGLE BOWL OF SAUCE SOLVES ALL THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS

An article written on 6 April 2531 (1988)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya

Translated from the Thai by Santikaro Bhikkhu

This article was prepared by Ajahn Buddhādāsa as part of a series of six pamphlets to be distributed at a major exhibition on his life and work organized by Ajahn Ranjuan Indarakamhaeng and other students at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Subsequently, all six pamphlets were published as Messages of Truth from Suan Mokkh.



A SINGLE BOWL OF SAUCE SOLVES ALL THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS

Our world is ridden with problems and will be doomed unless it changes its course. For many decades, we have lived with the massive danger of the dozens of thousands of nuclear warheads and delivery vehicles stockpiled by the different sides.¹ While nobody really knows how many warheads have been accumulated by the various nuclear states, who cannot be trusted to be honest about such things, a few thousand of them are more than enough to destroy the world many times over. This situation is a result of the selfishness of those people who aim to rule the world. Such selfishness is rampant and, in fact, rules the world.² Let's consider the causes of this crisis with sufficient thoroughness to find suitable remedies.

Selfishness originates when the instinctive sense of self gets out of control and turns into full-fledged defilement.³ Then every activity is controlled

¹ Although the so-called Cold War ended a few years after this message was dictated, nuclear proliferation is in many ways more grave a danger than it was then. In addition, a multitude of chemical, biological, and conventional weapons cast a pall of fear upon our world). The reader may also apply the Dhamma perspectives that follow to other contemporary issues, such as global climate instability.

² Whether utilizing capitalism, communism, and similar ideologies.

³ *Kilesa* are the defilements of mind (or 'afflictive emotions'), such as greed, ambition, hatred, fear, pride, and delusion, which darken, pollute, and torment the mind.

by these selfish emotions (*kilesa*). When one is personally selfish, one's selfishness torments one personally, such as with insomnia and headaches. When one associates with others, one's selfishness harms more broadly and oppresses others. With democratic rights, one is free to cunningly apply one's selfishness without breaking any laws. Let's take a very good look at such behavior, which everywhere permeates our social, economic, and political relationships and the professions of so-called educated people. This is something that prehistoric people would die laughing about if they were able to witness it.

In our democratic system, if the citizens are selfish, they will elect selfish representatives, who will constitute a selfish parliament or congress, which in turn will form a selfish government. Then the whole country will be under the power of selfishness. Consequently, it is worth asking how many unselfish people we have left in today's world.⁴

A democracy made up of selfish people is more wicked and harmful than the worst dictatorship. This is because such a democracy puts no limits on selfishness; the more intelligent a selfish person is, the wider and more profound his exploitation becomes.⁵ If truly unselfish, even a dictatorship will be better, for authority will be used righteously. Either way, only with Dhamma will everything be well irrespective of whether the system is authoritarian or democratic. Hence, let's consider the benefits of unselfishness to the utmost and give unselfishness a fair chance.

Unselfishness must return in due time before the world is ruined. People throughout the world must discover this truth and quickly find ways for the timely return of unselfishness. For example, if selfishness is hoarded, Bangkok will never be able to rid itself of mosquitoes. However, with the return of unselfishness, mosquitoes will disappear from the city in a wink.⁶

⁴ In discussing current affairs, Ajahn Buddhādāsa's comments apply most directly to Thailand and its limited experience with democracy (British-style parliamentary system). Nevertheless, he felt they also applied pretty well to the world at large. Despite his criticisms of the way democracy has played out in Thailand and abroad, he favored an unselfish, decentralized democracy as the ideal system, although he doubted our ability to actually put it into practice.

⁵ A selfish democracy seduces everyone into its corrupt value system; a selfish dictatorship cannot do so using its clumsy means of coercion. Ajahn Buddhādāsa believed that, with Dhamma, an authoritarian system could encourage its people in unselfishness.

⁶ At the time this was dictated, mosquitos were a major public health issue requiring cooperation from citizens, businesses, and public officials.

Unselfishness is the purpose of every religion, no matter what a religion's level of development or whether it is theistic or non-theistic. Even shamanism and occult religions do not want selfishness. If all the religions cooperated in eliminating selfishness from the world, using their own particular methods, the world would be freed of selfishness and all its crises would disappear. By itself, the United Nations, with member countries that are still quite selfish, can do little more than try to keep the skittering crabs together on the same tray.⁷ It should instead cooperate with the world's religions in eliminating selfishness from the world. The religions have the broad diversity needed to satisfy people at all levels; therefore, through them there is an excellent chance of success.

Buddhism teaches not-self (*anattā*) as an essential principle. If one realizes the heart of Buddhism, selfishness cannot arise in one. Religions that assert some sort of self or soul may have some difficulties in teaching their followers to have selves that are unselfish. To set a good example, may the followers of Buddhism hurry to realize the essence of their religion, and thereby positively challenge and support other religions. Don't let Buddhism's great value go to waste among a populace that shows little interest in its core teachings.

Selfishness arises when the self instinct takes the wrong course, namely, the way that leads to defilement (*kilesa*) rather than enlightenment (*bodhi*).⁸ Because of their environment, our children grow up in ways that tend towards defilement from the time they are infants. We have traditions that nurture our babies with selfishness. We give them all the pleasant things – tasty foods, beautiful clothes, cuddly toys – that lead to infatuation. So the children become possessive and greedy. Everything becomes 'mine': 'my father,' 'my mother,' 'my house.' Whatever 'I' want, I must get. No parents ever bring their children to a toy-shop full of all those wonderful, beautiful, expensive toys and say to them, 'My dear children, they have all these toys here just to

⁷ Ajahn Buddhādāsa uses this Thai idiom to mean the United Nations can do little more than try in vain to keep its member countries in line. This challenge is amply illustrated by the consistently selfish behavior of the permanent members of the Security Council, especially its dominant member.

⁸ Ajahn Buddhādāsa frequently spoke of the instincts and considered the instinctive sense of self to be the most basic of all. Because there is an instinctual feeling of 'somebody' being, possessing, or controlling this mind-body process, all the other instincts have a field in which to operate.

make you stupid.’ Instead, most parents tell their children to choose any toy they want, no matter how expensive, and then the parents buy it. Alternatively, they take their children to a fancy, expensive restaurant and tell them to choose any tasty food or sweet they want. No matter how exotic or expensive it is, the parents will buy it and in enough quantity that some is invariably left over and wasted. There are many other environmental factors that strengthen selfishness as children grow older, or at least while they are under their parents’ supervision. Therefore, we need a family culture that instills unselfishness in children starting from birth, such that it becomes their habitual character as they grow up. By the time they reach adulthood, their selfishness will be light and easily redirected. Our ancient culture did not encourage children’s selfishness nearly so much as does its present counterpart.⁹

Peace and happiness are easily discovered only among people who detest and fear selfishness. We Thai people need some elements in our culture and Thai identity – which have Buddhism as the inner core – that will eliminate or lessen selfishness for the sake of our own well-being. The core of our Thai identity must be unselfishness – or an ever-present smile based in unselfishness rather than the intention to trick somebody – instead of superficial things like classical Thai music, classical Thai dances and plays, Siamese cats, fighting fish, and the like. If we consider our *cetiyas*¹⁰ and temples as the symbols of our country, we must substantiate them in the Dhamma of unselfishness.

Our education process must be complete. That is, once it makes people clever, it also must ensure that their cleverness is in line with morality and does not fall under the power of selfishness. Nowadays, we have education systems so advanced that they lead to many miraculous things, such as going to the moon as easily as stepping out into one’s own backyard. However, there is no educational process whatsoever to keep people’s cleverness under moral control. I have been severely criticized for calling our present education system ‘stump-tail dog education’ and ‘spireless *cetiya* education.’¹¹ What is one to do when the facts are thus? One can only speak the truth forthrightly. There has

⁹ One can only wonder what Ajahn Buddhādāsa, or the Buddha, would say of the modern temples to consumerism found in the rich countries of the world today!

¹⁰ Based on the more squat *stupa* of India and similar to the pagodas of Burma, *cetiyas* are the tall, round, and graceful representations of Buddhist cosmology, with Nibbāna at the peak, that Thais use as memorials.

¹¹ Both terms refer to things that are obviously incomplete because an important part is missing. They are so incomplete that they can’t perform their proper functions.

been much talk in this country about expanding the education system; however, we should not expand this kind of education further until we have cleaned it up sufficiently. We must be careful not to expand it without first improving the education process in line with its actual problems.

If we retain our tradition of novice ordination for underprivileged boys and temporary monk ordination for young men, we must have the kind of 'ordination for learning' in which the boys and young men are rigorously trained in unselfishness, not merely free schooling. Such ordination can be said to mean the study not only of our religion but also of how to work for others without expecting any benefit, not even a word of gratitude, in return.¹²

What we will call the 'Single Bowl of Sauce' is unselfishness. It solves all the problems of individuals and society. At Suan Mokkh, we have a day of labor so that the monks and novices can bathe in sweat and learn to honor sweat as the god that helps save them. By cultivating such character, they will not be idle later on in life, and thus cause no problems for society or themselves. Whatever work one will do, one must see clearly how one works for the Buddha in helping the teaching and practice to continue in all respects. At Suan Mokkh, we also practice self-contentment as expressed in the slogan 'Eat from a cat's plate, bathe in a ditch, sleep in a pigsty, and listen to the mosquitoes sing!' Some people shake their heads at this and decline to stay with us. However, we eat frugally and aspire to the highest activity. If we selfishly aim at good eating, we will progress in nothing except the accumulation of selfishness.

The comprehensive university for temple boys, in which I was fortunate to study, deserves a great deal of attention. If I had not graduated from such a university, the person now known as 'Buddhadāsa' might never have happened in this world. Please consider this carefully, for it has nurtured people like myself. The life of temple boys is a complete system of around-the-clock learning that digs out selfishness, 'down to the bones.'

We temple boys had to rise for work before all the chickens got out of the coop. If anyone was still sleeping, his friends had the right to pour water over him. (Sometimes, one of us would clear out the coop early in order to soak his sleeping friends, which was a training in the highest sporting spirit

¹² The custom of boys and young men ordaining in order to receive a basic education and religious training has deteriorated into a ritual in many cases, and a money-spinner in some. Nonetheless, it remains important for poor boys in rural areas and is increasingly available for underprivileged girls, too.

among friends that cannot be found among athletes nowadays.) After waking, we boys went into the village to fetch tiffin carriers of food for the monks. Back at the monastery, we prepared everything for the monks to eat, making no mistakes. We waited on the monks until they finished eating – none of us could disappear for a moment. Next, we fed the cats, making sure that each got a share of the leftovers. Finally, we ourselves ate, following the traditional etiquette (for example, not blowing noses while eating). After the meal, we cleaned up and put everything away, then studied in tandem, always on the lookout for the switch, which often fell upon us unjustly. We repeated the serving process while the monks had lunch. Following that was another study session.

Late in the afternoon, close to evening, we tended the garden (mostly growing yams), looked after eggplants and peppers next to the pond, or gathered fruits to give to the villagers in gratitude for the food they offered each day. We also cared for the chickens, dogs, and other temple animals. (My temple also had a pig, which was rather special. It scared off chicken thieves at night so well that the abbot treated it as an angelic pig. It never dug up our yams, which it could have eaten easily, because it was marvelously unselfish.) We took turns fetching water and filling the line of water jars, though small boys like myself were exempted from this duty because the well was deep and the distance far. Instead, we smaller boys had to prepare garlands for the monks to use at the morning and evening chanting services. At night, we massaged our teachers with our hands and feet, while they told us strange and interesting tales and fables.

Apart from the routine chores, we temple boys also had to keep the grounds clean, sweep out the buildings, and pull out the weeds. We sometimes drilled in Thai boxing both to preserve the cultural tradition and because we frequently got in arguments with boys from other monasteries. Another rigorously enforced rule we temple boys had to follow was to greet the elderly with a *wai*, that is, putting both hands together in a lotus bud gesture of respect. This had to be done to all senior citizens regardless of their mental condition or social status. This was troublesome as many people regularly passed through our monastery. We had to put down our work tools often and greet the elderly passing by. It was very painful to greet the old men who smoked marijuana, who did not seem worthy of our respect, but it was probably a good way for us to reduce our self-centredness. I lived like this for two years and graduated with the self-conferred ‘diploma of full-fledged temple boys, servants of the world.’

After that, I went on to study in the government school. My school had no janitors then. We schoolchildren had to arrive at school very early in the morning and joyfully contested with one another in sweeping the grounds and buildings. We had to keep everything clean by ourselves. Sometimes we were asked to help carry things up to the monastery from boats in the canal. We always did this whenever we had the chance. Other times we helped in turning the winch used to pull wood planks up from the canal; it was always a lot of fun. All of these activities were excellent spiritual lessons in eliminating selfishness. There are no such lessons in present-day schools, where there are janitors to do such work. Thus, the children nowadays are more selfish and delinquent than in the past. This ‘diploma of temple boys who serve the world’ is the single bowl of sauce that can solve the problems of society and the world.

The single bowl of sauce is the *nam prik* or shrimp-paste sauce that is an indispensable part of traditional Thai meals. Our ancestors, who never tasted exotic Chinese or Western foods, ate this staple throughout their lifetimes and thus learned to be unselfish and to love others. However, they have given birth to children and grandchildren who eat fancy and expensive foods, becoming increasingly selfish every day. They are most cunning in their selfishness and never think of serving anybody except themselves. Some even think of conquering the whole world, because they have never been to the ‘University of the Single Bowl of Sauce.’

We must have an education process that does not serve the democracy of selfishness, of people whose cleverness is completely unrestrained. They are great thinkers, speakers, and doers, but are stuffed full of the most cunning selfishness. The more educated and clever they are, the more deeply and profoundly selfish they become, eventually transforming themselves into crooks and con men before they know it, even in the schools and universities. Our universities graduate only those who refuse to eat the single bowl of sauce or are unable to swallow it. We have the kind of education that serves only economics and politics without serving morality and ethics. Thus, morality is disappearing. There are violent rivalries and quarrels among school students nowadays, even in the universities.

Nowadays, we educate the girls to refuse being women and mothers, and the boys to be unable as men and fathers. The modern education causes men and women to compete for each other’s work under the banner of human rights, so that everybody ends up sexless or neutered. Among married couples,

there are the most ridiculous arguments over who will be the elephant's front legs {leader} and who the hind legs {follower}. This problem did not exist among our ancestors who ate the single bowl of sauce. They left matters in accordance with *idappaccayatā*, the law of interdependent conditionality; each family could agree on who was most suitable to play which role.¹³

We must have the kind of education that does not lead to men and women taking work from each other. Let women have the livelihood of mothers and men the livelihood of fathers. The father takes on the burden of providing for the family so that the mother does not have to work outside the home. If she has some income generating work, she does it at home. This enables her to take care of the children fully, bringing them up to be good human beings and good citizens who will not bring tears to their parents' eyes.¹⁴ The world, then, will have peace because its citizenry is fit to live peacefully. The children will be brought up correctly, so that both the boys and the girls are unselfish. There will be no sexually stimulating and provocative activities, such as the sexually oriented beauty contests that encourage shamelessness among both contestants and spectators even in primary schools. Such activities represent the worst kind of selfishness, for they erode morality and train young people to become slaves of defilement, thus becoming a menace to society and harming themselves in the process.

Whenever Buddhism is the basis of our education process, Dhammic socialism¹⁵ will easily become our political system, for it is in accordance with nature's requirements. The socialism of the egotist cannot create world peace, only a socialism based in Dhamma and unselfishness can genuinely do so. The latter fosters love among fellow human beings as profound comrades in birth, aging, illness, and death. This accords with the ideal of Sri Ariya Metteya, whose coming is hoped for by those who know what she is about.¹⁶ The

¹³ This should not be taken to mean that men should always be the front legs (leaders), for wives made the key decisions in many families and were often stronger than their husbands.

¹⁴ This passage has struck some readers as sexist and offensive. Ajahn Buddhādāsa wouldn't object if the father stayed home and the mother took on the burden of earning the family's bread. His point is that somebody must stay home and raise the children properly, and he recognizes that women are usually the ones who do it.

¹⁵ See *Dhammic Socialism*, first published by the Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development in 1986.

¹⁶ The next Buddha, Sri Ariya Metteya, will usher in a world of universal loving-kindness, peace, and well-being. Traditionally, she is believed to be due 5,000 years after the passing of the Gotama Buddha. Ajahn Buddhādāsa taught that her coming depends more on humanity creating the right conditions than on a predetermined period of time.

essence of this, again, is the single bowl of sauce – unselfishness pure and simple.

In conclusion, our ancestors' single bowl of sauce – unselfishness – is needed in every activity that aims to promote the conditions for peace and the corresponding national cultures of peace. This Dhamma is the essence of every religion that aims at eliminating our world's evils and is suitable as the central theme of morality and ethics. In other words, for human beings in this scientific era it is sufficient to practice a single precept – unselfishness. Please think about it. Once you have no selfishness, you will automatically follow all the precepts and be free from all moral problems. Naturally, economics, politics, and government won't have any more problems either. This is how the single bowl of sauce can solve all the problems in the world.



