

NIBBĀNA

From Every Angle



Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles No. 6

Nibbāna from Every Angle

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Translated from the Thai
by Dhammavidū Bhikkhu.

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by Pierre Wittmann.

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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

Dhammavidū (Kenneth Croston) is an Englishman, who, after ordaining as a Buddhist monk, lived for, altogether, seventeen years in the Dhammadūta Hermitage of Suan Mokkh Nanachat (International). He became interested in and subsequently studied the Thai language until able to read it well enough. In particular he devoted his time to the study of Buddhadāsa's work, of which the Dhammaghosana (Dhamma Proclamation) series of books particularly attracted his attention. Having read extensively from the series, he realized the value of the Dhamma revealed by Ajahn Buddhadāsa as something not often met with and of real benefit. Anyone willing to read the Ajahn's work and put into practice what they read will be able to solve their problems, that is, to practice for the ending of *dukkha*. Dhammavidū thus decided to translate what he could of Buddhadāsa's work into the English language. At this time several translations have been completed, some of which have been published, while others are awaiting publication. The Buddhadāsa Foundation considers this Dhammaghosana series of books (*Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles*) ought to be speedily printed, containing, as they do, discourses on many important topics, such as *idappaccayatā*, *suññatā* and so on.

I, as President of The Buddhadāsa Foundation thus would like to thank and *anumodanā* Dhammavidū, who is, with faith and diligence, working to translate these books into the English language.

I hope that these publications will be enduring of use, of value, and of benefit to the readers.

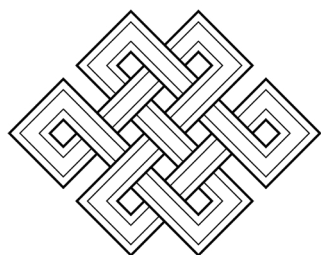
Dhamma, Blessings, and Mettā

Buddhadhammo Bhikkhu

21 April 2558 (2015)

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Nibbāna from Every Angle

*A lecture given on 21 August 2525 (1982)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma.*

Today, we'll take a comprehensive look at *nibbāna* and try to build some understanding of this commonly misunderstood concept. To keep it brief we can limit ourselves to just two main points: the *nibbāna* that the ordinary individual knows, and that which they don't. 'Ordinary individual' refers to everyday people, those with an everyday level of learning.

Putting it bluntly, there's the *nibbāna* the ignorant know, and there's the *nibbāna* that they don't know.

The first kind, which everyday people know about, is the *nibbāna* which has almost no meaning at all and isn't really the concern of Buddhism. In this country children are taught to use certain suitable words to describe death as it relates to animals and to the different social classes, such as ordinary people, those with some distinction, monks, royalty, and so on, thus, when it concerns the Buddha it's taught that *nibbāna* is the proper word to use. This is the everyday understanding of *nibbāna*, that it means 'death,' the

death of a Buddha. But, as the true Buddha can't die, *nibbāna* can't really be about death. Still, this is taught in Thai schools where the teachers, to inculcate the correct use of royal words, teach the children that *nibbāna* is death and is used to denote the death of a Buddha. This sort of thing is repeated by those who don't bother to study Dhamma and who prefer to understand *nibbāna* as a place, a country, to reach which it's necessary to go through an enormous number of births and deaths first. Some of them even say that the country of *nibbāna* isn't a 'fun' place, not worth going to, and that they don't want to go there anyway. And yet one has to wait for an excessively long time to get to it! This is one version of *nibbāna*, an example of the kind the ignorant know about. It represents wrong knowledge of a foolish kind.

The second kind is the *nibbāna* the ignorant don't know, the kind that we don't have to wait an enormous number of lives for, that we don't need to die to experience, the kind that is always available, that sustains us, keeps us safe here and now. What is it? It's the intermittent freedom from the kilesas, from the defilements, because when the defilements don't arise to disturb the mind, there's *nibbāna*. If there's defilement there's heat, there's fire, and should the fires of defilement burn day and night then people would go mad, or even die. But they don't burn the mind day and night, they come and go, come and go, and that intermittent freedom from the heat of defilement is the *nibbāna* which sustains our lives here and now, which allows us to live safely, to stay sane, to stay free from nervous diseases and depression. So, get to know this *nibbāna*, the kind that there's never much interest

in, which is never much heard about, rather is it taught that only after another ten thousand, another hundred thousand lives can we hope to experience *nibbāna*.

