



EXCHANGING
DHAMMA
While Fighting

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

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by Nagasena 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 Indapaṇṇo,
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.

Buddha dāsa

*Mokkhabālārāma
Chaiya, 2 November 2530 (1987)
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3 February 2531 (1988)*

EXCHANGING DHAMMA WHILE FIGHTING

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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

¹ MN 4.

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 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

² AN 4.

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

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 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.

⁴ See Cūlatanḥāsāṅkhaya Sutta (MN 37).

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 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.

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]

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.



About the Author

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was born in 1906, the son of a southern Thai mother and an ethnic Chinese father. He followed Thai custom by entering a local monastery in 1926, studied for a couple years in Bangkok, and then founded his own refuge for study and practice in 1932. Since then, he has had a profound influence on not only Thai Buddhism but other religions in Siam and Buddhism in the West. Among his more important accomplishments, he:

- Challenged the hegemony of later commentarial texts with the primacy of the Buddha's original discourses.
- Integrated serious Dhamma study, intellectual creativity, and rigorous practice.
- Explained Buddha-Dhamma with an emphasis on this life, including the possibility of experiencing Nibbāna ourselves.
- Softened the dichotomy between householder and monastic practice, stressing that 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 Translator

Venerable Nagasena Bhikkhu, an Indian citizen, spent a number of years in Thailand, primarily in the 1970s. He was often based at Wat Benjamabopit (The Marble Temple) in Bangkok. After students of Ajahn Buddhadasa introduced him to their teacher's work, he visited Suan Mokkh and carried out a number of the early translations into English. His major translations of Ajahn Buddhadasa's teachings include:

- Towards Buddha-Dhamma (1964)
- The Fruit of Meditation in Extinction Without Remainder - Bodhi Leaves No. B. 33 (1967)
- Mindfulness of Breathing (Anapanasati) by Ven. Acariya Buddhadasa(1975)
- Anapanasati (Mindfulness of Breathing) Vol. I - The Sixteen Steps To Awakening (1976)

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*
- *Living in the Present without Past without Future*
- *Natural Cure for Spiritual Disease: A Guide into Buddhist Science*
- *Nibbāna for Everyone*
- *No Religion*
- *The Prison of Life*
- *Patīccasamuppāda: Practical Dependent Origination*
- *A Single Bowl of Sauce: Teachings beyond Good and Evil*
- *Void Mind*
- *Buddha-Dhamma for Inquiring Minds*
- *Under the Bodhi Tree*
- *Seeing With the Eye of Dhamma*

Online Resources

www.bia.or.th

www.suanmokkh.org

www.kevalaretreat.org

www.youtube.com/@buddhadasabhikkhu7829

www.soundcloud.com/buddhadasa

Buddhadāsa Foundation

Established in 1994, the Buddhadāsa Foundation aims to promote the study and practice of Buddha-Dhamma according to Ven. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's teachings. It encourages compilation and translation of his works from Thai into foreign languages, as well as supports publication of translated teachings for free distribution.



Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives

Established in 2010, the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives collect, maintain, and present the original works of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. Also known as Suan Mokkh Bangkok, it is an innovative place for fostering mutual understanding between traditions, studying and practicing Dhamma.



“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.’”

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