COMMONLY MISUNDERSTOOD BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES

THE WORLD AND THE DHAMMA

A lecture given on 11 September 2525 (1982)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya

Translated from the Thai by Dhammavidū Bhikkhu

The original Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles Dhamma discourses were delivered to the monks, maechis, and laypeople at Suan Mokkh during the three months of the 1982 rains retreat. What follows is the tenth out of the eleven discourses composing the series.



THE WORLD AND THE DHAMMA

Things that are misunderstood can be harmful. Anything that isn't properly understood can never be really beneficial, only harmful, both for us and for other people, for those associated with us. When we don't understand anything properly, it has no benefit and we can't make proper use of it. It gets forcibly misused and the results are detrimental. We need to properly understand everything we're concerned with so that whatever it is, it can be beneficial. Misunderstand anything, misuse it, and from the misuse come harmful effects. No matter what it is – household articles, personal things – if we use them wrongly, they can be harmful, but if we use them properly, they're useful. There's harm for others because we're all connected, we can't live alone.

We're connected sometimes out of necessity, that is, in matters that we may have to help each other accomplish or be collectively responsible for, like family affairs, where, if there's misunderstanding, togetherness disappears to be replaced by arguments, by disputes. Even with national matters, which are of great import, if people in a country understand anything wrongly, or in a contrary manner, it has the result we see, that is, there's no real peace.

An apposite example occurs in the problems associated with the concepts 'world' and 'Dhamma.' It's generally said that if one wants the Dhamma or Nibbāna, wants the quenching of suffering, it's first necessary that we abandon

the world. This is an example of people without knowledge talking about things they don't really understand. Everyone, all those beginning to study, even children should understand these words 'world' and 'Dhamma' properly and not just believe what people say when they tell us that we have to abandon one in order to achieve the other, who tell us that to quench suffering completely we must forsake the world. If we did that, where would we live?



At present there are two languages in use – the language of worldly people who don't understand things yet, so they use 'worldly' language, and the language of those who know the Dhamma, who have some understanding and use words in a deeper way, who use 'Dhamma' language. Each uses language on their own level and sometimes the same words and phrases can have almost opposite meanings. Worldly language, when it describes the 'world,' means this earth, this physical world, the world we live in, but in the language of Dhamma, 'world' refers to a mental level, to the mind still on a low, base level. One language describes the planet, the other the mental world of someone still dwelling on a low level. From now on, we'll be using Dhamma language, so 'world' will imply the mental level of someone still at a base level, while 'Dhamma' will indicate an elevated mind, something which can help people to transcend, to dwell 'above' the world. 'Dhamma' in worldly language would refer to the teaching of the Buddha, the paraphernalia of Buddhism, the books, the scriptures, the Triple Basket of Discourses, the Dhamma talks, or whatever.

If it's the deep language the Buddha used, then 'world' implied suffering: *dukkha* (suffering) is the world, the cause of suffering is the cause of the 'world,' the quenching of suffering is the quenching of the 'world,' and the way to attain the quenching of suffering is the way to attain the quenching of the 'world' – the Four Noble Truths. Referring to *dukkha*, suffering, as the 'world' means the mind that is still on a low level and going wrong all the time, which is really the same thing as suffering. So if it's said that the 'world' is suffering, it's Dhamma language and indicates a low-level mind. Ordinarily, the world, this earth, isn't *dukkha* or *sukha* (happiness). It can't be said to be either, so if we declare the world to be *dukkha*, it means the mind of a being operating on a low level, moving under the power of *avijjā* (ignorance) and full of suffering. 'The world is suffering' has this kind of meaning.

Dhamma is the opposite of suffering. It's that which can quench it, put an end to it. If, however, the world is to be free from suffering, if it's to be quenched, it must happen in the place where suffering happens, and because suffering happens in the world, the Dhamma that will quench it must do so in the world too. The two can't be apart. So if anyone doesn't know where the world is, or where suffering is to be found, they won't know where to quench either. Know that the 'world,' that suffering is in the mind; the world enters and dwells in the mind which is low, without knowledge. The low mind must always suffer – that's called 'world.' Suffering dwells there, in that sort of mind, the spinning around in the mass of dukkha; the great whirlpool of all suffering is in the mind. We'll have to quench suffering at suffering, at the 'world,' and 'world' in this meaning is a matter of the still ignorant mind, the mind not interested in Dhamma.

Now, if this world is to be free from suffering, it will be because it has the Dhamma. The two can't be apart, can't be two different matters in different places. If we want peace and happiness, if we want the quenching of suffering, it will happen because the world has the Dhamma instead.



Looking particularly at the world, something that arises according to nature but without knowledge is called 'world.' When they're born into the world, people are without knowledge of what they are, without the knowledge they need to have concerning themselves. If they know anything, they'll know that they've been born. People are born into the midst of ignorance, ignorance of themselves, so they dwell stuck, sunk in the world. Now, we – are we like this? Take a look and see. If we're still blind, still ignorant, without knowledge of anything as it really is, then we are – we've been born into the world and we're dwelling blindly in it, living blindly in the mass of suffering. If we suffer, it means that we're still blind to the Dhamma, that we don't know the truth of anything. Hence, we oscillate – we swing back and forth between happiness and unhappiness, between laughter and tears. We're someone who doesn't know what the world is or what life is all about. If we enjoy living like this, we're going to be mentally up and down, up and down, up and down, and all of the time. If, however, we feel that we don't want that any more, we're going to have to begin forming a new understanding, a new way of life so that we don't have to continually swing back and forth between laughter and tears,

between being happy or sad.

So that which is called ‘world’ is born into the world in accordance with the law of nature, but blindly, without knowledge, born in ignorance, which then increases. That is, people become more ignorant as they find delight in and become infatuated with the things they experience. In the mother’s womb, there’s no infatuation because the infant isn’t experiencing anything that can delight it, but once born, it will be fed, it will drink milk, hear sweet sounds, see beautiful things and so on, and will fall into delighting in those experiences. The infant meets with and feels liking for the pleasant. It gets ‘sucked in’ by the things it likes. It goes into, it ‘sinks’ into the ‘world,’ becomes a worldling obsessed with worldly things – enslaved. It delights in them so that if it’s given anything else, it’s not interested but wants only the sensually delightful. This is to become worldly, to sink into the world, into the delightful, into the various forms of fun and happiness we derive from the things around us. This is the worldling. How many such people are there? Think about it.

Who isn’t like this? If we aren’t, we can be sure it’s because we aren’t stuck on the delightful, aren’t stuck on the ‘fun’ things we see, hear, etc. If we’re really free of all that, we won’t be worldlings infatuated with the world we experience. But right now, through being unaware of what’s really what, we’ll probably be ‘sunk’ in the world of sensual delights.

When we emerge from the womb, we aren’t like that. We’ve yet to become infatuated because we’ve yet to receive sights, sounds, smells, and so on, but in no long time, as the senses receive impressions, then if anything delicious, delightful is involved, it will cause feelings of satisfaction. There will be clinging to it as ‘mine,’ and there will be a ‘me’ growing up in the mind. Right here is a deep truth – it’s the desire for the delight, the satisfaction in any experience that gives rise to the feeling of ‘me,’ the feeling of being the ‘desirer,’ of the ‘me’ who experiences the delight and satisfaction. The ‘me’ arises after the ‘mine,’ which is normal. When we feel satisfaction in anything, that’s the arising of the ‘world’ right there, it’s then that we become worldlings. The mind sinking into those things is said to have ‘sunk’ in the world.

This is Dhamma language, so when we say ‘sink in the world’ we don’t mean sink into the ground in the same way that Devadatta (the Buddha’s relative, the one who tried to put an end to him) sank into the earth. Rather, we mean the mind sinking into ignorance, into infatuation with the delicious, into clinging to the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental objects being

experienced. Thus, if something is likeable, satisfying, we ‘sink’ into liking, into satisfaction. If it’s the opposite, we ‘sink’ into anger, into dissatisfaction, annoyance. Someone sunk in the world will laugh, will cry, will be pleased, displeased, and so on. Anyone who is like this ought to know it for themselves.

What’s most dangerous about this is that we’ll become so delighted with this world we’ve sunk into, so infatuated with it that we won’t be able to see anything as being better. Because we’re infatuated, the things that we’re infatuated with are, for us, the ‘good.’ This is where we need to mention the concepts of ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ People addicted to cigarettes or to alcohol see such things as ‘good’ and don’t listen when we talk about giving them up, throwing them away. They don’t see any ‘good’ in that. Cigarettes and alcohol are, for them, amongst the most enjoyable of things. However, we should be aware that the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental objects that we meet with through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind are things more addictive than cigarettes and alcohol, but because they don’t reveal the associated problems directly, because nobody dislikes them, and because they’re all-pervasive, people become infatuated with them.

Be aware, however, that these things actually torture the minds of those who find delight in them. The pretty sights, the sweet sounds, the delightful smells, the delicious tastes, the soft and gentle touches, the sensations, and the pleasant thoughts, all these enslave the mind to pleasure. We’re pleased every time that we get them, but when we don’t get them, when we get the opposite, we feel uncomfortable, irritated, disappointed, even angry.

People who live in the world, who sink in the world, display just these traits, these two kinds of behaviour – now happy, now unhappy, now it’s laughter, now tears. How enjoyable is that? Think about it. If we weren’t like that, wouldn’t it be better?

It’s the misfortune of children to be without knowledge when they come from the womb, so it’s inevitable that when the child meets with the delicious, it will fall into liking; when it meets the opposite, it will fall into disliking. If children had the right kind of knowledge, they wouldn’t do that. If they knew from birth that things are ‘just like that,’ are just what they are according to their nature, that depending on them the nervous system produces feelings, and that some things touch the nervous system and produce pleasant sensations, while some produce unpleasant sensations, then they would know that that’s all that happens – there’s nothing more than that.

For ease of understanding, take the experiences of the bitter and the sweet. One feeling is called ‘sweet,’ another ‘bitter.’ Now, the nervous system feels them as they are, according to their nature, but we don’t, so we fall in love with the sweet and into aversion for the bitter. Then we’re mentally up and down, up and down, up and down – which is a kind of madness, one kind of madness. We stray into happiness, into unhappiness, into anger, into love, into fear, into anxiety, into jealousy and so on because we don’t understand these things properly, and if it all gets to be too much, there’s nervous disease, insanity, and sometimes people even kill themselves, drown themselves because of their infatuation with worldly things.

So if we understood these things in such a way that we didn’t make any mistakes when we had to deal with them, wouldn’t that be better? It would be beneficial, it would be fortunate for us if we could avoid laughter and tears. Laughter is wearisome, tiring. If you don’t believe this, try it and see – try to laugh for just half an hour and you’ll probably drop dead. Not having to experience either would be better. Then there would be freedom, the freedom of a life lived beyond the things that cause laughter and tears, above the things that cause us to be pleased or disappointed. Then we would live normally in the true sense. That would be better. But if we wouldn’t like to be normal, to be above happiness and unhappiness, then there’s nothing for us to talk about. That’s our choice.

The aim of the Dhamma is to help us to live above the power of the things that can cause laughter and tears, until we reach the point where we’re no longer affected by them at all. If anyone doesn’t like the thought of this because they see it as not being ‘fun,’ the Dhamma has nothing to offer them. To still like laughter and ‘fun,’ to like lots of laughter and tears, isn’t anything to do with Dhamma.

People say that they want to study the Dhamma, to know the Dhamma, to study it more and more, but we’re afraid that in some cases they won’t really feel a strong enough need, because if someone still likes to laugh and cry, they aren’t ready yet. The Dhamma is all about helping people to rise above laughter and tears. So do we really want this – do we really want to be above the things that make us laugh and cry? Only in the world of mind can we find those kind of things. The Dhamma will help us to rise above them – but if we don’t like the thought of that, there’s nothing to talk about; if we do, there is.

This is the world, the ‘world’ that’s full of the things that can make

us happy or sad, that can make us laugh or cry, can make us spin around in suffering.

Now, the second thing is the ‘Dhamma.’ ‘Dhamma,’ here, is the opposite of the ‘world’ and represents the mind which is awake. ‘World’ represents the mind without real knowledge, which is asleep, so to speak. We’re all worldly people sunk in the world, all except for those elevated beings – the *arahants*, the *Buddhas* – who dwell above it, and teach about dwelling above it. But we’re sunk in the world, stuck with happiness and suffering. Dhamma represents the mind which isn’t that way, mind that knows the world as it really is, knows the things that cause happiness and unhappiness as being ‘just like that’ so that it doesn’t fall for them and instead goes along in the right way.

In the Pāli language, the word ‘Dhamma’ means all things without exception. Up to now, we’ve been dealing with the part which is the enemy. Hence, ‘world’ is one meaning of Dhamma, a *dhamma* on the side of ignorance, of wrongness. In opposition to that are those *dhammas* on the side of illumination, of awakening, of knowledge. Dhamma is wide in meaning – anything and everything is a dhamma – but get to know the dhammas of the dark side so that we can avoid going wrong. Come to know the worldly dhammas so that we can avoid sinking into the world. Get acquainted with all dhammas, no matter what they are or what their meaning is, so that we can learn to deal with them properly. Know the worldly dhammas and know those that lead us out from the world, out from suffering. Then we’ll always be able to quench that problem no matter how it manifests. In this way, the Dhamma we study won’t be wasted. If we know the bad, then that helps us to avoid it. Knowing suffering, we can avoid doing the things that cause it.

If we study the Dhamma, we study the truth that will help us dwell above suffering, but it shouldn’t be just an intellectual exercise – it’s not about studying so that we can answer questions or score points. That would be too little, not nearly enough. If we know the Dhamma, we can control ourselves, control the mind, cause it to dwell in the Dhamma way so that there’s no suffering, no need to laugh or cry anymore. Dhamma is necessary for people living in the world. Humankind is sunk in the world and full of suffering, and the Dhamma is that which will help us to escape from that predicament. Just behave properly towards the things of the world and there won’t be any problems – that’s Dhamma. Anyone studying the Dhamma should do so to get this benefit. All people should study the Dhamma so that they know how to

dwell above suffering, how to avoid being worldlings sunk in the world, sunk in suffering, and to become human beings dwelling above it instead.

However, we'll have to get to know suffering before we can begin to like the Dhamma. If we don't know our own suffering yet, the time hasn't arrived for us to love the Dhamma. We have to know that which troubles and oppresses us so that we can turn towards its opposite. It must be suffering that teaches us about suffering. We're going to have to find it sufficiently unbearable if we're really going to be interested in doing anything about it. It's then that there can be faith in the Dhamma, belief in the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, which taken together, make up the system for the quenching of suffering.

The Buddha tells us that we should take the Dhamma as our refuge, as our guiding light, and not to rely on anything else. But this we must see for ourselves – just as we must do what has to be done ourselves. No-one can do it for us; it's a personal affair. *Paccatam veditabbo viññūhi* means 'to be experienced personally by those who know.' We must do this ourselves – come to know for ourselves how it is that we sink into the world, sink into the mass of suffering, come to know within ourselves the desire to escape, come to experience faith in the Dhamma for ourselves, and then make the personal effort to practise and to come out safely.

Thus, the Buddha pointed out that one should take oneself as a refuge, have oneself as the guiding light and not take refuge in anything else. The Dhamma is a refuge, but we must realize it for ourselves. Thus it's said that we should take ourselves as a refuge, and we can achieve that through behaving Dhammically, through behaving correctly.

So now we know the Buddhist way – that we do things for ourselves, by ourselves until the result arises, until the quenching of suffering happens – that's the Buddhist way. If we let ghosts and gods or whatever in to help, then it's the supernatural; it belongs to the supernatural and we won't be able to understand anything as it really is. It's taken for granted that to follow the formalities, to perform the ceremonies means that we'll have good luck, that we'll be happy, but this is superstition – superstitious belief which will have some result, some small and temporary result. If it's going to be Buddha-Dhamma, we're going to have to see clearly that suffering arises from our ignorance, from our being deceived into liking and disliking, into being made happy or unhappy by the many and various things we encounter. We can then arrive at the knowledge that whatever we experience is 'just like that.' The loving and hating can stop

and there can be normalcy, the absence of suffering. Seeing clearly in this way at all times is Buddha-Dhamma.

We need to study the Dhamma and practise to receive the fruits of our studies, to avoid the supernatural, the superstitious. A student of Dhamma who practises in the hope of getting a result, is going the way of superstition, so come back, hurry, turn around, come back to the Buddhist religion. Otherwise we'll wander aimlessly in the realms of the superstitious. Understand that since birth, we've had to depend on other people for our guidance, on people who don't understand the way things really are themselves. We've received the sort of teaching that has been essentially supposition from the time we were born. But that's from another time. Now we have to understand the problem itself; we need to understand ourselves, understand our minds to see how suffering arises, where its roots are, and then go about destroying them. In this way, our own actions will become the '*devas*' that help us, the 'god' that gives us assistance. We help ourselves to quench suffering (*dukkha*). This is the meaning of 'having oneself as a refuge.'