Now, we'll need to be on our guard if we're to know this sort of *nibbāna*, so, whenever the mind is cool and peaceful, free from the defilements, take a good look. It's because we don't bother to look that we don't see, and we don't look for it because we don't think that it's there in the first place, but, please, observe, take a good look and see how the mind is when it's undefiled, when it's free from the kilesas, how is it then? It will be cool, when the mind experiences anything and the defilements don't invade, there's coolness, the absence of heat, there's *nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* appears whenever the mind doesn't have the heat of defilement. This is something people aren't ever aware of because they don't look for it. But we should be aware that the defilements aren't present all of the time, that the kilesas come and go, and when they aren't around to burn the mind it dwells with *nibbāna*.

So, when the mind is without the fire of the kilesas there's *nibbāna*, but it's a 'little' *nibbāna*, a temporary *nibbāna*, just a sample we can try. So, make a special effort, observe: when the mind is free of kilesas, how does it feel? Don't follow those who say that mind is always defiled. We say that it can be free from the defilements. The Buddha said that these defilements are *saṅkhāras*, concocted, dependent on causes and conditions, hence they come and go, arise and cease, they aren't always around, rather they arise, persist for a while, and then they quench away. Be aware when the

kilesas have arisen, be aware of their presence, and be aware of their absence. When the kilesas quench from the mind pay close attention to how it feels, because it's then that there isn't the heat, the disturbance, there isn't the greed, the hate, the delusion. How is the mind then? It will be cooled, cooled just for a time because whatever came to contact it didn't concoct the defilements into activity. We might say that it has cooled by chance (*sāmāyika*), that it simply happened, or, that it has been cooled by meeting with something that lead to the cooling (*tadaṅga*).

For instance: let's say that we go to the seaside, then perhaps experiencing the sea air might cause the mind to calm down, to be without defilement. It's a quality of sea air, that it can cause people to feel contented, can cause the mind to be free from the kilesas for a time. On the other hand, perhaps we make *samādhi*, bring the characteristics of samādhi to cover the mind, then the kilesas don't arise and the mind is cool, it tastes the flavour of *nibbāna* because of that samādhi. Any level of samādhi will do, if the mind has samādhi then it will, to whatever extent, be free from the defilements and won't be hot. Even *vipassanā*, a flash of insight that, just for a time, allows the mind to see clearly into *aniccam*, *dukkham*, and *anattā*, but doesn't completely destroy the defilements, will bring the characteristics of *nibbāna* to the fore. These frequent temporary experiences of *nibbāna* arising in dependence on some factor are called *tadaṅga-nibbāna*.

The temporary *nibbānas* that happen by chance are called *sāmāyika-nibbāna*. Both of these kinds of temporary *nibbānas* that come and go, come and go during our daily lives are, even though they don't endure, still *nibbāna*. If they should endure, it would be true and absolute *nibbāna*, which, because it would not change in the normal sense, would be referred to as *anupādisesa-nibbāna*. *Anupādisesa-nibbāna*, true *nibbāna*, will be attained when the defilements are completely cut and an [Arahant](#) arises into the world, but for someone still on the ordinary level of life, still an ordinary individual, there are these occasional *nibbānas* to sustain them. If there were not, there could be insanity, or even death. The defilements often ravage life, but the times when they don't, when there's no defilement, when there's the occasional sort of *nibbāna*, are frequent enough to keep us reasonably sane and free from nervous diseases. We should be grateful for these temporary *nibbānas*, recognising the benefits, we should be thankful for the *nibbāna* that sustains the mind and keeps us from insanity, even if it is only the temporary kind. This is the *nibbāna* that the ignorant don't know, the *nibbāna* that everyday people are unaware of.

The word *nibbāna* means 'cool,' it doesn't mean 'death,' it doesn't mean the death of a Buddha, for instance. The word means cool and has been used in that way since the first, since ancient times. In the [Pāli](#) language, along with other old Indian languages, *nibbāna* meant cool, and people would use the word to indicate coolness. It would have been common

usage around the house, for instance: someone might take the tongs and remove a glowing red coal from the stove, and, when that coal had become black and cool it would be said to be *nibbāna*. People nowadays will smile at this, but the word commonly used to describe anything which had once been hot but had since cooled down was *nibbāna*. When boiled rice is *nibbāna* it can be comfortably eaten, while it can't be if it's still too hot, thus the cook might call to those waiting outside: 'Come and eat, the rice is *nibbāna*.' If one were to say this now people would die laughing, but the word was, in former times, used in this way. Anything hot, once it had cooled down was referred to as *nibbāna*.

Thus the meaning of *nibbāna* is 'cool.' The coolness of material things is called *nibbāna*, the coolness of the body, of the mind, of knowledge, of awareness is called *nibbāna*. Even creatures, wild animals from the forest, once trained until they're no longer dangerous, can be described as *nibbāna*. Observe, then, that *nibbāna* is something useful, something beneficial, not something useless. *Nibbāna* doesn't mean 'dead,' or 'vanished.' Take the meaning to be 'cool,' the coolness of something without heat. What's a little interesting here is that people in Thailand, not in India as far as we know, but in Thailand, talk about a '*nibbāna* tree,' by which they mean a dead tree, not one that has been cut down, rather a tree that is dead but still standing, so that the trunk can still be used. That tree, they say, is *nibbāna*. Ancient people probably knew the meaning of *nibbāna* better than we do now, hence they would say that a tree was *nibbāna* – it was dead, but its

heartwood was still useful, thus it wasn't useless. *Nibbāna* isn't useless; it's beneficial.

Understand *nibbāna* well, it means 'cool,' cool and useful, because coolness brings happiness. If the mind is cool it's comfortable, it's without suffering, there's no nervous disease, no insanity. We should be grateful for the coolness of *nibbāna*.

Now, *nibbāna* has to be discovered in *saṃsāra*.¹ *Saṃsāra* is the opposite of *nibbāna*. The *saṃsāra* is made up of *kilesas*, defilements, of *kammas*, the subsequent deliberated actions, and of *vipākas*, the results of those actions – *kilesa*, *kamma* and *vipāka*. Confusion through the concocting of the *kilesa* into *kamma* and *vipāka*, that itself is suffering, spreading out as the *saṃsāra*. So, in searching for *nibbāna*, it's necessary to seek in the *saṃsāra*, it's necessary to look into *dukkha* to see its quenching. If we want to watch a fire go out where do we look? We look at the fire itself. So, where will we find *nibbāna*, the quenching of *dukkha*? We look at *dukkha* to see its quenching, to see *nibbāna*. The quenching of *dukkha* needs to be experienced right there and then, as it takes place. To believe that it will take many tens of thousands of lives for that to happen is wrong. To be genuine it has to be personally experienced in the moment that it happens, has to be *sandiṭṭhiko*, a personal matter, experienced by oneself there and then, as it occurs. There's really no need to talk about any passage of lifetimes. Whenever there's the quenching of *dukkha* the mind is cooled then and there,

¹ See *The Whirlpool of Saṃsāra (Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles No. 7)* by the same author.

and this is experienced by oneself then and there. *Nibbāna* is a sandiṭṭhiko matter that one sees for oneself, there's no need to die and, after death, go through ten thousand, a hundred thousand more lives to attain it. We must observe the defilements burning in the mind as they are quenched through whatever means. That's *nibbāna*, the cooling of defilements: *tadaṅga-nibbāna*, if something has been done to assist the process, or *sāmāyika-nibbāna*, the *nibbāna* that simply happens now and again. Either way it's *nibbāna*.

See *nibbāna* in the quenching of the defilements that blaze up and make the mind hot, as hot as hell, know this hell, know that this is dukkha, and, when the conditions for its quenching appear, the fires go out and it's cool, then know this coolness too. This is *nibbāna* here and now. Wherever and whenever we're able to practise for the quenching of dukkha, whenever we're able to control the defilements, there's *nibbāna* right there. This is what we call 'nibbāna here and now' – the *nibbāna* that the ignorant don't know about because they only know the *nibbāna* that needs hundreds of thousands of lives to attain, or the *nibbāna* that has to do with the death of a Buddha.

To continue: *nibbāna* isn't a matter of running away, of abandoning the world, neither does it cause a weakening of development. It's often said that we need to leave home, to retreat from the world in order to attain *nibbāna*; it's also said that if anyone has a *nibbāna* mind they won't develop, they will be unable to progress because being *nibbāna* they won't want anything, won't do anything, they will be passive,

disinterested. But this is a wrong understanding. It's not necessary to abandon the world. One can live in the midst of a fire without being burned by it, live in such a way that the defilements don't burn the mind, and right there is *nibbāna*. There's no need to run away, to go and live anywhere else.