So hurry up, go to it, do the right thing! What if we did wrong before? Never mind that now because we didn't realize it then, didn't know that we were doing wrong, so it can, in a sense, be forgiven. But from now on, if we go wrong again, we know we'll get the reward – laughter and tears – now laughing, now crying, now happy, now sad until we become really insane. Why let that happen? Stop making mistakes and do what's right, be correct. From this time on, don't let anything delight the mind or make it angry, make it like or dislike, make it be afraid, or whatever. Then we'll have put things right through our own efforts. Then we can look on our actions as being the *devas*, the god, as that something holy, something sacred that comes along to help us. Thus, we meet with success through our own efforts. This is Dhamma.

As for ignorance? That's the world – worldlings sunk in superstition, unable to know anything correctly, even the world they're sunk in. We can compare this with, for instance, a bird that doesn't see the sky it flies in. People in former times had a saying that birds don't see the sky; although they fly in it and their eyes are open, still they don't see the sky. The fish doesn't see the water even though it swims in it and the water is always right in front of its eyes. The worm doesn't see the dung it lives in. The earthworm doesn't see the earth it moves through, that it eats, and so on. Thus, it's said that people live in, sink in the world but they don't see it. Are we like this? Are children

just born into the world like this? Are they the same as the birds and fishes? If we could see the world as it is, then we'd be incapable of going wrong and wouldn't have to suffer. Rather, dwelling always above the world, we could mock it, make fun of it. We could dwell above the world because we'd know the reality of it. If we can't do that, we're in much the same place as the bird that doesn't see the sky, the fish that doesn't see the water, and so on – we're people who don't see the world we live in.

Now, if correct seeing should arise, it would become a Dhamma matter. Dhamma is a matter of knowing, and knowing the world as it really is, one wouldn't be inclined to sink into it. First, people live with suffering, then they get the Dhamma as the Buddha taught it and as it continues to be taught, and knowing Dhamma, they don't sink in the world, so they don't have the suffering of those who do. The Dhamma and the world can't be apart; if so, there are problems. Don't be foolish and talk about abandoning the world to go and live with the Dhamma, because it can't be done. The physical part of us, the body, must live in the world, must be connected with it, must eat, and so on. Bring Dhamma into life to help sustain it. Don't let suffering happen. Live in the world without having to sink into it, without having to suffer. We make the effort and study the Dhamma to get this kind of result – less suffering, or no suffering at all. Thus, we get benefit; if we don't, it's not worth the time and effort. We should get the boon of a bright, clean, peaceful, clear mind so that life is cool, not dark, hot, and full of laughter and tears.

Hence, we don't need to abandon the world to find the truth, and anyway we can't do that because the body has to live in it. Just don't let the mind sink into the world. Have Dhamma so that the mind doesn't sink in the world even though we still have to live in it. That 'world' is the suffering arising through wrongdoing towards the various things we have to experience. The world, the actual world, the earth, and the multitude of things in it aren't happiness or suffering, aren't 'good' or 'bad' in themselves, but if we respond to them carelessly, there's immediate suffering. If we deal with them correctly, they're useful. We can use them for our benefit, as with possessions, as with money, property or whatever. We can use these in such a way that they don't have to be dukkha, but if we're ignorant and deal with them unwisely, they will be. We need to know how to handle such things without letting the mind become infatuated and delighted with them. People without such knowledge live sunk in the world and have a lot of suffering, but we won't be like that, won't have to suffer to that extent, and, eventually, won't have to suffer at all. When we

want to do only what's right, there's no suffering. 'Correctness' is the dukkhaless. If we still have to suffer, we still aren't operating correctly.

This correctness is completely useful, without any bad effect, and so everybody benefits. Thus, we live in the world usefully and everyone has the boon of being without suffering – that's correctness. That's Dhamma.

Now, it's said that anyone who sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha too. The Buddha said as much. If we don't see the Dhamma, hanging a Buddha image around our necks as a talisman isn't going to do the job. But as already mentioned, if we see the Dhamma, we know the truth, the truth that mankind sunk in the world suffers, so if we don't sink into it, don't misunderstand the happiness and unhappiness that's in it, then that won't be the case. Seeing the truth of this, one sees the Dhamma, and anyone who sees Dhamma to such an extent that they're able to quench suffering for themselves is someone who sees the Buddha. Don't think that the Buddha disappeared with His Nibbāna, His death, His cremation, and the distribution of His remaining bone relics. Ignorant people would think that way, but not those with knowledge, because the Buddha had already made it clear that the Dhamma-Vinaya He had revealed would represent him once He was gone. The body of the Buddha would break up, but He would continue to exist in the form of the Dhamma, so He said, "*Anyone who sees the Dhamma sees me.*" The Dhamma is dukkha and its quenching. Really knowing this is called 'seeing the Dhamma,' and when one truly sees the Dhamma, one sees the Buddha too.

It's a sad fact that even though the Dhamma is within us, we don't see it. We have suffering, so we must have the Dhamma too. Suffering and its quenching are within us, both are in the mind. This being so, take an interest in suffering. Don't just let it go on and on. Don't be careless. Don't be indifferent. Whenever suffering is present, take a close interest in it. Be patient, see that it can be quenched, and then there can be satisfaction with the Dhamma. Seeing Dhamma in this way is to see the Buddha, to have the Buddha within us, not to just talk about it. Mostly it is just talk – "*Buddham, saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*" – we call the Buddha our refuge and yet we don't really know ourselves or the Buddha properly, so it's just words. We need to see our suffering and the Dhamma that can quench it. Then we have the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, then we are the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. That would be the greatest good fortune, the best thing that a human being could get, that a Buddhist could have.

We're looking at the world and the Dhamma. The 'world' is an ignorant being sunk in the mass of suffering and unaware of it. The 'Dhamma' is the mind which is bright, clear, which has the knowledge and conduct necessary for the quenching of suffering. If this world doesn't have Dhamma, it's a hell. If it does, it's a world of peace and contentment. The world cannot be apart from the Dhamma. If Dhamma is removed from the world, it comes to pieces and hasn't any use or benefit. The world at large would have Dhamma if suffering people could conduct themselves properly. If they could behave in such a way that they didn't let dukkha happen, there wouldn't be any suffering in this world.

At present, everyone suffers to some extent, now laughing, now crying and so on, and the world isn't an attractive proposition. It's still a world of suffering, a world of beings sunk in dukkha. Living without having to experience dukkha means avoiding being sunk in the world. When anyone manages to do this, they're said to dwell 'above' it instead.

There's a word we ought to understand: *lokuttara*, which is a Pāli word and indicates a mind that is elevated, that isn't worldly, isn't sunk in the world. Those beings called *arahants* dwell mentally above the world, aren't sunk in it and don't experience suffering. We too, sometimes, can dwell above the world. It's not that we're always ignorant and sunk in it, but sometimes, for perhaps a few minutes at a time, we know what's happening. We can restrain the laughter and tears, the happiness and the unhappiness, and when that happens, there's a little freedom, a little lokuttara, just a sample – what we like to refer to as 'a taste of Nibbāna,' a taste of the 'unconditioned.' Whenever the mind is elevated, dwelling above the things that cause suffering, there's clarity, and then it's as if we dwell on a higher level from where we can look down on the ocean, on the swamp of suffering, which is an ugly fearsome thing. Those are the best, the most comfortable, the happiest of times, when the world doesn't lure us into suffering.

It's important to realize that the world is full of 'bait,' full of things that can lure us into problems, but that it's only when we're foolish that we take the bait – it's only then that we have problems. So if we don't let ourselves be foolish, we can avoid doing the things that cause the problems. That's the benefit of Dhamma – the grace of the Buddha is right there to help us, to keep us from sinking into suffering. So having the Dhamma, we have the Buddha,

and having the Buddha we have the Dhamma.

Get to know the Dhamma so necessary for the world so that we can come to know the way to dwell above suffering, because when we know that there's something we can do about it, then we might feel the desire to act. That's the beginning of faith, the faith that we can defeat suffering and that it's the Dhamma that will help us to do that. Then we can practise in the sure knowledge that it's going to be beneficial. If we don't feel this way, there's no belief, no faith, or rather there's the sort of faith that might persuade us to go and see a particular movie, but when we do see clearly what life is like and that there is a way out from that, a way to dwell above suffering, then we can have faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. It's then, perhaps, that we might renounce in order to study the ways and means, and more than that, ordain to have the necessary time for Dhamma study and practice that will bring us closer and closer to the Buddha.

These are the still misunderstood matters of the world and the Dhamma. It's still claimed that one needs to abandon the world in order to attain Dhamma, to quench suffering. But to put an end to that problem, what we really need to do is to manage the world correctly. If there's suffering in life, fix the part that's the problem. Don't allow the causes of it to exist; be clever, get to know the causes of suffering. At present, people aren't much interested in doing that, so they suffer, oscillating between laughter and tears until overtaken by nervous disease or insanity, or if it's worse than that and they're at their wits end, some people might even kill themselves, take poison or jump into the water and drown. But we don't need to do that, and anyway that would be shameful. If one knows the Dhamma, one knows how to control the mind, to change it in such a way that none of that needs to happen.

The Dhamma is thus a necessity for the world; the world must have Dhamma. Humankind – we – must have Dhamma so that we can rise above the world and not sink into it so that we don't have to suffer.

Suppose for a minute that we could go and live with the *ariyas* (the noble ones), then we'd be dwelling 'above' the world, that is, the mind would be above the world but the body would remain in it. The Buddha's physical body and the bodies of arahants dwell in the world, walk around, eat, drink, bathe, etc., in the world, but their minds don't, so there's nothing in the world that can cause them to be happy or unhappy because they dwell 'above' worldly

things. If the mind isn't foolish and doesn't sink in the world, the body doesn't matter. The body won't sink by itself even though it has to live in the world, even though it was born, will age, get sick and will die. If the mind doesn't cling to anything, there won't be a 'me' to be born, etc. We cling, and birth, ageing, sickness, and death become 'mine,' so let birth, ageing, sickness, and death belong to nature.

The bodies of the Buddha and arahants get old, get sick, and die, yet we say that they aren't born, don't age, don't get sick or die. Why? Because they don't cling to anything as 'mine.' So now we won't be born, won't age, get sick or die too; we'll live in just one way, in the Dhamma way. We won't be deceived into taking birth, ageing, sickness and death to be 'mine,' so there won't be a 'me' to experience them. The mind can be this way. It can be trained, can reach this level. If we're interested in studying and practising, the mind can be changed so that it doesn't cling to anything as 'mine.'

To sum up, we ought to live in such a way that we're above the world – which sounds odd – live in the world but be above its influence. But remember it – live in the world, but be above the world. That is, don't sink. Keep the mind above the things that can cause happiness and unhappiness, that can cause suffering. Then we can live in the world but be above its power, above its pressures. The body dwells in the world, and the mind dwells with the body, but the mind is above the pressures of the world. There's no power in the world that can pressure this mind, make it happy or unhappy, make it give rise to greed, anger, and delusion, because it has the Dhamma. The world and the Dhamma are connected in this way – dwelling in the world having conquered its influence, that's Dhamma. The matter is at an end.



BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL
AN INTERVIEW WITH AJAHN BUDDHADĀSA

Interviewed by Christopher Titmuss in February 2531 (1988)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya, Thailand



A Poem

TO THE VOIDNESS

Do works of all kinds with a mind that is void

And then to the voidness give all the fruit

Take food of the voidness as do Holy Saints

And lo! You are dead to yourself from the very beginning.

In 1970, I went to visit Ven. Ajahn Buddhādāsa in his unfenced 250-acre forest monastery in Chaiya, Surat Thani Province, twelve hours on the train south of Bangkok, Thailand. I asked him a question about meaning and purpose in life. I remembered he laughed and then said, ‘If you really want to know, then you have to first understand that there is nothing whatsoever worth grasping onto in life, nothing worth clinging to.’ He then took hold of his monk’s robe, which was draped across his left shoulder, pulled it off and said, ‘Not even this robe and the idea of being a monk is worth grasping.’ He then called a novice over to take me to a hut deep in the forest and told me to reflect on what he had said.

Ven. Ajahn Buddhādāsa (*Ajahn* means ‘Teacher’ and *Buddhādāsa* means ‘servant of the Buddha’) was ordained in 1926 when he was 20 and chose to live in a forest several miles from the present monastery. He engaged in both meditation and personal study of the talks of the Buddha recorded in the Pāli Canon, which amounts to some twenty volumes. For the most part, it was a very solitary life. He once told me that his only teacher and friend was the Buddha.

Nearly fifty years ago, he moved to another forest which was only accessible by a dirt track and was several miles from the nearest village. The people in the villages provided him a hut, and each morning he would receive rice, coconut, and vegetables from the homes of the farmers not far away.

As time went by, word got around about this solitary monk of Thai-Chinese origin living in the forest. Other monks came and requested permission from Ven. Buddhādāsa to live near him in the forest. Nuns also came, so more huts were built. Lay people, first from the immediate area and then from all over the country, began to visit him. People began to record his talks which touched on every conceivable aspect of Dharma, the teachings that deal with human existence. As the years went by, his discourses were transcribed into countless numbers of books. Some of them were translated into English, including *Handbook for Mankind*, *Heart-Wood from the Bo Tree*, *Towards the Truth*, *Mindfulness of Breathing* and *Why Were We Born?*

By the late 1980s, the number of visitors to Suan Mokkh Monastery had reached a staggering 300,000 per year, as coachloads of pilgrims

visited the monastery, having travelled on the new trunk road just outside the forest. The number of huts for the monks had risen to more than a hundred, and a huge spiritual theatre hall and concrete ark had been built for the pilgrims to learn Dharma on their visits. On a 50-acre nearby site, a cloistered international meditation centre and a centre for inter-religious understanding is being built.

Meanwhile, Ven. Buddhādāsa, Thailand's foremost religious speaker, poet, and teacher continues to reside in the same spot as he did when he first arrived in the forest in the early 1940s. His hut has been replaced by a concrete building for him to receive guests. The Dalai Lama has paid him several visits.

In a traditional society like Thailand, Ven. Buddhādāsa has always been regarded as both radical and controversial, although a number of us who have lived with him in the forest regard his teachings as a valid inheritance of the Buddha's message. He has never permitted a temple to be built in the forest.

'If the ultimate truth returns, the world will be bright; if it doesn't return, the world is dark. But now the darkness has become ordinary.'

'The more incense and candles lit, the more it becomes superstition; at best, it's Buddhism for thumbsucking kids.'

'The more material progress, the more insanity with the material; the more insane, the more believing its progress.'

'The heart of Buddhism is on page one of the Bible.'

'Fools say that only time eats us and that we can't eat time.'

'Buddha can be anyone who awakens.'

When I arrived at Wat Suan Mokkh, it was 6.45 a.m. The dawn had just broken through. Outside the room of Ajahn Buddhādāsa were a party of some seventy college students seated on the ground. The Ajahn was seated cross-legged on a concrete bench talking to the students about education. He continues to sit there and talk as the people continue to come every day. He is 82 years old. A servant of the Buddha.

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

Christopher Titmuss: What is the essence of dharma?

Ajahn Buddhādāsa: When we speak of dharma, we speak of three things: natural phenomena, the law of nature, and duty in accordance with the law of nature. Duty means taking the responsibility to solve the problems of life. It means engaging in right conduct to solve all problems of living.

CT: If a person is experiencing suffering or is faced with problems, what must he or she consider in order to engage in right conduct?

AjB: Right conduct is to find out the cause of the suffering. This is the duty of each person. This duty must be practised in accordance with the law of nature. Even the planet suffers the effect of impermanence, the effect that everything is changing all the time, and so everything has to be regarded as not self, as only nature. The concept of ‘self’ is instinctive. Living beings have the instinct of self within.

CT: This instinct of self is so strong that it seems very difficult to see through.

AjB: Instinct deceives humanity into believing that it has a real self. When instinct no longer deceives, then the concept of self has no reality in the mind. A different kind of knowledge is then present in the mind.

We can change from suffering to awakening. The instinct is neutral but it easily becomes defiled.

CT: Do we need to follow a gradual path of changing ourselves, from being trapped in harmful and destructive instincts to enlightenment?

AjB: It can happen suddenly.

CT: In spiritual teachings, there is often an emphasis that desire and craving is the cause of suffering. In Western analysis, causes for human suffering are often regarded as political, social, and economic. These are two different ways of understanding suffering.