Nibbāna is death before dying. Death before death? If this isn't understood properly it just sounds insane, but let the 'I,' the 'me,' the defilements that are 'me' and 'mine,' let them die before the body breaks up and that's 'death before dying.' The defilements that cause the feeling of 'self' die, hence the 'me' dies and can't arise again because wisdom has arisen, there's proper understanding to prevent it, and, should it arise, it will dissolve away immediately. This is called 'death before dying.' Let the 'me,' the 'self' idea die before the body dies and there will be ease and comfort. If we cling to the 'me' idea then we have to bear life, to shoulder it, to cart it around, then life becomes 'heavy,' that's dukkha. Clinging to and carting something heavy around, the five aggregates, is suffering, throwing them off isn't; then there's no need to talk about death anymore because there isn't anyone who will have to die. Living without the weight is cool and comfortable, one might want to call it 'happy,' but the true Dhamma says that it's 'not dukkha,' it's 'dukkha-lessness' here and now.

We don't need to suffer; cause the 'self' to die before the body does, and there won't be any suffering. Then Māra can seek all he likes but he won't find us, because the 'me' he's seeking will already be dead and gone.

Now, it's usually said that one 'goes to' *nibbāna*, but this is wrong, very wrong, because no-one 'goes' to *nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* is the quenching of the defilements right here; there's no need for anyone to go anywhere, just quench the fire of defilement right here, coolness arises, and that's *nibbāna* right here and now. Hence, if we want to be correct we don't talk about 'going to' *nibbāna*. If we insist on going to *nibbāna* we'll never get there because, for one thing, we won't know where to go. If, however, we just stay where we are and quench the defilements then we attain, we 'arrive,' and without having had to go anywhere at all. If anyone mishears this they will say that it's more craziness, but be aware once again that the language used with *nibbāna*, with the *lokuttara* (the transcendent) is always the opposite of that used with the *lokiya*, the worldly. Hence we talk about the *nibbāna* that the ignorant know being of one sort, and that which they don't being of another. If someone says that they can attain *nibbāna* without having to go anywhere it's the most correct way of putting it.

Now, it's correct speech to talk about quenching the aggregates with the *nibbāna-dhātu*, with the *nibbāna* 'element.' The Buddha quenches the *khandhas*, the aggregates with the *parinibbāna-dhātu*, the element of full *nibbāna* or thorough coolness realised by the Buddha at his enlightenment. When he awakens it's said that he attains the *anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*, meaning that he quenches the defilements, the *kilesas*, with the *anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu* (the element of coolness without any residue or fuel remaining). That's 'death before dying,' the complete death

of the defilements, which ‘die’ before the death of the body. When, after many years, the time arrives for the body to break up then it won’t be the Buddha, it will be the body, or the five aggregates, that do the dying. If ordinary people like us die it can’t be said to be a quenching with the *anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*, it would be death with the kilesas: anyone still with defilement dies, or quenches the aggregates with defilement. If one were *sotāpanna* or *sakadāgāmī* (the first two levels of ‘nobility’) it would be said that the aggregates had been quenched with the *saupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu* (the element of coolness with residue or fuel remaining), hence, someone who is *ariya*, noble but not completely so, quenches the aggregates in accordance with their level of nobility. The *sotāpanna*, the *sakadāgāmī*, the *anāgāmī* (the third level) quench by way of the *saupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*, while the Arahant, the Buddha, or the Paccekabuddha (the Silent Buddha) quench via the *anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*.

Don’t go too far and say that *nibbāna* is ‘achieved,’ or that the Buddha ‘*nibbānas*,’ that would be wrong. That which is called ‘Buddha’ cannot die, cannot *nibbāna*, only the kilesas can *nibbāna*: the *kilesas*, the defilements, cool down completely and there is the *anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*. Then, until the time arrives for the body, for the remaining ‘shell’ to die, there’s quenching via the *anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*. It’s said that the *anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu* is attained to by Buddhas and Arahants at the moment when the defilements cease completely, and as the Buddha ends the kilesas when he attains enlightenment, then the full enlightenment of the Buddha is the *parinibbāna* of the

kilesas, and the *parinibbāna* of the kilesas while still alive is known as *anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu* – until the end of life the aggregates will quench into the *anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*. Hence, to say that the aggregates quench into the *nibbāna-dhātu* is correct, is right speech. Ordinarily it's said that there is death with the *nibbāna-dhātu*, which is also right, after all the noble ones die, that is, the aggregates quench into the *nibbāna-dhātu*, whether *sa-upadisesa* or *an-upadisesa*. Worldly people, however, die with the *kilesas*, die with the defilements, because they're still afraid of death, etc.