AjB: We have to know blind wanting. If the wanting is not blind but is simply to provide and sustain the basic requisites for life, then it is not desire. This unenlightened ignorance creates desire and suffering. Desire for more and more gives birth to the concept of ‘self’ – ‘I’ want, ‘I’ have. The ‘I’ is blind wanting. Blindness wants. Ignorance wants. Ignorance wants more of itself. We have to be clear that it is this ignorance that wants all these things too, even Nirvana.

CT: What do you think of social, political, and economic wanting?

AjB: Right wanting does not lead to selfishness.

CT: There are a growing number of people who are unhappy with property, power, and possessions, but they cannot see an alternative to that. They are also unhappy with religion.

AjB: The question ‘what is religion?’ is an important one. I like to use an old definition of religion. Religion is observation and right conduct in order to bind a human being to the supreme thing. The supreme thing can be described as God or Nirvana. But now religion is full of ceremony and superstition; it is the religion of the fool, so it is not true religion. True religion is the same everywhere. In Christianity, there is an important sentence at the beginning of the Bible. We must not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That means we must not attach to good and evil and discriminate in that way. There is this very high level of teaching in Christianity, but today Christianity has forgotten that instruction.

CT: I first came to see you eighteen years ago and initially spent two or three weeks here. I said to you that I wanted to become a monk and

you said, ‘Anybody who changes their religion does so because they haven’t understood their own.’ Would you still say the same?

AjB: The desire to change one’s religion is ignorance at work. By means of wisdom, one will change oneself. Follow the steps of spiritual training of virtuous action, meditation, and wisdom. This is called *sikkhā* in the Pāli language. It means look inside, see inside, and know inside. It is to know yourself within, to know what is what. It is to know this ‘I’ and to know what this problem of ‘I’ is, the problems of life. The true contentment is realizing that ‘self’ is truly ‘not self.’ ‘Self’ is ‘not-self’ already.

CT: This faith and wisdom you speak of seems to be of a different order. Often in religion, faith seems to be directed towards a God out there, or it is faith in the guru, or a methodology. What you seem to be saying is that faith is present when we look within.

AjB: Yes. Faith inside – look inside, see inside, know inside, know what is simply mental, emotional, physical activity and know it as just that. See into unwholesome activities of the mind. See into the suffering.

CT: Faith and *sikkhā* contribute to wisdom?

AjB: When we see and know what is what, then there is wisdom. Wisdom is to know things directly and to know what to do and what not to do. What is especially important is to know this elusive ‘self.’ The ‘self’ is not to be regarded as a real ‘self.’ Only ignorance makes it seem to be a real ‘self.’ There is only body-mind and observation at work, and any aspect of the human process can do its duty without ‘self,’ without ‘I.’ There is no need to believe in ‘self’ or have a ‘self.’ Every aspect of mind-body is not ‘self,’ not ‘I.’ But this is not nihilism.

CT: Does love and compassion come naturally when every aspect of life is seen to be void of ‘self’?

AjB: You have to know that even in love and compassion there can be ‘self.’ There is the ‘self’ who is the giver and there is the ‘self’ of the receiver. There may be love and compassion, but this is not the supreme instruction, not the supreme thing. Love and compassion alone does not give emancipation or liberation. This was taught in India before the time of the Buddha. In love, there is a small scale ‘self.’

CT: You have lived in this same spot for nearly fifty years. There was only the forest when you came. And today this enormous monastery without walls has built up around you while you have been sitting here. Why do you choose to give your life and your time to receiving countless numbers of people and teaching them dharma? What allows you to do this? You could have gone into the forest and never seen anybody. You could have lived as a recluse, but you have chosen to live and welcome all these people.

AjB: By means of wisdom. Not by means of attachment to 'self.' It is to know what to do and what not to do.

CT: But couldn't some other monk say, 'By means of wisdom I choose to live in solitude.' Your life has been very available for people to come to see you.

AjB: It's convenience only. [*Laughing.*] Some friends or some people come for some instruction.

CT: Isn't that love and compassion?

AjB: One does not have to attach oneself to love and compassion. There is simply duty through wisdom.

CT: One of the criticisms of Buddhism is that we can spend so much time engaged in looking within that we forget about nuclear bombs, we forget about the destruction of the rainforests and poverty and pain elsewhere.

AjB: If we do not see the reality of the mind-body then we cannot stop false and harmful views, harmful thinking, and ignorance. We then cannot know the right way of living. We become too much attached to good and evil. Don't use the word 'detached.' To be detached is another kind of attachment. This only makes a new problem.

CT: Yes. I can understand that.

At the present time there is a lot of discussion between people of different religions. What does Buddhism have to learn from Christianity, and do you think that Christianity can learn from Buddhism?

AjB: Both can learn from each other to discover mutual understanding. I learnt the utmost important principle from one single sentence in the

Book of Genesis: God commanded the couple not to eat of the Tree of Good and Evil. That sentence is the essence and heart of Buddhism. That means not to be enslaved by the value given to good and evil. It is to go beyond the influence of good and evil, beyond positivism and negativism and thus be free and emancipated. That is the heart of Buddhism. Christians did not understand this. They became attached to the instruction of Jesus Christ to love one another. Owing to attachment to good and evil, selfishness occurs. We give up selfishness by not being attached to good and evil. Then in the end of this attachment, we love others automatically.

CT: Some people might say, for example, that the work to save the rainforest, the work to save animals from the laboratories, the work to help people's struggle for peace and justice is doing good as opposed to evil.

AJB: If they are attached to doing good, they have not realised that ultimately there really is not good nor evil, only suchness. Out of wisdom comes action where events are not interpreted as good and bad. First, be beyond good and bad.

CT: Let me give one example where wisdom and action is required. At the present time in Thailand, there is the possibility of a huge dam being built. The authorities say the dam will provide electricity to many people, but the protestors say that the dam will destroy thousands of acres of forest. This seems to be an issue of right conduct. What is your response? Do we have a dam or do we protect the rainforest?

AJB: Not correct. This is surplus knowledge.

CT: Surplus knowledge?

AJB: Material progress will destroy everything. They think they are doing good, but it is selfishness of human beings. Selfishness destroys sentient beings, through the support of ignorance. The problem is inside, so that is where we have to look. The selfishness, the suffering, the cause of suffering, and the cessation of it is within.

CT: What do you see in contemporary society as the role of the monk or nun?

AJB: Their role is to be an example of living a life beyond all problems so

that others will look within and live in the same way. Selfishness in the world is to be destroyed, otherwise the world will be destroyed. Now selfishness rules the world.

CT: How do you feel about the destruction that is happening on the earth?

AjB: No need to be unhappy or happy. We do our duty by means of wisdom and abide in suchness, not in good and evil, not in positive and negative thinking. To help our friends in the whole world to know the dharma is to direct them beyond the influence in the world of positive and negative. So that our friends have a free life, an emancipated life, a liberated life. May all our friends in the world know this.

CT: These days I travel extensively giving dharma teachings. I feel grateful to you for your teachings. For many years, you have emphasised seeing through ‘I,’ ‘me,’ and ‘mine’ and the discovery of suchness.

AjB: To be beyond the influence of positive and negative, we have to be void of ‘self.’ We must know the concept of ‘self.’ To see ‘self’ is to know that it is not a real thing but a concept. We come from the mother’s womb. After that, the senses make contact with this or that and then the wanting takes place in the mind, which is positive or negative. This takes place more and more and more. Then the ‘I’ arises; this delusive appearance is believed to be more than a concept. The emancipated mind is emancipated from this delusion of the reality of ‘self.’ ‘I’ is not a real thing; the ‘I’ is only language. Even the Buddha uses the concept ‘I’ or ‘he’ or ‘she’ but without attachment to giving any meaning to the term. The concept is used just to speak with people in the street because that is the language used. It is to make sense of speaking and thinking.

CT: What is the difference between the two? The ‘I’ arises when speaking and the ‘I’ arises when thinking.

AjB: Language is for the person who has ‘self’ and language is for the person who knows ‘not-self.’ Spiritual teachings need to be in harmony with natural truth. I prefer to see Buddhism, Christianity, and other religions as a natural truth to serve sentient beings, to solve the problems of suffering through not being under the control of positivism and negativism.

- CT: Can I make a small suggestion? Could the title of your book *Handbook for Mankind* be changed to *Handbook for Humankind*? In the West now, we do not use the word ‘mankind’ much at all. We are all human beings.
- AjB: Is human being better than sentient being? [*Laughing.*]
- CT: We have forgotten we are human beings and we have become human havings and human wantings.
- AjB: Then we are not yet human beings, not yet human. We have the wrong system of education in this nation and in the whole world. Education only teaches young people to be clever. They learn knowledge in order to command cleverness, cleverness in selfishness. The teachers cannot govern their own cleverness. The world will be destroyed by cleverness. Teach them to know selfishness, the demon, the satan of human life. It is peculiar that the human world has much more selfishness than the animal world. It is rather funny. We say we are civilised; we are always saying we are more civilised than animals, but we have much more selfishness. Teach there is ‘not-self’ so that there is ‘not-selfishness.’
- CT: Thank you, Ajahn.



MESSAGE FROM SUAN MOKKH LET'S ALL BE BUDDHADĀSAS

An article written on 30 April 2531 (1988)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya

Translated from the Thai by Santikaro Bhikkhu

This article was prepared by Ajahn Buddhādāsa as part of a series of six pamphlets to be distributed at a major exhibition on his life and work organized by Ajahn Ranjuan Indarakamhaeng and other students at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Subsequently, all six pamphlets were published as Messages of Truth from Suan Mokkh.



LET'S ALL BE BUDDHADĀSAS

There is a kind of servitude or slavery that doesn't need abolishing. The more there is of it the better. If we all were such servants, the world would be free of crisis and at peace. What kind of servant is this? A servant of the Buddha, that is, a *buddhadāsa*.

***Buddhadāsa* means one who offers her or his life in service of the Lord Buddha.** We do so feeling indebted to the Buddha's Great Compassion, out of gratitude, and seeing how such a life benefits all humanity. Thus, we wholeheartedly dedicate our bodies and lives to serve the Lord Buddha in every way we can, in order to carry out what we believe to be the Buddha's purpose.

Which Buddha do we serve? To answer in ordinary people language, we serve the historical person who appeared in the world, awakened as a Buddha, and taught sentient beings until the end of his life more than 2,500 years ago. However, if we answer in Dhamma language, we serve the Buddha spoken of in the words "***Whoever sees the Dhamma, sees me; whoever sees me, sees the Dhamma.***" This is the Buddha that exists throughout endless time and is found in everyone who sees the Dhamma, that is, natural truth, the reality of how things naturally are. This natural Buddha is the mindful wisdom (*sati-paññā*) that can quench suffering, as spoken of in the words "***Whoever sees dependent co-arising, sees the Dhamma.***"¹

¹ *Paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent co-arising) is the law of interdependent, mutual causality that shows how everything depends on other things as causes and conditions, especially suffering and the way out of suffering.

If we follow this principle, serving the Buddha simply means serving the wise awareness in oneself that sees the Dhamma so thoroughly as to end suffering in oneself, and then helping others to end suffering also, thus benefiting the people of the world in line with the Buddha's purpose. Servants of the Buddha take this to be the duty of their lives and carry it out wholeheartedly.

How do we serve? We serve by establishing correctness in the study (*pariyatti*) and practice (*paṭipatti*) that lead to true realization (*paṭivedha*) of Dhamma. We serve by helping fellow humans to understand Dhamma, accept Dhamma, use Dhamma, benefit from Dhamma, and live peacefully and coolly with Nibbāna here and now in proportion to the wisdom and ability of each person. We serve by propagating this wisdom throughout this world and all worlds. We disseminate Dhamma among all beings, including celestial and human. Humans are those who must live through their own sweat, while celestials are those who have no personal experience of perspiration. Here 'all worlds' refers to all the places where people wander aimlessly through indulgence in sensuality, physical and material forms, and formless or abstract things, such as power, fate, influence, and even goodness. In people language, 'world' means the externally visible, physical planet on which we live. In Dhamma language, it refers to the worlds within people, that is, the different levels and realms of mind. Dhamma must rule genuinely and thoroughly throughout both this world and all worlds.

How can Dhamma become popular throughout the world? When people from all walks of life incorporate Dhamma into their everyday lives, then everyone will be mindful, wise, clearly aware, calmly collected, and tolerant in carrying out their duties in all times and places, in every moment and square inch of their lives. People will do their duties joyfully all the while they work – not only when they get paid and spend their earnings on the various roads to ruin (*apāyamukha*, vices). They will live righteously all day long, so that when night comes, they can raise their hands reverently and bow to themselves. This is genuine heaven here and now. Nobody will be unemployed because everyone will know that all their work and duties are Dhamma itself, as people knew in ancient times, even before the Buddha appeared.

What is it to be correct in study, practice, and realization? 'Correct' or 'right' doesn't depend here on the standards of logic or speculative philosophy. Rather, something is correct according to Buddhist principles when it results in nobody being harmed or oppressed, and everyone benefits. This can be

experienced directly, without the need to believe an external authority or be told by somebody else (*sandiṭṭhiko*). Anybody can see for themselves when something is correct. Correctness is expressed in flesh and blood (*ehiṇṇasiko*) and it bears fruit unconnected with time – unconnected with past, present, or future lives – because the fruits occur immediately whenever duty is performed (*akāliko*). To be correct means to not bother or harm anyone and to bring good results to all involved, including oneself. The meaning is clear enough; there is no need to argue about it or take each other to court. *Pariyatti* is correct knowledge, *paṭipatti* is correct action, and *paṭivedha* is the correct result simply because one understood and acted correctly.

How can suffering be quenched? When people have sufficient understanding of *suññatā* (voidness), *tathatā* (thusness), and *atammayatā* (unconcoctability), nothing can stir them up or cause them trouble. Their minds don't fall under the power of positivity and negativity because they see everything as impermanent (*aniccam*), prone to decay and suffering (*dukkham*), and not-self (*anattā*). They have peaceful hearts and cool minds in daily life. They don't hunger for anything except the contentment of knowing they have done their duties correctly. Their sweat is holy water that entices the gods and sacred things to help them. They know most clearly and certainly that if they don't live Dhammically, that is, do their duties, then nothing sacred can help them, even a herd of supposedly holy things. When they perform their duties correctly, their very sweat becomes the God, or 'All the Sacred Powers in the Universe,' that alone can help them. These people have firm conviction that whoever they seem to be, that 'self' alone will help them until such (illusory) self is finished and no more help is needed. While selfishness is hot and burns, unselfishness or the end of selfishness is cool and soothes. Whatever they do, they do it with mindful wisdom or right understanding, rather than through the power of selfishness that burns as long as it is around.

How do we end selfishness? We end selfishness by studying the lack of a real, abiding self (*anattā*). Body and mind are natures able to know, think, feel, speak, and act in all kinds of ways without needing any spirit or ghost – self or soul – to possess them. Thus, everything can be done in line with natural law according to whatever results are required. If one is still foolish enough to think there's a self, at least don't be selfish about it; otherwise, it will bite and chew with greed, hatred, and delusion, which are like fires. Be mindful and fully aware when experiencing the objects of the senses, so that experience isn't concocted into selfishness; simply deal with each object

wisely as circumstances require. With right understanding (*sammādiṭṭhi*), see clearly and continuously that selfishness, or clinging to body-mind or the five *khandhas* as ‘self,’ always causes the painful experience of *dukkha*. Such clinging is suffering itself. Without such clinging, *dukkha* can’t happen and life doesn’t get hot and bothered.

What is the highest right understanding? The highest right understanding begins with the knowledge or understanding that all things are concoctions created by causes and conditions, which are themselves concocted and which subsequently lead to the creation of other things through processes that go on endlessly. All this concocting is the stream of change or impermanence called *aniccam*. Due to this constant interaction with inconstant, changing things, they are difficult to bear and endure. This symptom is called *dukkham*. Because there is nothing that is immune to change and unsatisfactoriness, we see that there is no lasting self or entity, that everything is not-self (*anattā*). That everything is transient, unsatisfactory, and without an abiding self is called *dhmmaṭṭhitatā*, the ordinary, natural way things are. They are this way because the law of nature makes them so.

The law of nature is called *dhmmāniyāmatā*. The fact that everything happens according to causes and conditions is called *idappaccayatā*, which is the law of nature equal in power to what people call ‘God.’ That there is nothing able to withstand or block the law of *idappaccayatā* is called *suññatā*, the voidness that is empty of self and any meaning of selfhood. The highest truth is called *tathatā*, thusness, that things are just as they are and don’t jump to our wishes; whoever tries to go against this truth by indulging their desires will be bitten, chewed up, and spit out, that is, will suffer. Finally, there arises the experience of *atammayatā* (unconcoctability), the realization that nothing can be relied on or depended upon ever again, which we express in ordinary street language as ‘I ain’t gonna mess with you no more!’ When dependency is abandoned, the path and its fruits are realized.² *Dhmmaṭṭhiti-ñāṇa*, knowing the truths of all created things, is fulfilled in *atammayatā*. From there follows the group of *nibbāna-ñāṇa*, the insight knowledges that transcend worldly experience and are the beginning of coolness, the core meaning of Nibbāna.