Something commonly bandied around is that *nibbāna* is a crystal or jewelled city in some world somewhere up above. This is sometimes heard in Thai monastic discourses: 'Nibbāna is a jewelled city in the world above.' This is a dangerous thing to say because it leads some to understand *nibbāna* as a place – rather in the way of another religion where they say that the world above – heaven – is the home of god. That *nibbāna* is a jewelled city somewhere in the sky is conjecture, it isn't literal truth. *Nibbāna* isn't a city or some world somewhere where no-one ever dies, rather *nibbāna* lies in the quenching of the defilements, so, to attain *nibbāna* achieve the quenching of the defilements, attain the undefiled state. If we call the undefiled state 'the city of *nibbāna*,' it could be said that, when the mind reaches that city it attains to *nibbāna*, but if we put it that way it will be misunderstood. Take care! If it's supposed that *nibbāna* is some place or other, it's superstition. *Nibbāna* must be about

the ending of the defilements: quench the defilements right there and *nibbāna* is right there – right there, but in the mind.

To say that the Buddha ‘achieves’ or ‘reaches’ *nibbāna* is a little dangerous, the sort of speech that can lead to wrong understanding. People prefer to say that the Buddha or the Arahant achieves or reaches *nibbāna*, which is very much like saying that they go to, they reach the city of gems in the world up above. If one interprets that statement correctly, it’s not a problem, but if it’s misunderstood, it leads to superstition: a city that one goes to live in, that the Buddha goes to live in is just a superstitious belief. True Arahants don’t go anywhere, don’t achieve anything. *Nibbāna* is the mind without the kilesas; the mind free of the defilements, that’s *nibbāna*. If one uses the word ‘achieve’ it can lead to problems; ‘attains’ is a little better – the mind completely removes the *kilesas*, completely quenches the defilements, then ‘attains’ *nibbāna*, attains ‘normalcy.’

Now, to say that *nibbāna* isn’t about dying in the physical sense, and that it has to be attained to before death happens is the proper way to state the case. *Nibbāna* is the quenching of the fires of defilement, it isn’t the death of a Buddha. Remember that Buddhas don’t ‘die,’ they attain the ‘deathless,’ the *amata-dhamma*. Don’t make the Buddha and the Arahants ‘die,’ that would be wrong. There’s no death other than the ‘death’ of the defilements. *Nibbāna* can be attained before the body breaks up, before death, while there’s still life. This is the most accurate way to put it.

Another point is that *nibbāna* represents the ultimate freedom, the supreme 'voidness,' that is, it's the quenching of the kilesas and thus 'void,' or free of mental heat, free of suffering, of 'me' and 'mine' so that those problems can't arise again. When both the 'me' and the 'mine' are gone that's voidness, that's freedom. Therefore it's said that *nibbāna* is the ultimate voidness: there isn't a 'me,' there isn't a 'mine,' and there isn't the anxiety and worry associated with them, that's the supreme freedom. Remember *paramattha-vohāra*, that is, the language of ultimate truth, the mode of speech that conveys deep meaning, hence the saying '*nibbāna* is the supreme voidness' doesn't mean that *nibbāna* is a vacancy, a 'supreme nothing,' don't understand it as void in the material sense, as being nothing at all, because, in the Dhamma sense, it means that everything is there that should be there, but there's no 'me' and no 'mine,' there's no defilement and no suffering.

Now, another regularly discussed point concerns 'the conditions for *nibbāna*,' that which is a condition for *nibbāna* – a condition for *nibbāna* being that which helps anyone to attain it. True *nibbāna* itself is 'unconditioned' and doesn't require any supporting conditions. If there are conditions for *nibbāna*, they are for the person who stills suffers. If anyone would develop the conditions for the attainment of *nibbāna*, they would need to put an end to the defilements. So, destroying them and their supporting conditions which underlie dukkha is the same as creating the 'conditions for *nibbāna*,' as it's said, although it would really be a condition for that person to *attain* *nibbāna*. For instance: when we

make a donation, when we make merit, if that activity were to become a condition for defilement then our merit-making would have to be motivated by the desire to be born in an elevated manner, into a paradise, or as a god, a goddess, or whatever. If, on the other hand, we make merit with the intention of making a complete end of the clinging to ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ of completely ending the defilements, then it would be the condition for the attainment of *nibbāna*. Anything that destroys the kilesas, everything one does that cuts the defilements is a condition for *nibbāna*. So get to know the conditions that promote *nibbāna*, make much of them and it will be more easily attained to.