The world is transformed into a cool, peaceful place once it is full

² He later spoke of these insights as ‘the nine eyes.’ They are explained in more detail in *Mindfulness with Breathing: Unveiling the Secrets of Life* (Wisdom, Boston, 1998) and elsewhere.

of *sīladhamma*, the natural, normal unperturbed condition of people's minds. This can happen despite the ordinary busyness and commotion of the external world. A cool peace of mind is easy to find among these people, no matter how confused and tumultuous the situations they are in, because their minds are free of foolish clinging, refusing to fall for the ordinary ways of the world. In a world full of *sīladhamma*, there will be fewer prisons, police stations, courts, psychotherapy clinics, psychiatric hospitals, and suicide hotlines. Loving-kindness and honesty will be common everywhere in such a society, like the world of Phra Sri Ariya Metteya, the future Buddha of Loving-kindness.³ Even if nuclear missiles strike, people will still laugh, being free of clinging to self, and won't see it as anything strange. Due to the power of *sammādiṭṭhi* (right understanding) as explained above, they won't let it stir up any suffering or fear. All of this will be the fruits of the labor of all the buddhadāsas who have done their duties to the fullest of their capabilities and wisdom.

How many buddhadāsas can there be? If we don't overlook them out of carelessness or narrow-mindedness, we will find Servants of the Buddha all over and in great number. However, they don't call themselves 'buddhadāsa,' fearing dishonor, and prefer to be called *upāsaka* and *upāsikā* (devoted followers, men and women who are close to the Buddha and His teaching). Each day during the evening service, they all chant "*Buddhassāhasmi dāso va, Buddho me sāmikissaro*" (I am the Lord Buddha's servant, the Lord Buddha is my master). Are they blindly declaring themselves to be servants of the Buddha without knowing what they mean? Or do they understand the profound meaning of these words? This should be carefully examined.

To be a buddhadāsa truly and fully according to the Buddha's purpose means to carry out that duty perfectly and not just declare something loudly without understanding it. To be a buddhadāsa is to carry out one's duty wholeheartedly and successfully according to the Buddha's purpose. Expressed most succinctly, the Buddha's purpose is for everyone to fully understand, be awakened, and blossom perfectly into life free of suffering. Current understanding treats Nibbāna – which is directly experienced by oneself (*sandiṭṭhikam*), unconnected with time (*akālikam*), for inviting others to come and see (*ehi-passikam*), and the heart of Buddhahood – as something beyond our abilities and, anyway, out-of-date. In effect, this means that Buddhism

³ Tan Ajahn liked to refer to this popular belief, emphasizing that this Buddha would appear when we practiced appropriately and not merely after a certain number of years (popularly believed to be 5,000 following the passing of the Buddha of this era, Gotama).

has disappeared in an unbelievably pitiful way. All who volunteer to be buddhadāsas need to be sufficiently aware of this situation.

Everyone can be a buddhadāsa and has everything needed to be one, lacking only *sammādiṭṭhi*, right understanding or correct view. If we look carefully, we will discover that there are more than a few buddhadāsas around, only they don't reveal themselves because when thoroughly committed it isn't necessary to show off. This invitation to be a buddhadāsa doesn't require declarations or displays. Just do it genuinely by being a good example of the cool, peaceful life; by endeavoring to point out that life to others so they better understand this system of life; and by striving to help fellow humans understand Dhamma. Further, don't consider any of these a favor to anyone or expect anything in return. Everyone can participate more or less; there isn't anyone who is incapable of helping somehow.

Finally, when we Buddhists have carried out the Buddha's purpose to the fullest of our capabilities, the Buddha's wishes will be fulfilled. Benefits and happiness will fill the world; all worlds, including the worlds of celestials (*deva-loka*), tempters (*māra-loka*), and gods (*brahma-loka*); and all beings, including sages (*samaṇa*), priests (*brāhmin*), celestials (*deva*), and humans (*manussa*), fulfilling the Buddha's purpose for the benefit of all beings.⁴

So, please, let's all be buddhadāsas. There's no better time and place than right here and now. Let's do it!



⁴ These various worlds and kinds of beings are mentioned throughout the Suttas, and are chanted every morning in Thai temples:

Yo imaṃ lokaṃ sadevakam samārakam sabrahmakam

Who for this world, including the worlds of benevolent, tempting, and godly beings,

Sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiṃ pajam sadevamanussam

For the benefit of all beings, seekers and sages, celestials and humans,

Sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā pavedesi

Has through supreme insight realized and revealed the final quenching of dukkha.

They may be interpreted literally or as qualities of being or states of existence that one may inhabit at any time, depending on circumstances.

THE THIRD WISH

TO LEAD THE WORLD OUT OF MATERIALISM

A Dhamma lecture given on 27 May 2529 (1986)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya

Translated from the Thai by J. Ratana Nantho Bhikkhu
Edited by BIA volunteers

Three Dhamma lectures were given by Ajahn Buddhādāsa, in the morning, afternoon, and evening of his 80th 'Age Teasing Day' (birthday). Subsequently, they were all made into the book The Three Wishes of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu. What follows is the evening and final lecture.



THE THIRD WISH

TO LEAD THE WORLD OUT OF MATERIALISM

Dear Buddhist and Dhammic friends who are interested in Dhamma, in the third delivery of my discourse, I will begin with the Third Wish as the topic of my talk. The wish is *to lead the world out of materialism*. It sounds uninteresting, but in fact it is a matter that deserves the greatest interest. It is materialism that has become our enemy, and it is even more harmful than anything else one could possibly conceive of, especially in this present age when materialism practically reigns over the world. The charm of materialism has a pull on the heart and mind of every human being on earth, and it forces us to struggle to get more of it until we become deluded, which is the reason behind the arising of selfishness as well as the factor that encourages the thriving of selfishness. The world is thus full of selfishness because human beings are contented with the ‘taste’ of material goods and have become more infatuated with it than any other tastes.

LEARN AND UNDERSTAND THE WORD ‘MATERIALISM’

Some of you may not exactly understand the word ‘materialism.’ Do allow me to elaborate a bit about this matter. I will make a comparison for the sake of easy understanding. It is just like a little mouse telling its mother that it had seen an animal that was most ugly, disgusting and fierce-looking. The little mouse dared not look at it for long. Then this little mouse saw another animal which it thought to be most lovely and worthy of its friendship. The most ugly and fearsome animal which the little mouse talked

about was a hen, or a cock rather, with a cockscomb, while the most lovely animal that the little mouse was well impressed with was a cat! So, this little mouse had such a unique concept of ugliness and beauty. Its disgust for the cock and infatuation with the cat should be reversed. But the poor little mouse somehow felt that the giant (meaning the cat) was lovely and mistook the harmless cock as a dangerous giant.

People in this world are just like the little mouse – they get infatuated with or deluded by the ‘delicious taste’ of material things which will eat into or even devour even their own hearts, and yet as for the ‘delicious taste’ of Dhamma or a sublime mind, they regard it with disgust and fear. For example, they fear Dhamma and they fear any ‘Nibbāna.’ People such as these are like the little mouse, not knowing what a giant is, and failing to know where danger lies.

Taking a close, good look, one can feel that materialism is something beautiful, lovely and enticingly attractive, but it has characteristics comparable to the case of a cat which gets involved with rats. As for the happiness of the mind or ‘Dhammaism’ (a self-invented word taken to mean the tendency to favour or love Dhamma), people tend to perceive it as something boring, disgusting and to be feared. There are people who even declare outright that they hate calmness as there is simply no fun in it – no jumping and no dancing is just no fun, so they also do not like silence. This is materialism which has an enticing power that can tempt people into delusion, and it has a ‘delicious taste’ that appeals to the natural and common feelings of the majority of the general populace.

People also learn to make changes just to increase the enticing power of materialism so that everything which appeals to the human senses is made doubly or many more times attractive or delicious: ‘delicious’ in the context of eyes-perception, that is, making things look even more beautiful than how they used to look; ‘delicious’ to the ears is making something sound pleasant to the ears; ‘delicious’ to the nose means improving the fragrance of odour to its highest quality; ‘delicious’ to the tongue points to the great pains that are taken to advance culinary skills to get the best tastes in food; ‘delicious’ to the skin means making whatever things possible to provide a comfortable feeling for the body skin or sense of touch. Thus, everything is being made, readjusted, or modified in every aspect to yield more attractiveness to the five aspects of material goods. People who are innovative and initiate these adjustments are shrewd opportunists who earn good profits, and so far there seems to be no end

to this kind of material progress. Materialism is indeed the norm of the day.

In these modern days, people are simply infatuated with material goods and services. They buy the kind of things which are not really necessary in their lives and fill their houses with such unnecessary material things. Some go to the extent of borrowing money in order to be able to make their purchases of material goods, just to satisfy their whimsical demand for sensual pleasures. This kind of social behaviour, when overlooked, seems to be a trifling matter. However, when viewed closely, it is obviously a matter of serious and grave concern for it has become a problem that ‘devours’ humankind until we have lost that lofty part of our humanity, living mindlessly with no prospect for a bright and peaceful future, while at the same time worshipping the pleasures of the flesh and skin obtainable from all sorts of material goods and idolizing them as though they were our God.

Take a good look at all those students who are still filling the various academic institutions. They all cherish the hope of getting a good income in the future to ensure a high purchasing power so that they can buy whatever goods or services they want in order to satisfy the needs of the senses which have been ‘set’ on an ascending scale. Competition is ever on the increase, and salaries become insufficient to meet daily expenditures until one may resort to cheating or many corrupt practices and other related corrupt means. This is the impact of materialism. There is no peace and happiness in the world of today. Materialism is the ‘destructive giant’ that is capable of even destroying the whole world. We are, in fact, voluntarily digging our own graves by allowing ourselves to be deluded by materialism.

Delusion in materialism leads to selfishness, which means ‘to be concerned with one’s own self-interests only.’ It amounts to feeding our mental defilement with baits. The mind is a defiled mind, so it cries for baits to be fed to it, whereas a pure and clean mind needs no baits. It needs only some reasonable amount of small spiritual factors for it to survive, that is all. But if it were to be a matter of *kilesa* (mental defilement), the mind would need baits, more baits and even more baits, an endless chain of baits. Therefore, the ‘delicious taste’ of material goods nourishes our defiled craving, and this defiled craving is something felt within the mind. Hence, the mind itself is divided into a particular part which is pure mind and another part which belongs to *kilesa* (defiled desires), and which covers the rest of the mind. Many of us do not know how to make the distinction. Therefore, we get caught or trapped in

our sense of attachment and become deluded to the extreme. There is no one to warn us or to persuade us that it is time to stop our crazy infatuation with materialism, and to be thrifty and reduce our senseless material consumption. There is simply no one to tell us to do just that; but there are many who encourage the pursuit of an ever-increasing materialistic inclination until the whole world is overflowing with materialism.

In academic fields, research is done solely in matters concerning material things. In the field of invention and production research, it is also about material things. So material goods rule the world, and we do not know who is to be held responsible for this state of affairs. If we were to let God assume the responsibility, we do not know exactly where God is. We only talk about God, but we do not really know where He is. So, people who worship materialism more than God are thus turning their backs on God. The chapters in the holy texts of religions become impotent or of no significance. No one believes in them and no one bothers with them. Materialism has the advantage, and so widely has it spread that it rules over the world now.

MATERIALISM MAKES THE WORLD SIMMERING WITH EATING, SENSUALITY AND HONOUR

Now just take a look around and think about this. What do we get from the progress made in material things? And what do we lose? The answer is we get carried away by an engrossing fun of the most delusive nature, and we lose our real peace of mind as a result. So the exchange is done. It is true that we get a lot of comforts, convenience and amusement from material things, but it is delusive – so delusive that it eventually turns us mad, and we lose all of our peace. The world will surely be simmeringly hot, baking hot until it bursts into flame or fire, not the fire that burns papers, but it is the fire which burns the deep inner mind that lies deeply within us. It is the fire of the mind and soul. See what the power of the so-called materialism is capable of. It can just light up the fire in our mind, a fire that is unbearably hot.

I have selected three words for special consideration: ‘eating,’ ‘sensuality,’ and ‘honour.’ This matter of eating is all a matter of ‘delicious tastes,’ not only just about food, but it is also about the ‘delicious taste’ of ‘baits’ of all kinds, waiting for us to eat or ‘get hooked’ on. Putting the mental or spiritual aspect aside, in accordance with nature, our human body needs only a certain amount of food just to survive. This refers to eating food in the

literal sense, not eating baits. But mental defilement, or craving, or desire or whatever you may wish to call it, does not feed on this kind of food. It wants to devour baits which can stimulate the strong feelings of the nervous system. Thus, there are two kinds of eating: the physical body needs to eat food in the literal sense, and the mind, with its desires, needs to feed on baits that satisfy and strengthen the sensual feelings.

This matter about *kāma* (not *kamma* which is a totally different matter) or sensuality has become a matter that is different from pure reproduction. Nature dictates reproduction for a purely biological reason – to ensure the continuation of the species so that it does not become extinct; but human beings are not contented with reproduction for the sake of the continuation of the species.

They seek pleasures in consuming sexual baits and indulge in sexual pleasure (*kāma*) in an increasing intensity. Some people even look upon reproduction as undesirable and disgusting, but even so, most people still come under the influence of *kāma* which necessitates the implementation of birth-control.

Now we come to the word ‘honour.’ ‘Honour’ is not a matter of only the intangibles in relation to mind and consciousness. It is the tool which people want to have in order to use it for seeking material gain. Generally people who have honour or rank keep the honour they have only to be used for seeking other material gains. It is not just honour for honour’s sake, but rather it is a kind of ‘honour’ that implies a power to ‘sweep’ whatever material benefits or gains directly or indirectly into one’s own hands or the hands of whomever it may concern. Looking retrospectively, we can conclude that we do have many problems indeed with regard to matters of eating, sensuality and honour.

MATERIALISM IS A BIG PROBLEM

Now that everybody is more or less becoming a slave of materialism, what are we to do? The fact that many people simply cannot understand the core of their religion is because they have become too immersed in materialism. They are so busy struggling to get the ‘delicious taste’ of all those material things (and sensual pleasures too) that they simply do not care to make serious efforts toward mutual religious understanding. Even if a mutual understanding between religions could be reached, there is still the problem of every member of the entire world community becoming the slave of

materialism. So there is yet a need to deal with this problem after all.

Now, just think about this: the spreading of Dhamma, or the truly right kind of religious teaching, has been a formidable task and has even failed rather miserably these days. What is the obstacle that obstructs or hinders the task? Looking superficially, we will see other insignificant causes, but a deeper and closer scrutiny will reveal the true identity of our enemy – materialism. Materialism has a strong hold on the mind of most people in the world. The influence is so great that people simply become obsessed with their pursuit of material goods and sensual comforts and pleasures until they simply cannot be bothered about taking an interest in religions or Dhamma. Therefore, if this ‘monster’ of materialism cannot be killed, the world will have to put up with living in an ever-increasing suffering that will never end. If the world could be led out of materialism, there would be peace and happiness, but now it is simply impossible to get rid of materialism. The irony is that in spite of the realization that materialism is unhealthy for human spiritual development, people are still very much attracted to it. It can capture the hearts of more people than any other thing can. It seizes the hearts and souls of almost all of us, making this world addicted to the ‘delicious taste’ of material goods.

For those who want to propagate Dhamma or religion, it is most important that they must be able to discern the problem posed by materialism. It is the most realistic and harmful obstacle to the propagation of religion as well as to the hope of a future lasting peace. Therefore, you all are left with this problem to contemplate.

To all of you who are here to receive the delivery of this Dhamma discourse, do look at your own selves properly and ask yourselves a question – why is it that we simply do not like Dhamma? Well, allow me to supply you with an answer – it is because we have become so infatuated with the charm of materialism, even though on the surface we may not like to admit it. In fact, in reality, there is hardly any room in our mind for such a ‘dull’ thing as Dhamma or religion. Once I asked a guy, ‘Do you wish to attain Nibbāna some day?’ He replied, ‘Yes, I would love to,’ but when I told him that there would be no *ramwong* (a kind of Thai dance) in Nibbāna, he shook his head to show that he did not want Nibbāna any more because he liked *ramwong* very much. He must have imagined that in the ‘city of Nibbāna,’ the *ramwong* there would be even more fun than the normal ones here. So, observing carefully, you will see that there is something like this in almost everybody. While claiming to

wish for Nibbāna, the moment someone says there is no ‘delicious taste’ in Nibbāna, a change of heart occurs. See how firmly materialism has seized the world. Are we to let this situation prevail until our death, or are we to help solve the problem by getting the world out of materialism?