Now, don’t let the attainment of *nibbāna* lie too far in the future, don’t let it be a long time coming – ten thousand lives or whatever, one cannot wait that long. So, how, where, and when will *nibbāna* be attained? It’s when we behave properly that the defilements don’t arise, and that any in process of arising quench away, it’s right there and then that *nibbāna* is attained. When behaviour is correct towards *phassa*, sense contact, there’s *nibbāna*. We’ll mention *phassa* again, in fact over and over again until it gets to be annoying, but it’s necessary that we do because the danger lies right there, right at the point of *phassa*, of contact, when the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and the mind meet with the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mind objects and the appropriate *viññāna*, consciousness or cognition, arises to know about it. That’s contact, *phassa*. This happens to everyone, every day, and all the time, because the senses do their duty all the time. When there’s sense contact and the

mind is ignorant then the contact will be ignorant and the defilements must arise. If, however, there's wisdom, if there's sufficiently developed mindfulness and clear understanding when any contact occurs it can be correctly managed so that the defilements don't arise, then there's the coolness of *nibbāna*.

To put it in a nutshell: act correctly in the moment of contact, of *phassa*, during the course of every day that we still have the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, and there and then, in that moment, the *kilesas*, the defilements, won't arise – the absence of the defilements is *nibbāna*. So, if one were to ask how and where is *nibbāna* attained, the answer would be 'when there's correct behaviour towards contact, *phassa*.'

This is the *nibbāna* that the ignorant don't know about. They tend to understand *nibbāna* as being the death of a Buddha, or as a city somewhere – quite where no-one knows – but if we do a lot of merit-making we can go and live there: after tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of lives spent making merit there will be *nibbāna*. That's the *nibbāna* the ignorant know about.

We're disciples of the Buddha, of the one who knew, who was awake, and we, as followers of the Buddha, should be the same, we should know the *nibbāna* which is right and true and cease being foolish.

Consider it as basic that if it's to be the true Buddhist religion, it must include *nibbāna*. This is a general and fundamental principle that needs to be clearly and certainly

understood: if it's the Buddhist religion it must include *nibbāna*, just as, if someone is to be considered Buddhist they should know about *nibbāna*. If they don't then they aren't really Buddhist at all. If there's no doctrine of *nibbāna* it isn't the Buddhasāsana (the Buddhist religion), or if there is a form of *nibbāna* but it has been culled from another ideology and isn't understood in the same way, then it isn't the Buddhist religion either. *Nibbāna* in the Buddhasāsana, within the Buddhist religion, has the meaning of coolness, it's coolness due to the absence of the heat referred to as defilement, *kilesa*. Put out the fire of the *kilesa* completely, destroy all of its fuel, and there is complete quenching of the heat. This is *nibbāna* in the Buddhasāsana. If it's not yet final *nibbāna*, if it's only a temporary experience, then it can be likened to a sample of the merchandise, which is fine, because a sample of cake, for instance, is still cake, the only difference is that it's a small piece. Thus, we get a little 'taste' of *nibbāna* whenever there's freedom from the *kilesas*, whenever there's the absence of greed, aversion, and delusion. What's that coolness like? Taste it, and, if we find it agreeable, perhaps we can cause it to become complete, to endure.

Nibbāna, coolness, appears when the defilements, the *kilesas*, are absent. Because this can happen whenever something impacts the senses, *nibbāna* of this type is called *tadaṅga-nibbāna* (the coolness dependent on a particular factor). What impacts may be lowly or elevated, or a factor of deep meditation. Because these impacts are temporary, the coolness changes and also is called 'temporary *nibbāna*.'

However, if we're clever enough we can prolong the experience, make it longer, make it last longer and longer until it's full and complete coolness. This is the *nibbāna* that the ignorant don't know and which they need to know if they're to overcome their ignorance. Buddhists cannot be ignorant of this subject, if they are they're not really Buddhist at all.

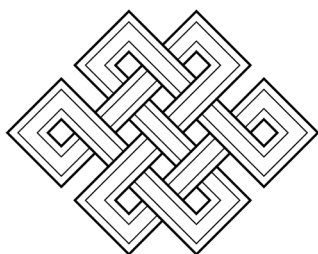
We can work out for ourselves what will come from wrong or right understanding of this matter, we can observe for ourselves that a proper understanding results in the absence of disagreement, of dispute, and that the result of that is coolness, coolness through the power of *nibbāna*.

Think about it a little: we, at this time, are dukkha's friends. Birth, ageing, sickness, and death are our everyday companions, and, given that, how can we benefit from *nibbāna*, how can we, every one of us, help each other to get benefit from it here and now? Well, we can cool ourselves down individually, and, through that, help to cool down our societies, and, perhaps, even cool down the whole world! That would be the greatest benefit, that would be to extract the greatest use from *nibbāna*: everybody, everyone cooled, the whole world cooled, cooled on the level where we keep the defilements under control, or cooled on the level where they're truly finished with.

Have a little of *nibbāna* while living in this world and in the condition we're in. Strive to meet with the undefiled, to keep the kilesa from arising as often as is possible, try to dwell with a mind free from defilement. Make the effort to

study. Seek the opportunity of associating with people who live restraining the defilements and join with them wherever they are, dwell trying to prevent the arising of the kilesas, do that as well as we can and we'll have the corresponding coolness. Cultivate the desire for a cool rather than a hot life, and life will become cooled. It's a certainty that life can be cooled: act wrongly and it's hot, behave properly and it's cool – life can be cooled, just be one of those people who live carefully, who pick their way carefully through life.

There's this wrong comprehension amongst Buddhists where the matter of *nibbāna* is concerned, and so there's abuse, condemnation, insult, disparagement: 'They're wrong, I'm right!' and so on. There's disagreement over the matter of coolness itself, which tends to make the cool into the hot. We think this is something that Buddhists ought to understand properly; then the wrong opinions can fade away and we can come to a correct understanding.



Glossary

Pāli dictionaries are arranged according to the Sanskrit order of characters. The order here is according to the English alphabet, for ease of access for readers new to the early Buddhist texts.¹

anattā, not-self, the fact that all things, without exception and including Nibbāna, are not-self and lack any essence or substance that could properly be regarded as a 'self.' This fact does not deny the existence of things. Rather, this insight realizes that nothing can be owned or controlled, nor be the owner or controller, in any but a relative, conventional sense. Its purpose is practical rather than ideological. ↓

aniccam, impermanent, not-lasting, transient. Conditioned things are ever-changing, constantly arising, manifesting, and ceasing. This is the first fundamental characteristic of conditioned things. ↓

Arahant. Worthy (adj.), worthy one (noun): supremely worthy because far removed from the fires of greed, hatred, delusion, and other egoistic reactions, thereby liberated and awakened. ↓

ariya. Noble, noble ones: stages of awakening beginning with stream entry (*sotāpanna*) and culminating in Arahant. Ajahn Buddhadasa observes that these traditional terms are in 'people language,' conventional terms of apparently existing persons. ↓

¹ Compiled by Santikaro Upasaka.

Dhamma. Truth, nature, law, natural truth, duty, order, 'the way things are': this impossible to translate word has many meanings, the most important of which are nature, the law of nature, our duty according to natural law, and the fruits of doing that duty correctly according to natural law. Also, teachings pointing to Dhamma. ↓

dukkha. Distress, dis-ease, suffering: the main subject of the fourfold ennobling realities (*ariyasacca*). In other contexts, we find *dukkha* as 'pain.' ↓

dukkham, prone to *dukkha*. In Tan Ajahn's Thai usage, this is the same as *dukkhatā*, the unsatisfying aspect of all concocted phenomena. Because *saṅkhāras* are transient, created things, they cannot be bases for lasting well-being and happiness, nor can they be owned or controlled according to our wishes and agendas. Thus, they easily become objects of our dis-ease and suffering, which is as true of pleasant experiences as it is of painful experiences. This is the second fundamental characteristic of conditioned things. ↓

kamma, (Sanskrit *karma*). Action: volitional actions of body, speech, and mind. The consequences or fruit of such actions are *kamma-vipāka*. When actions arise from *kilesa*, the consequences are ultimately destructive. When actions arise from wholesome intentions (*kusala-cetanā*), the consequences are beneficial, yet still egoistic. To end *dukkha*, 'action without an actor' is the way. ↓

khandha, aggregates, groups, bundles: the five subsystems or basic functions which constitute the human being. These groups are not entities in themselves; they are merely categories into which the functional aspects of our lives can be analyzed. None of them are 'self,' 'of self,' 'in self,' or 'my self'; they have nothing to do with 'selfhood' and there is no 'self' apart from them. ↓

kilesa. Defilement, reactive emotions that tarnish and distort mind: greed, hatred, and delusion are the classic exemplars. Further examples include confusion, fear, pride, envy, shame, boredom, dissociation, bypassing, stubbornness, and excitability. ↓