WE SHOULD NOT BE THE SLAVES OF MATERIALISM BUT WE SHOULD PRACTICE IN ACCORDANCE WITH ‘DHAMMAISM’

I feel that there is a necessity to hold on to us humankind to prevent all of us from becoming the slaves of materialism; that is, at least let there be some human beings who can manage to resist the charm of materialism and become firmly intent on propagating Dhamma. Well, let me take this opportunity to speak about Dhamma or ‘Dhammaism.’ Materialism and spirituality are a pair of opposites, but to be excessively engrossed in spirituality is also a kind of extreme attachment and would be as harmful as the extreme clinging to material things in materialism. Thus, one must take a middle position between the spiritual mind and the material goods as well as all the sensual pleasures to be derived from material possession, which means one must be able to control both the spiritual mind and the material things. Let there be some form of harmony between the two. It would be a right kind of ‘control,’ just fine for both sides. This right and proper way of conducting oneself is called Dhamma or Dhammaism.

Do not be mistaken that the escape from materialism must necessarily be followed by the attachment to spirituality. It is not necessarily so. Both are open to extremism. The right thing to do is to be in the middle, and it is called Dhammaism. The word ‘Dhamma’ is an important word which must be properly understood.

Now, we still do not have a widespread Dhammaism because materialism has been pulling all the people away. Real spirituality, unlike materialism, fails to attract people in general. It attracts only some people or some groups of people who are fatuous or misguided in the matters of spirituality or mind, and that is only a small number of people who may end up being hermits, ascetics or forest nuns in a wood or forest, posing no problem to anybody or any country. However, to live a life-style of extreme austerity in a forest is of no apparent benefit to anyone. What actually poses a big problem to the world as a whole is no problem other than the problem of materialism.

Life is composed of two things: on the material side, it is the body, and

on the spiritual side, it is the mind. Between these two, there is something that tells truth or the right truth which leans neither to the physical side nor to the spiritual side. It is Dhammaism.

WE OUGHT TO KNOW THE MEANING OF MATERIALISM

Now we are to consider this matter of materialism in particular in the status of its being an evil enemy to humankind. Those of you who have never known the meaning of this word will come to understand it somehow, for the word ‘materialism’ is rather ambiguous.

The first and foremost meaning is ‘the state of getting infatuated with and deluded in the ‘delicious taste’ of material goods.’ People worship the ‘delicious taste’ of material things because it is understandably an easy thing for anyone to get committed to. Babies born out of their mothers’ wombs find it easy to get ‘addicted’ to the taste of material things, beginning with the milk of their mothers for example, right up to more sophisticated food as they grow older. There is simply no need for anyone to teach them. Babies or children will learn by themselves. Not many days after their births, babies learn by instinct to like whatever things that taste delicious to them. Materialism begins to have power over them. Children grow up with delusion about material things. As they get older and older, the *āyatana* (the sense organs) such as the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind have an even higher capacity to spur them toward the ‘addiction’ and delusion in the ‘delicious taste’ of material objects in every possible way. The children have become victims of those devils (*māra*) and monstrous giants of materialism which take them away to worship the ‘delicious taste’ of material goods.

Even though we may not be materialistic to the extent of becoming intensely deluded in sensuality and material goods, the convenience and comfort which material things can offer is enough to persuade us to become worshippers of materialism, so that all we want is only material comfort, not necessarily a more profound form of sensual delight, but some look specifically for the latter. Thus, there are two kinds of materialistic pleasures in all, and most people come under the power of such materialistic inclination. One group of people sinks deeply in the ‘delicious taste’ of sensual pleasures material objects can offer, while another group simply yearns for conveniences and physical comforts such as an air-conditioned room or a nice car for convenient and comfortable traveling. Then they all become contented and

later, much deluded, by their material possession.

People generally seem to know only about the beauty of material objects and do not know not about the beauty of the mind. They know the value of material things but are ignorant of the value of inner virtues of the mind. Thus, they do not understand when they hear such utterings like these: Dhamma has beauty in the beginning, it has beauty in the middle and in the end. Those people simply cannot understand. Even the monks and the novices fail to understand those verses, let alone the ordinary householders and Buddhist followers. It is because people have a mind that knows only about material things and the comforts and conveniences to be derived from them. Hence, they see no pleasure in Dhamma and never care to develop a liking for it. In fact, some people actually chant those verses every day, but they pay no interest to the meaning of what they chant. The Buddha reminded us with these words: *“May all of you spread the Dhamma, proclaim the Dhamma, and let there be beauty in the beginning, in the middle and in the end.”* Now, do our Buddhist preachers know about the beauty of Dhamma at the beginning, in the middle and in the end or not? If the answer is ‘no,’ how are you going to make such a proclamation?

Now we come to matters concerning various rules and principles. The regulating of rules and principles, the writing of historical records, and the making of anything to be evidence, are all done based on material objects because people concerned in such matters know nothing about the spiritual mind. Therefore, a lot of books or texts and various regulations which have been written or set up are mostly matters associated with only material objects, and then the conclusion is that the task is completed, the highest point has been reached, and there is nothing beyond this. Historical records in particular, are being done in this ridiculous way. All historical facts are being based on material evidence, and nothing of the spiritual side is being involved.

Philosophers who define the ‘truth’ of nature or the universe, or whatever it is, also have their definition of truth based on matters relating to material objects, which is superficial. Even in matters of the mind or Dhamma, no truly profound definitions have been offered, and yet people adhere to those principles blindly, believing them to be the right principles whose legitimacy is based on material evidence or scriptural records. This is an even heavier indication of materialism until in the end there arises the overall viewpoint that material goods lead the mind in accordance with the principle of

dialectic materialism. This dialectic materialism is a concept of materialism which comes up with reasons to prove that material goods or objects lead the human mind, just like the communists who adhere to the belief that when material objects or goods are in abundance and good, everything else will be good too. Nowadays, do we not see that material goods lead the mind all along, only to be sunk in the mind? In fact, the mind is sunk deep under heaps or piles of material objects. Materialism leads the world in this way. Those people claim that in all developments in this world or universe, material objects lead the mind. When material objects are fine, the mind is fine. This is a principle that goes against natural law. It is deceptive, most deceptive, but then they still manage to find their own reasons to prove their point until everybody believes them, and they join hands in developing material objects. So materialism will rule the world someday. Even the communists used to think of reigning over the world through development in the material fields.

As for the principles of Dhamma, it is just the reverse. Through Dhamma, one is able to discern fact or truth, that it is the mind which leads the material objects and not the other way round. The thinking process will have to take place before any material object will arise and be what it has to be accordingly. The mind is the tool that leads the body to healthy growth because it is the mind that makes the right choice for the body. When the body is healthy, it helps to improve the mind in return. In a body that is healthy, the mind will also be healthy. This is quite true, but if asked what leads what, material goods or the spiritual mind, the answer, according to Buddhist teaching, is that it is the mind that makes the right choice for the body. Therefore, it leads all the material objects. The mind needs to be set right first, and only then will the material objects be properly used or beneficially utilized. This should be a discernable point.

Therefore, we have to develop the mind first and then direct it to the right and proper usage; then the material objects and the mind will find themselves in their proper places. Thus, the notion that material objects lead the mind is in itself an aspect of materialism.

The materialists are convinced that development depends on material things, and so they set material progress and development as their main target, and the results have been abundant and satisfactory, but this is not in congruity with the fact that the mind leads the material things. In reality, it is the mind

that decides which kind of development should be allowed to be launched so as to benefit the society. Clearly, the right kind of material development depends on the right perception of the mind. However, what actually happens nowadays is that people are more concerned with material gains than moral ideals. They are more interested in the ‘delicious taste’ of material objects and so they claim that progress depends on material things. This is pure materialism. Satisfaction from material consumption leads the mind to seek for even more material objects, and the world is flooded with the development of those material things until all human beings become slaves of materialism. This is what we call ‘true materialism.’

They worship materialism as an ‘ideology’ that helps and ensures survival and regard it as something supreme, beginning with the worshipping of the ‘delicious’ or pleasure of sensuality, or they hold on to all the established rules and principles that seem to place materialism in the position of a God. Thus, materialism is the God of this world of blind delusion.

We live in an age when material goods have become a matter of vital significance that leads and develops the mind. The mind is so influenced by material development that we come to worship the material objects as God, as well as the codes or principles associated with them.

LIFE MUST HAVE BOTH MATERIAL OBJECTS AND SPIRITUALITY

Let us get to know the characteristics of this thing called ‘materialism’ in every possible aspect. We have to know the way to solve our obsession with materialism. We can begin with perceiving things from the right perspectives. Life must have both material objects and spirituality. In the language of Dhamma, they are called *rūpa* (form, visible objects) and *nāma* (mind). Life simply cannot be just a form or a visible object (*rūpa*), nor can it be just a mind (*nāma*); it must be composed of both object and mind (*rūpa + nāma*). Therefore, we need to have the right management in both matters of material objects and mind. If we hold on to only one side, all things would go wrong. The world, taking it as a whole, also consists of objects and mind. The development of the world is being conducted in the manner of mind leading the material objects. It is the minds of human beings that decide what we are to do with the world we dwell upon, and so far our mind has been leading us into developing our world into what it is today. Obviously, it is the mind that leads the material world. Should it be the reverse, the consequences would be very much on the

negative side. In sum, be it an individual human being or the world as a whole, each cannot do without both material objects and spirituality. We must have the right knowledge about both matters.

Now let us get to know even more deeply into the whole matter. Be it a material object or the mind, it is only an element (*dhātu*) of nature; it seems such teaching is found only in Buddhism which stresses that everything is a natural element, be it on the *rūpa* side (form or visible object) or the *nāma* side (spiritual side), including all the states of being or actions and reactions such as happiness, which is considered as an element itself, and even suffering too is an element. There is nothing that is not an element. Even Nibbāna itself is a natural element, but it is the kind of element that is *asaṅkhata*, which means it cannot be conditioned or embellished. It is a truly free natural element, but even so, it still remains an element in accordance with nature or natural laws. As for the other things apart from Nibbāna, they all succumb to the conditioning of *saṅkhāra* (bodily, verbal, and functioning factors). In short, they are subjected to conditioning or embellishment.

So far as I have been learning and noticing, it seems the teaching concerning everything being an element in nature is only found in Buddhism. It is a unique aspect of Buddhist teaching – everything is merely a natural element, be it susceptible to conditioning or not subjected to conditioning. Be it *saṅkhāra* or non-*saṅkhāra*, which is Nibbāna, it still is just a natural element.

To remain sensible and sane, we just have to make sure that we are not overcharmed and overcome by material objects, nor should we dote on spirituality excessively because both material objects and spirituality are simple elements in nature. Thus, we can discern *tathatā*, or the trait of being ‘just the way it is’ in all of them. Those which are subjected to conditioning or embellishment (*saṅkhata-dhātu*) react and ‘struggle’ according to conditioning or embellishing factors, while those that belong to *asaṅkhāra* (that cannot be conditioned) need not strive to react to anything at all, but they just stay firmly in place, forever unshaken no matter what the circumstances are since the mind is already in a state of true liberation, not having a ‘self’ to get attached to. This is what we call ‘to know to the end of the depth of matters which we ought to know,’ insofar as this matter of material objects and mind is concerned. In addition, we also come to know of a third matter which is neither material object nor mind. It is Nibbāna.

Nibbāna transcends embellishment or conditioning; it does not embellish or condition anything and it is not subjected to any embellishment or conditioning too. It simply cannot be embellished. It is a state of mind that ‘transcends the normal mind’ to become a truly liberated mind in which no embellishment, conditioning, or manipulation can take place. Thus, we actually know more than what other people know, for they only know about the body and the ordinary, mundane mind, whereas we know something more and higher up, that is, Nibbāna, which is to be the tool used for halting and extinguishing the charm of the body and mind.

Having known the matter of the mind and materialism to this extent, it would be easier for us to get to know the ways to eliminate the power of materialism. If we were to know only one side, say, the mind, for instance, it would not be balanced. It would be a knowledge with an imbalanced base, thus rendering it impossible for us to get to the real truth for we still do not know enough about the material objects. If we know only about the objects, our knowledge is again inadequate and imbalanced since we still know too little about the mind. Thus, we would not be in a position to reach the Dhamma of true liberation. The Dhammic truth of survival is the truth of true liberation. It comes from the right and complete knowledge that includes the knowledge about material objects and the mind, as well as the knowledge which transcends these two items, being neither material objects nor mind, and comes to be known as Nibbāna. Having learned to this extent, we now know all that is to be used for tackling the difficult issue about materialism. When both the right knowledge concerning the material objects and the spirituality are combined together, it becomes a matter of Dhamma or Dhammaism. Dhammaism is thus a matter of right knowledge of both materialism and spirituality.

However much we know, and if we know only one side of the story, it will set nothing right because it is a one-sided knowledge. Even if we were to know more about the material objects than what we do know now, it still will be of not much help in solving our problems; but of course, it may help us to invent and produce even more surprising and wonderful material things for us to use such as these days when we are coming into the age of the existence of strangely wonderful products relating to such matters like space or atoms until we have such a wonderful machine like computer, which works wonders. There are many more wonderful inventions yet to come, more wonderful than the previous ones, but they are, after all, just a matter of material objects –

products of only a slice of all human knowledge. They alone cannot solve all our human problems.

WE MUST BE INTERESTED IN TURNING LIFE INTO DHAMMA

We should have a complete knowledge of things which concern our lives, both in the material fields and spiritual spheres. If knowledge were to fill a circle, this circle must consist of two portions: one for knowledge concerning material objects while the other is knowledge concerning spirituality. We must have both portions of the circle, which means we know well about matters relating to material objects as well as matters of spirituality, and also matter, which is above or beyond material objects and spirituality. It is a system of Dhamma used as perfect knowledge in eradicating foolishness from the mind and also lifting the mind above all the delusion and evil charm of material objects.

As such, we must be interested in this thing called Dhamma. Dhamma is the ‘state of being right’ with regard to both material objects and the mind. It reflects whether a material object, for example, is ethically sound or wrong.

It is our duty in particular to practice or to act in accordance with this duty until it becomes a normal thing for us to lead a life of Dhamma, or to have Dhamma as the guiding principles of our lives, because right practice in relation to the physical and mental system will lead to the right perception and conduct with regard to material objects and Dhamma or spirituality.

Therefore, bear in mind that the word ‘Dhamma’ implies ‘the state of being morally or ethically right’ on both the material side and the mental aspects of the systems of life. Above and beyond this right system of material objects and mind (spirituality) is a ‘state of being right in all respects’ in other words, it is the ‘state of ultimate rightness.’ If we were to be so ultimately right to this extent, what problems could there be then? We would be able to solve our problems by having Dhamma as our lives, not only material objects or the mind.

Hence, we must have Dhamma, the state of being morally and ethically right regarding both material objects and spirituality, together with whatever it is that is above and beyond material objects and spirituality, in order to collectively form the principles that are to become the system upon which our lifestyle is based. A new word is born, anyway. It is *Dhammajīvī* in Pāli; in Sanskrit it is *Dharmajīvana*. It means ‘having Dhamma as one’s own life.’

Just this word alone is enough to make all material objects or materialism flutter away and disappear into thin air, and it will also shoo away whatever mad or fanatical spirituality that lurks around, and so what remains behind is Dhammaism – the right truth.

When our life is composed of Dhamma, it is just a matter of time before we will reach the truth of all things and phenomena and realize that they are just elements of nature. Being elements of nature, they do not have a ‘self’ or an entity for us to cling to, and hence do not deserve to be regarded as highly desirable. This perception is a way out of materialism.

Take Dhamma as the principles of life, or even better, take it to be life itself; do not take material objects as your life, like some foolish people who say, ‘Oh! This car is my life!’ or ‘Drinking is my life!’ So take life from Dhamma. Make Dhamma your life, or turn your life into Dhamma. Behave or practice according to Dhamma and you will not go wrong. The word ‘Dhamma’ has a most excellent meaning which everyone ought to commit to memory. It is a system of right practice for humanity in every stage of human development and is meant for the benefit of ourselves and others. That is the thing which we call Dhamma.

Dhamma was born out of our knowledge of nature – knowing the complete facts of nature which include: knowing nature itself, knowing the laws of nature, knowing the duty according to the laws of nature, and knowing the consequences which arise from the implementation of the laws of nature. There are five things to be known about Dhamma. The third – the duty in accordance with the laws of nature – is the Dhamma itself. It carries a meaning which has to be known and understood before any other meanings of Dhamma. It reminds us of our duty to do whatever is right according to the laws of nature.

Knowing nature well, we will not senselessly take anything from nature, to lay claim to it as our own. Knowing the laws of nature will help us know the way to restrain whatever traits of nature within us which lean toward the more undesirable side – things which are in the body and mind, elements, aggregates of consciousness or feelings and whatever such things there may be. It also helps us to know our duty in accordance with nature as to how we must perform our duty. That sort of nature will not lead to problems and suffering.

The duty in accordance with the laws of nature is something which can quench suffering. Of all the teachings in Buddhism, there was nothing more

emphatically preached than this matter about the duty in accordance with nature – something which we have to perform rightly if we are to overcome all the suffering.

In the Abhidhamma, there is a word, *cetasika*, which sticks together with the word *citta* (the mind). There is no need to separate it from *citta*. It knows well about matters of the body, the mind, and even Nibbāna; but in the Abhidhamma that people have been learning or teaching, there is a separation of *cetasika* from *citta*, ending up with four matters of *rūpa* (object), *citta* (mind), *cetasika* (mental concomitant factors) and Nibbāna (Nirvana). However, as I have mentioned, it is not necessary to separate *cetasika* and *citta*, the mental factors and the mind. After all, the mind and the mental factors are so intimately connected that they are normally taken as one, and with that, we are still able to understand well the matters about the body, the mind, and Nibbāna.

There is also some teaching concerning *dhātu* (elements). *Rūpa-dhātu* is the element with a form, or in short, it is simply an object. (Visible form); *arūpa-dhātu* is an element with no form but is an object (such as wind), and *nirodha-dhātu* is Nibbāna which is not included in or considered as *rūpa* or *arūpa-dhātu*, visible or invisible element. Nevertheless, it is an element.

If we have learned and know about the state of *dhātu*, element, in this manner, how could we possibly become deluded in material objects? Just think about it: knowing all about material objects and mind and even Nibbāna, which is beyond all conditioning, means we could eliminate the folly of getting deluded and attached to material objects or lopsided spirituality and ideology. In reality, true Buddhists are not likely to become materialists for they are not stupid enough as to fall under the power of materialism because they know about the truth or the Dhamma or Dhammaism, which is meant for restraining both material objects and the mind.

BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE CREATE A LIFE OF DHAMMAISM

Now we come to Dhammaism or ‘the state of being morally sound and right.’ When speaking in the context of actual practice, the Buddha taught about *aṭṭhaṅgika-magga* – the Noble Eightfold Path, which is a matter of ‘rightness’ or doing the right things. There are altogether eight aspects, hence eight paths to this important matter. All the eight paths are grouped together to form a single big path (*magga*) called the Eightfold Path (*aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*). If we have the right knowledge with regard to matters of material objects, the mind

and Nibbāna, we will be able to implement all eight aspects or paths rightly and with ease. A complete practice in the Eightfold Path leads to *Dhammajīvī*, or a life that is Dhamma itself, or having Dhamma as life, or having a life that is morally right in eight aspects: Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) – to be right in opinion, thinking, view, knowledge, belief or whatever it is which is an opinion or view that is right. When the view is right, the intention will be right too. This is Right Thought. And there will be Right Speech, followed by Right Action, then by Right Livelihood. And there is action on the mental side, which is Right Effort. And there is Right Mindfulness, as well as Right *Samādhi* (Right Concentration).

Look into these eight aspects. There is moral rightness in all of them, be it in matters to do with material objects, matters of the mind, or matters transcending the mundane sphere. Matters relating to material objects are just simply a worldly matter; they will somehow remain in the world. If it were to be a matter of Nibbāna, it would be something supramundane (*lokuttara*), which means it is above and beyond the ordinary mundane world. So now we have to get to completely know all these matters of the mundane and supramundane worlds.

If comparisons were to be made, the mind is one of things that deserves much pity. It comes with life. Born out of a mother's womb, it knows no inkling whatsoever. It knows not which way to go. Now when anything comes into contact with it, it will just pounce upon that thing and grab whatever value or worth the thing offers, and the first thing which it grabs is the 'delicious taste' of whichever material or sensual object it happens to pounce upon. Thus, the mind begins to err and become deluded and silly. Thus, it has to receive its punishment corresponding to its foolishness and delusion, and it suffers on and on, until it gets so fed up that it begins to see the truth, realizing that it can no longer put up with the situation and decides that it must change.

So the mind will turn round to study the facts about Dhamma, practice according to the principles and attain Nibbāna in the end. Thus, the mind is said to have emerged from materialism, from objects or body, from matters of the mind to a voidness which is Nibbāna. One who is able to do just this is considered to have reached the most supreme level of humanity, with no delusion, no attachment to, and no sinking in materialism and lopsided spirituality or ideology.

Therefore, do be interested in matters of Dhamma, especially in the

Noble Eightfold Path, which is the way out of problems and sufferings. To speak in an even broader scope, it is the way out of the world – out of every kind of influence that exists in the world, out of the things which have influence over the mind and the world, which for the most part in this present age is no other influence than that of materialism. Yes, it's the way out of the power of materialism! This is the last thing which will help solve our world's present problem of why there is an increase in human suffering. Actually, the trouble is that we tend to develop the material side of our lives until we increasingly turn ourselves into slaves of materialism, and the whole world is following suit. It is most ridiculously ironical that the whole world is cooperating in the development of material objects to entice and delude the entire world's population in senseless attachment to material goods. The whole world sinks in the delusion and burns in the scorching heat of materialism, and it may spread to the world of the *devas* or even *māras*.

**STOP THE DELUSION AND ATTACHMENT TO MATERIAL OBJECTS,
AND DO LEARN ABOUT DHAMMA OR DHAMMAISM**

Therefore, do not be contented with delusion or paradise, divine gifts, *devas* or whatever things there may be. If those things are the delusive tools of sensual pleasures, then they should be regarded more as a matter of madness. Now, think carefully about the 'heaven' which people normally talk about. Based on conventional concepts, heaven seems to be a place full of delusion in materialism. Those communists, being good opportunists as they have always been, take it as an excuse to attack religions as being mad and delusive, something which they rejected. Even the communists rejected the notion of heaven being a place full of an abundance of material objects, where 'materialism' seems to prevail. How could we Buddhists, who are not communists, come to love the things that those communists detest? They reject the materialistic concept of what a heaven would be like more for their own ideological or political reason, but we Buddhists have to reject materialism because it is not conducive to the well-being of our spirituality.

In the end, we have to withdraw or uproot ourselves from materialism. Bear this in mind: one has to depend on one's own self. Even though the Buddha taught us the way of practice for withdrawing from 'self,' He could not do it on our behalf. We have to do it by ourselves. All the Buddha could do was just show us how to do it. It was just like showing someone the way

or the path to go somewhere; if that person would not walk, even the Buddha could not help. “*The Tathāgata has shown the way and yet no one wants to walk the way, so what is there to be said then?*” so asked the Buddha. There is someone to show the way and yet there is no one to walk that way, so what else is there to be done or said?

Let us learn and get to know about the harmfulness and evil charm of materialism that delude people until they get sunk in heaps of material objects. This charm of materialism torments the mind by stimulating people’s desire, driving them into committing all sorts of *kamma* (action), and then they simply have to receive the fruit of the *kamma* committed. Having received the fruit, more desires or mental defilements arise which lead to further committing of even more *kamm*as, and the whole process goes on and on in an endless chain. This is the condition of ‘sinking in materialism’ for the sake of *rūpa-dhamma* (material pleasures) and *arūpa-dhamma* pleasures (non-material pleasures); but the seeking of non-material pleasures is very much less frequent than the love for material pleasures, so we will not talk about it. *Arūpa-dhamma* (immateriality), *arūpa-jhāna* (absorption of the immaterial sphere), and *arūpa-sukha* (formless pleasures) are not matters (and factors) for the elimination of suffering. It has to be Nibbāna that can actually be a factor for the quenching of suffering for it stays above the power of material objects in all respects.

Quickly learn about this aspect of truth, and then the loathing for materialism will begin to take root, enabling one to discern the abuses and harmfulness of materialism. The more one realizes the harm of materialism, the more one will loathe it, and in the end, the mind will turn toward the opposite direction, that is, towards Dhammaism or Nibbāna. When there is contentment or real happiness, true peace and calmness, one will begin to loathe materialism to the extent of not wanting even just to touch it as though it is something so filthy that one even refrains from using one’s own foot to poke it for fear of getting contaminated. The loathing has assumed an intensity because one has realized the real happiness which emerges from a true knowledge of Truth.

BUDDHISTS SHOULD LEARN AND PRACTICE IN ORDER TO GET OUT OF MATERIALISM

Let me tell you this – do try to be the right kind of Buddhists. It helps to turn you into one who knows (the truth), who is awakened (from ignorance)

and who ‘bloom’ (with joy). Know all that is to be known about materialism, the mind, the material objects and Nibbāna. Wake up from ignorance (*avijjā*). Be free from the oppression of all those material things and you will bloom with joy or delight, bloom by the power of Dhamma that never fades. But we use the word ‘bloom,’ which is the manner of the action of flowers. Flowers are most beautiful when they are in full bloom, so bloom like flowers do. However, when there is blooming, there must be fading and withering because after all, it is a matter of material objects which are susceptible to changes and decay; but in a mind which has Dhamma as a thriving, living force, the ‘blooming’ is one that never fades. This is the meaning of Nibbāna.

Delusion in material objects can be compared to a kind of sickness of the mind. It amounts to worshipping material objects as God. This is an illness of the mind that lacks *Sammā-ditṭhi* (right view), and what exists is false view, which is the cause for the developing of sicknesses. Kill false view and destroy ignorance. That will be the cure for the illness. The reliance on the Noble Eightfold Path – the Middle Way – to kill false view and destroy ignorance is the prescription for curing the illness.

However, should anyone refuse to admit that he or she is now suffering from this sickness of the mind, then there is no room for further talks. If we can see that we are at this moment suffering from this kind of illness, sinking in the ‘delicious taste’ of all conditioning factors and experiencing pain because of ignorance and false views, we must not hesitate to kill the causes of the trouble, and the sickness will be cured. The best way to ‘kill’ is to lead a life of Dhamma. Adopt the central theme of Dhamma, which is a system of right practice for humanity in every stage of human development meant for the well-being of all, as the one single definition to be scattered and re-defined into eight aspects forming the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the way out for all living human beings who want to get out of materialism.

**WE MUST PRACTICE DHAMMA AS *DHAMMAJĪVĪ*,
ONLY THEN WILL LIFE BE FREE FROM MATERIALISM**

We have a great intention to pull humankind out of the power of materialism, so we have to propagate enough Dhamma in a proper way so that our fellow human friends may know and practice it and adopt it as *Dhammajīvī*

– or Dhamma as a way of life. This is my third wish – to pull the world out of materialism by promoting Dhamma and a right education. The normal academic knowledge alone will not do in the absence of Dhamma. Even if there is Dhamma, it still will not work if there were to be no actual practice. So we must help to the best of our ability to promote the knowledge and practice of Dhamma and to make sure that people know how to make use of Dhamma to pull the world out of materialism.

To pull the world – which part is to be pulled? How to pull this huge mass? No, that is not the way to do it. To pull all the people in the world out physically or literally? No, that is not the way too. The right way is to pull the mind. Pull the mind of each and every individual out of materialism. Who is able to help pulling whom then? Well, everyone should pull his or her own self (or mind) out of materialism. This is based on the principle that ‘God helps those who help themselves.’ Therefore, the way we can help is to enable each and every individual to have access to the knowledge of freeing oneself from materialism. Help to propagate enough of this knowledge to those who are about to be able to pull their own mind out of the infatuation with material objects. At least it helps to restrain their own mind, preventing it from being swept away by the power of materialism.

Let this message be my reward to you all who have given me a present by coming here to listen to the propagation of Dhamma by the authorities of our Buddhist religion, who come as ‘ambassadors of Buddhism’ or ‘ambassadors of Dhamma.’ They will go out to spread the knowledge so that it is scattered widely among human communities in order that every human being knows how to pull his or her mind out of materialism. In sum, it is an act of pulling the world out of the power of materialism, fulfilling in every respect my intention which has been set up as a wish to pull and help the world get out of the power of materialism.

I beg cooperation and support from all of you for your help in this plan of trying to pull the world out of materialism. There is nothing better and more valuable than your cooperation. May you all strive toward the goal. It will be the highest cooperation of all. When the world is free from the power of materialism, there will be no more disastrous or seriously bad crisis left in it. If we were to be still under the power of materialism, we would be bound

to be selfish, thus paving the way for greed, hatred and ignorance to flood the entire world. Defiled craving or desire would rule the world and suffering would prevail everywhere because of the power of materialism which has the characteristic of appearing lovely, just like the little mouse which perceives the dangerous cat as something lovely to be much adored, while at the same time looking upon the majestic cock with a red cockscomb as something ugly to be feared and not to get near to. The mother rat must tell the little mouse: ‘Oh, dear child, don’t be silly! Ugly and fearsome is the face of the cock, but danger it has not; lovely and pleasing to the eyes is the face of the cat, but beneath it lies your untimely death. Do not be deluded by it, oh dear child!’

Now, let all of us be the little mouse which has received the right and full instruction from its mother, and does not become infatuated with the cat – something that can bring death to it. We are merely ordinary people who are rather ignorant, just like the little mouse. As soon as we have the knowledge and understanding in Dhamma, we will move beyond that state of ignorance, become a clever mouse, be free from the power of the cat, and know how to distinguish between friend and foe. In our present case, apparently materialism is our enemy in full, and Dhamma is our true friend in the fullest sense of the word ‘true.’

Do place yourself on the side of true friend. You will have the Buddha as a *kalyāṇamitta* (true friend) who points the way of Dhamma for you to tread, which is the middle way that would lead you safely through all the problems and suffering in life. According to the findings in the Pāli Canon, the Buddha mentioned the Noble Eightfold Path as the refuge by which humankind may get out of all of their problems and suffering. Treading this Eightfold Path, we will not have any danger or crisis to harass us in our journey through life.

May you all attain some knowledge and understanding in this matter and conduct yourselves properly. That would be amounting to pulling the world out of materialism. This is all I want to say about the Third Wish.

So now all the three wishes have been presented explicitly in full and true perspectives. I beg cooperation from each and everyone of you to make a successful and beneficial fulfillment of my Three Wishes. May you all join hands to make the fulfillment and accomplishment of these three wishes a success, and the resulting fruit will arise for you all to enjoy for it is not meant for me alone. Do help to turn my three wishes into a success and the fruit will be reaped by each and everyone among you all.

May you give your cooperation until the end of it in this manner: may everyone reach the core of his or her religion, may there be mutual understanding between religions, may there be no conflicts, and may everybody be out of the power of materialism.

With this much having been said, I beg to end my discourse for today.



MAY WE LEAVE THIS LEGACY WITH YOU

Short texts written by Buddhadāsa and published in May 2529 (1986).

Translated from the Thai by Ajahn Santikaro

For his 80th ‘Age Teasing Day’ (birthday) in 1986, Tan Ajahn prepared a souvenir book of Dhamma photos, proverbs, sayings, riddles, and legacies for his students. One of the six sections was about the legacies he wished to leave behind. They comprise a concise summary of the main points of his teaching, beginning with certain practical matters. What follows is a selection of 24 out of the 197 Legacies to help people live Dhammically in a society ‘just like that.’



FOREWORD

I have no inheritance to leave behind for Buddhist friends, my comrades in birth, aging, illness, and death, except for what is spelled out in the following statements. My hope is that for however long these legacies are passed along, the activity of Suan Mokkhabalārāma will continue and ‘Buddhadāsa’ will remain in that place for that long.

Please receive these legacies in your contemplation from this very moment, which will create ease in passing them further along.

May you accept them as a Dhamma inheritance for all Dhamma Comrades who have offered body and life in service to the Buddha’s Dispensation for the benefit of human beings throughout the world without the least personal consideration.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Legacy 1



Everyone can be a *buddhadāsa* (servant of the Buddha), if one wants to with a pure heart; just serve in the propagation of Buddhism by setting an example in practice and happy living that others may see and follow.

Legacy 2



Three Vows suitable for all servants of the Buddha to take as their standard in performing their duty for the world's benefit:

1. Strive to realize the heart of one's own religion;
2. Strive to help each other pull ourselves out from under the power of materialism;
3. Strive to create mutual understanding among all religions.

Legacy 6



Gardens of Liberation (Suan Mokkhs) – places that make intimacy with nature mentally and physically convenient – should be set up everywhere for the direct study of nature, for understanding the law of nature, and for sampling the taste of nature, until everyone knows how to love nature, which will help us to understand Dhamma easily.

Legacy 8

Suan Mokkh International, especially for the spiritual light of our fellow human beings from other countries and languages, is an idea that arose when we saw them struggling and searching in order to find themselves. Please help to establish it, then maintain and continue it.

Legacy 25

Sleeping with a wooden pillow is something the Buddha himself recommended as a way to train ourselves in not oversleeping. Māra has no chance to take over the person who doesn't indulge in sleep, who is strong and active both physically and mentally. In those days, both wanderers (*pabbajita*) and warriors slept with wooden pillows, especially, the Licchavi noblemen.

Legacy 26

Please allow me to object to the words 'work is money, money is work.' They are out of line with Buddhism, which teaches us to work as a duty that is proper for all forms of life, rather than to work seeking money to fatten up life so that it delights in the roads to ruin (*apāyamukha*) or in the pleasures that are nothing but 'flashes of insanity.' I leave this legacy of protest with you, also.