Pāli, the language of the Tipiṭaka and its derivative texts. Pāli was created when the early Buddhist teachings, originally preserved orally in various closely related vernacular languages of the Buddha's time, were compiled and written down with the aid of ancient Sanskrit grammar. Pāli is older than classical Sanskrit and is closely related to a group of languages known as Middle Indo-Aryan. ↓

phassa, the meeting and working together of sense organ, sense object, and cognition (*viññāṇa*). When a sensual stimulus makes enough of an impact upon awareness – that is, has 'meaning' – to draw a response, either ignorant or wise. ↓

samādhi, concentration, collectedness, unification of mind: gathering together of the mental flow and secure establishment of mind. Proper *samādhi* has

the qualities of purity, clarity, stability, calmness, readiness, and gentleness. Its primary characteristic is non-distraction. The supreme *samādhī* is the singleness of mind (*ekaggatā-citta*) that has Nibbāna as its sole concern. In a broader sense, *samādhī* can be translated ‘meditation,’ meaning development of the mind through the power of *samādhī*. ↓

saṅkhāra, concoction, conditioned thing, fabrication; concocting, compounding, conditioning. As a verb, *saṅkhāra* is the endless activity of concocting and change in which new things arise, manifest, and cease. As a noun, *saṅkhāras* are transient, created things acting both as the products of the concocting and the causes of ever new concoctions. ↓

viññāṇa. Cognition: the most basic knowing or awareness of a sensory object. All other cognitive and emotional functions occur once there is *viññāṇa*. For more than a century, ‘consciousness’ has been the standard translation; however, this custom is coming under increasing criticism. ↓



14. สิ่งที่เป็น ขจรชัยแก่นิพพาน (นิพพานขจรชัย ไท่ท) ที่นี้ - เคียงนี้.
 15. ถึง อย่างไร : เมื่อ กระทำถูกต้อง ทอดัสสะ
 ถึง เมื่อไร : เมื่อ กระทำถูกต้อง ทอดัสสะ } (ตามกฎอติพยา
 ถึง ที่ไหน : เมื่อกระทำความถูกต้องทอดัสสะ
 16. ถ้าไม่มีนิพพานนี้ ก็ไม่มีพุทธศาสนา, อย่างจะมีก็ในเคียงอื่น.

สรุปความ : ความความใจนึก ทุกทิศทางของเรื่องนี้ มีผลอย่างไร
 ความเข้าใจถูก ทุกทิศทางของเรื่องนี้ จะมีผลอย่างไร
 พุทธบริษัท แห่งสมัยปัจจุบัน จะไร่เรื่องนี้ให้เป็นประโยชน์
 - อย่างไร.

ทั้งในแง่ของ ตนเอง - สังคม - โลกทั้งโลก.

ทั้งในแง่ ของ โลกทิพย์ และ โลกุตระ.

ท่านอาจสงสัยคำว่า โลกิยะในที่นี้.

ตอบ : ก็คือเมื่อยังคงอยู่ในโลกนี้ ก็มีทั้งหังค-สามาชิก
 ความมีตามโค โน้นเอง, ชีวิตจะเย็นไปพลาง

Ref. Archives document of the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives:
Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles (21 August 2525).
 BIA 3.1/14 Box 4. Pages 57-58.

◇ www.archives.bia.or.th ◇

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 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 (Suan Mokkh).

After a series of illnesses, including strokes, he died in 1993. He was cremated without the usual pomp and expense. ↓

About the Translator

Dhammavidū Bhikkhu, originally from England, ordained as a monk in 1995 and has lived at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, in South Thailand since then. He has helped to teach meditation to foreign retreatants at Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage and Dipabhāvan Meditation Center at Samui Island. As a translator from Thai into English, he has been particularly interested in *The Dhamma Proclamation* series, a multivolume collection of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's major teachings. ↓

Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles

- 1. *Idappaccayatā: The Buddhist Law of Nature*
- 2. *Void Mind*
- 3. *Living in the Present Without Past Without Future*
- 4. *Concerning Birth*
- 5. *Concerning God*
- 6. *Nibbāna from Every Angle*
- 7. *The Whirlpool of Saṃsāra*
- 8. *The World and Dhamma* ↓

Recommended Reading (Books)

- *The A, B, C of Buddhism & The Meditative Development of Mindfulness of Breathing*
- *Mindfulness With Breathing: A Manual for Serious Beginners*
- *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh*
- *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*
- *Keys to Natural Truth*
- *The Prison of Life*
- *Void Mind*
- *Living in the Present Without Past Without Future*
- *A Single Bowl of Sauce: Teachings Beyond Good and Evil*
- *Under the Bodhi Tree: Buddha's Original Vision of Dependent Co-Arising*

Online Resources

- www.suanmokkh.org
- www.suanmokkh-idh.org
- www.bia.or.th

The 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.



The 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.