Legacy 37



Voidness (*suññatā*) for householders, including women and children, is to be mindful and clearly aware in not feeling attachment towards anything such that love, anger, hatred, fear, worry, longing, envy, and jealousy occur through the power of feeling ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ We insist that everyone has the awareness and strength needed to practice this and ought to practice it, so I leave it as a special legacy for householder.

Legacy 38



The principle of following the footsteps of the *arahants* can be used both by householders and homeless monastics. This is the principle of living life in a way that constantly scrapes away the *kilesa* (defilements) and lessens the familiarity with and tendency (*anusaya*) that causes more *kilesa*, by having *sati-sampajañña* in the moment that sense objects impact, and so not letting anything concoct greed, hatred, and delusion, or if they are concocted, have *sati* stop that mess.

Legacy 41



If all people in the world object to bringing Dhamma into the world, because they think it’s impossible, that’s up to them. We alone, if need be, ought to make ourselves quench all *dukkha* with Dhamma that’s up to the mark. Never be disappointed that so few people are interested in Dhamma.

Legacy 45

The Buddha as understood by most people usually becomes a Himalayan mountain range that obstructs the Dhamma for them because theirs is the Buddha of clinging (*upādāna*) and according to their own particular attachments and biases. Instead, one ought to understand the Buddha in line with reality.

Legacy 56

You ought to turn every piece and particle of your work into Dhamma through the mindful clarity and awareness (*sati-sampajañña*) that Duty itself is Dhamma, fulfilling Duty alone is practicing Dhamma. Then you will have Dhamma with you in all movements, at all times, in all places. All your work will be as enjoyable as playing sports. Already happy in the moments you work, you need not indulge in pleasure houses, night life, and addictions.

Legacy 60

Genuine Buddhist Art is not material art as is generally understood, but is the system of mindful and wise action that marvelously quenches *dukkha* within the hearts of beings, as the Buddha said, with beauty and splendor in the beginning, middle, and end.

Legacy 62



Dhamma exists to help us live in the world victoriously above the world. It's not for us to flee from the world, but to be above any influence of the world, so that we no longer drown in the world. Being 'above the world' is usually taught in such a way that everyone misunderstands and thinks we must flee the world, abandon the world, and throw away the world, in a way that has no value for anyone.

Legacy 65



Sīladhamma (moral behavior) must return for a peaceful world; *Paramatthadhamma* (Supreme Dhamma) must return for an enlightened world. If virtue and moral behavior don't return, the world will go to hell. If Supreme Dhamma doesn't return, the world will go blind. Thus, everyone must help bring them back, as they are absolutely necessary for the world.

Legacy 84



The heaven we can have in all movements is the awareness that one has practiced Dhamma correctly and thus be content with one's actions in every movement such that one can bow to oneself every time one recollects in this way. This is the genuine paradise, here & now. Every other kind of heaven depends on this one.

Legacy 85

Trees can speak and are always teaching Dhamma, only people can't hear. They talk about duty; about the three characteristics (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness); and about peace. And they tell the humans, 'Hey, don't be so crazy!' But people can't hear at all.

Legacy 89

Spiritual marriage with everyone in the world can happen without any of them being aware of it: this means being a companion in *dukkha* to all regarding their birth, aging, illness, and death, with unconditional, universal benevolence (*mettā*).

Legacy 91

According to natural principles of Dhamma, our hearts can be genuinely at ease while doing any work or activity. However, nobody is interested in this genuine kind of happiness because we're always reaching for the kinds of pleasure that deceive and trick, always exchanging the sweat of our labor for such deceitful pleasures.

Legacy 116



Our world must have different kinds and levels of religion in order to encompass all the different kinds of people who live in it. Attempts to create a single religion are both crazy and impossible. Trying to do so only brings difficulties and trouble resulting in more human beings who are unfit to live in this world.

Legacy 125



The more progress, the more craziness, according to the way materialism misleads us. Though led by the noses, we still think that greater material wealth really is progress. Materialism encourages us to chase deep into a jungle of difficult problems that humanity creates for ourselves in our ignorance of what our humanity actually means.

Legacy 126



Living intimately with nature makes it convenient and easy to realize the truths of nature, which ends all the problems that arise from nature because our solutions will be genuine.

Legacy 129

The five precepts in their fullest meaning are contained in the words ‘five kinds of non-violence’: not violating life, not violating property, not violating loved ones, not violating the truth and justice of others, and not violating one’s own clarity of awareness. Here there are no loopholes to be exploited, to avoid responsibility, or to make excuses.

Legacy 132

Real Hell is being so weary with oneself that one cannot respect and bow to oneself. That is the direct opposite of the Heaven here and now in which one is content with oneself enough to honor and bow to oneself with joy. All the other hells and heavens, however many they be, all depend on this kind of Hell and Heaven.

Legacy 133

Realizing *tathatā* – the thusness of everything – is the highest *ñāṇadassana* (insight knowledge-vision) of the Noble Ones. This prevents being surprised by anything and thus radically prevents greedy love, anger, hatred, fear, anxiety, longing, envy, jealousy, doubt, distraction, and all the other characteristics of commoners.



A REAL BLESSING THAT WORKS

*May the Virtues of the Buddha
The highest refuge without doubt
Protect all of you dedicated
To practicing the true path devoutly.*

*May the Virtues of the Dhamma
Which overcomes dukkha
Protect all of you determined
To practice in line with the Dhamma.*

*May the Virtues of the Sangha
That walks the path beautifully
Protect all of you aiming
To follow the path securely and true.*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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

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

ABOUT THE TRANSLATORS

AJAHN SANTIKARO went to Thailand with the Peace Corps in 1980, was ordained as a Theravada monk in 1985, trained at Suan Mokkh under Ajahn Buddhādāsa, and became his primary English translator. Santikaro led meditation retreats at Suan Mokkh for many years, and was unofficial abbot of nearby Dawn Kiam. He is a founding member of Think Sangha, a community of socially engaged Buddhist thinker activists that has given special attention to the ethical and spiritual impact of consumerism and other modern developments.

He returned to the USA's Midwest in 2001 and retired from formal monastic life in 2004. He continues to teach in the Buddhist tradition with an emphasis on the early Pāli sources and the insights of Ajahn Buddhādāsa. He is the founder of Liberation Park, a modern American expression of Buddhist practice, study, and social responsibility in rural Wisconsin. There he continues to study, practice, translate the work of his teacher, teach, and imagine the future of Buddha-Dhamma in the West. (www.liberationpark.org)

Santikaro's major translations include: *Mindfulness with Breathing – A Manual for Serious Beginners*, *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*, *Keys to Natural Truth*, *Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's Ethical Poems from Ethical Calendars 1998-2003*, and *Under the Bodhi Tree – Buddha's Original Vision of Dependent Co-Arising*.

PROF. MONGKOL DEJNAKARINTRA taught Electrical Engineering at the Faculty of Engineering, Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok between 1968 and 2002. He was an outstanding scholar and researcher who authored and translated a number of academic books and articles. His interests cover different areas including science and technology, electrical mathematics, and Buddhism.

In the 1980's, he was a member of a group of Bangkok academics who studied and worked with Ajahn Ranjuan Indarakamhaeng. Professor Mongkol has co-translated with Dhamma friends various teachings of Ajahn Buddhādāsa into English, including these following titles: *The Buddha's Doctrine of Anatta*, *A Buddhist Charter*, *Disadhamma – Mankind's Pathway Dhamma*, *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh*, *Messages of Truth from Suan Mokkh*, and *Some Marvellous Aspects of Theravada Buddhism*.

DHAMMAVIDU BHIKKHU, originally from England, ordained as a novice in 1994 and as a monk in 1995. He lives at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya in South Thailand. He helped to teach meditation to foreign retreatants at Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage for many years, and still does at Dipabhāvan Meditation Center on Samui Island. (www.dhammavidu.com)

Having been interested in rendering the works of Ajahn Buddhādāsa into English for a long time, he started translating in 2010. From *The Dhamma Proclamation Series*, a multivolume collection of Tan Ajahn's major teachings, he completed the following two series: *Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles* and *The Little Dhamma Book*.

J. RATANA NANTHO BHIKKHU is an Indonesian monk. He is fluent in several languages and has been living in Thailand for a long time. He is deeply interested in the teachings of Ajahn Buddhādāsa and has translated some of his books from Thai into English and/or Chinese. He stayed at Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage during the rains retreat of 2000. He currently lives in Nakhon Si Thammarat province in the South of Thailand.

J. Ratana Nantho Bhikkhu's translations include the following titles: *Life Should Be Harnessed by Two Buffaloes*, *A Handbook for a Perfect Form of Anapanasati Bhavana Meditation*, *A Consigned Legacy*, *I and Mine*, *Nibbana*, and *The Three Wishes of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu*.

PROF. LINDSAY FALVEY is an Australian who has lived and worked in and studied about Thailand over more than four decades. His interests range from the essence of Buddhism, to its folk modes of practice in Thailand and surrounding countries, to its integration into everyday life, to his professional area of expertise in agricultural science, in which he holds three doctorates.

His writings include the free translation of Buddhādāsa's lecture reproduced in this volume, a novel based on Jesus life presented in Buddhistic terms – *Dharma as Man*, and an interpretation of the Q document in Buddhistic terms – *The Buddha's Gospel* (freely available at various websites). His involvements in retirement include chairing the board of an international research centre that focuses on developing nations and assisting Thaksin University in Songkhla in an international PhD program and maintaining connections with Chiang Mai University.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWERS

AJAHN CHRISTOPHER TITMUSS, a senior Dharma teacher in the West, offers retreats, leads pilgrimages and Dharma events worldwide. His teachings focus on insight meditation (*vipassana*), the expansive heart and enquiry into emptiness and liberation.

He was a Buddhist monk for six years in Thailand and India from 1970 to 1976. He had two teachers. Ven. Ajahn Dhammadharo of Wat Chai Na, Nakhon Si Thammarat (and later in Suphan Buri) taught him Vipassana. Ajahn Buddhādāsa gave him teachings on Emptiness, dependent arising, non-attachment and liberation. Both teachers encouraged him to teach Dharma in the West. As a traveller, he met Ajahn Buddhādāsa in early 1970 and became one of his first dedicated Western students/monks. He was present at Suan Mokkh when, in 1972, His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Ajahn Buddhādāsa.

Christopher has taught annual Vipassana retreats for 40 years in the Thai Monastery, Bodh Gaya and also annual retreats since 1999 in the Thai Monastery, Sarnath.

Poet, photographer and social critic, he is the author of numerous books including *Light on Enlightenment*, *The Mindfulness Manual*, *Poems from the Edge on Time*, and *Freedom of the Spirit* (which includes the interview with Tan Ajahn).

LEONARDO CHAPELA, a Mexican scholar with a PhD in economics, was doing research work on ‘Buddhist Economics’ when he conducted the interview of Ajahn Buddhādāsa in 1991. His thesis is that Buddhism has influenced the economic behavior in Eastern countries, in a manner similar to that of Protestant Ethics which is believed to have influenced Western economic behavior. Over a period of three years, Leonardo Chapela visited Singapore, Thailand, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Korea and Japan, studying the different types of Buddhism and their influence in shaping the economic and social institutions in those countries.

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THE BUDDHADĀSA INDAPAÑÑO ARCHIVES 'SUAN MOKKH BANGKOK' (BIA)

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

BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU'S THREE RESOLUTIONS

- To help everyone penetrate to the heart of their own religion;
- To create mutual good understanding among all religions;
- To work together to drag the world out of materialism.

MISSIONS OF SUAN MOKKH BANGKOK (BIA)

- To be a Dhamma learning and edutainment center to help people attain Nibbāna;
- To preserve Buddhism through the works, intentions and ideals of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu to help bring back righteousness, peace of body and mind, and wisdom to humankind through Buddhism, to support mutual understanding among Buddhists, and to help people withdraw from the influence of materialism and become 'Buddhadāsas' who serve the Buddha by disseminating His Dhamma by living the Buddhist way until others appreciate and follow their way of life. In the end, every place will become a 'Suan Mokkh,' or a good place to attain Nibbāna;
- To collect, maintain and set up a database for original written works by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, to provide support for education, research, development, publication and exchange of Dhamma knowledge, and to organize activities that promote wisdom and strength of mind to the point where one can remain peaceful, calm and useful with the potential to provide help and support in the material world while going beyond it.

RECOMMENDED READING (BOOKS)

- *Mindfulness with Breathing: A Manual for Serious Beginners*
- *Handbook for Mankind*
- *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh*
- *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*
- *Keys to Natural Truth*
- *The Prison of Life*
- *Paticcasamuppāda: Practical Dependent Origination*
- *Under the Bodhi Tree: Buddha's Original Vision of Dependent Co-Arising*

OTHER LANGUAGES

Some of Budhadāsa Bhikkhu's teachings have already been translated into the following languages:

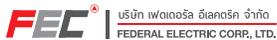
- Czech, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish;
- Chinese, Japanese, Korean;
- Indonesian, Lao, Shan, Tagalog, Telugu, and Vietnamese.

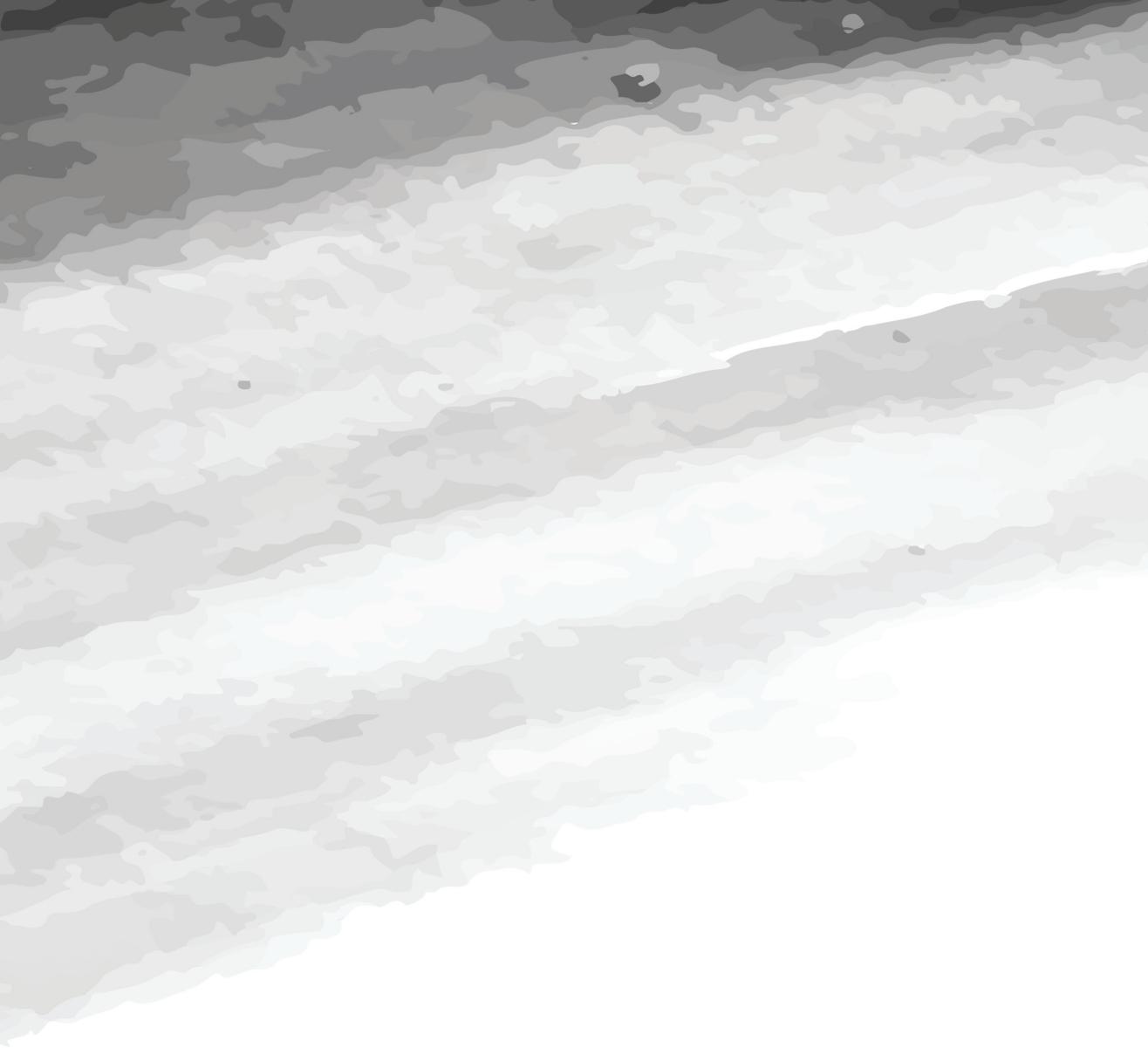
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ONLINE RESOURCES

www.suanmokkh.org

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