

The background is an abstract painting featuring thick, expressive brushstrokes in various shades of blue, white, and light yellow. The composition is layered, with some areas appearing more saturated and others more ethereal, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is reminiscent of a seascape or a sky filled with soft, billowing clouds.

TWO KINDS OF **LANGUAGE:**

Everyday Language
& Dhamma Language

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

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Translated from the Thai (ภาษาคน ภาษาธรรม)
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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 Buddhadāsa 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.

Buddha dāsa

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

TWO KINDS OF LANGUAGE:

Everyday Language & Dhamma Language

*Lecture at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya
on 8 October 1966*

Today's talk is rather special. Time and time again I have noticed that, regardless of how the subject is explained, there are a great many aspects of the more profound teaching that the majority of people don't understand at all. People hear things explained many times over and still don't understand. Why is this? If we look into it, we discover the reason. Most of us are familiar only with everyday language, the language spoken by the ordinary person, ordinary worldly language. We fail to realize the existence of another quite different and very special language: the language of religion, the language of Dhamma.

The language of Dhamma is something altogether different from the language of everyday. This point must be borne well in mind. Everyday language and Dhamma language are two distinct and different modes of speaking. Everyday language is worldly Dhamma language is the language spoken by people who have gained a deep insight into the Truth, into Dhamma. Having perceived Dhamma, they speak in terms appropriate to their experience, and so Dhamma language comes into being. This special mode of speaking is what we call Dhamma language. It is a language quite distinct from ordinary everyday language.

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

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

The point now is that if we know only everyday language, we are in no position to understand true Dhamma when we hear it. If we don't know the language of Dhamma, then we can't understand Dhamma, the supramundane Truth that can truly liberate us from unsatisfactoriness and misery (*dukkha*). The reason we don't understand Dhamma is that we know only everyday language and are not familiar with Dhamma language.

It is essential always to interpret the Buddha's teaching in terms of Dhamma language as well as in terms of everyday language. Both meanings must be considered. Please take careful note of the following passages:

*Appamatto ubho atthe adhigaṇhāti paṇḍito,
Diṭṭhe dhamma ca yo attho, yo ca'ttho samparāyiko.
Atthābhisamayādhiro paṇḍito ti pavuccati.*

The wise and heedful person is familiar with both modes of speaking: the meaning seen by ordinary people and the meaning which they can't understand. One who is fluent in the various modes of speaking is a wise person.¹

This is a general principle to be applied when studying Dhamma, whether at a high or low level. It is also applicable in ordinary spoken language. The passages cited contain the unambiguous expression “*ubho atthe*,” that is “both meanings” or “both modes of speaking.”² A discerning person must consider both meanings or modes of speaking and not just one of them alone.³ Anyone who, for instance, considers only the ordinary everyday meaning and ignores the other meaning, the meaning in terms of Dhamma language, cannot be called a wise or discerning person. As the Buddha said, a discerning person is one who is able to take into consideration both modes of speaking. It behoves us, then, to be careful and to study diligently in order to acquire this ability to take into account both possible interpretations, the one in terms of everyday language and the other in terms of Dhamma language.

We shall now consider some examples of what I mean. Each of the following words will be explained according to both everyday language and Dhamma language. This should enable you to clearly understand both modes of expression.

BUDDHA

The first example is the word “Buddha.” As you know, the word “Buddha” in everyday language refers to the historical

¹ Saṃyutta Nikāya I 87. (The author's interpretation differs from the orthodox reading of this passage.)

² **Attha** can be translated “meaning” or “benefit, purpose.”

³ Although some words may have more than two levels of meaning, all of them will fit into these two modes.

Enlightened Being, Gotama Buddha. It refers to a physical man of flesh and bone who was born in India over two thousand years ago, died, and was cremated. This is the meaning of the word “Buddha” in everyday language.

Considered in terms of Dhamma language, however, the word “Buddha” refers to the Truth which the historical Buddha realized and taught, namely the Dhamma itself. The Buddha said:

One who sees the Dhamma sees the Tathāgata.⁴ One who sees the Tathāgata sees the Dhamma. One who sees not the Dhamma, though grasping at the robe of the Tathāgata, cannot be said to have seen the Tathāgata.

Now, the Dhamma is something intangible. It is not something physical, certainly not flesh and bones. Yet the Buddha said it is one and the same as the Enlightened One. “One who sees the Dhamma sees the Tathāgata.” Anyone who fails to see the Dhamma cannot be said to have seen the Enlightened One. So in Dhamma language, the Buddha is one and the same as that Truth by virtue of which he became the Buddha, and anyone who sees that Truth can be said to have seen the true Buddha. To see just his physical body would not be to see the Buddha at all and would bring no real benefit.

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

Again, the Buddha said, “The Dhamma and the *Vinaya* (Discipline), which I have proclaimed and have demonstrated, these shall be your teacher when I have passed away.” Thus the real

⁴ “One gone to thusness (*tathatā*): a word the Buddha often used to refer to himself.”

Buddha has not passed away, has not ceased to exist. What ceased to exist was just the physical body, the outer shell. The real Teacher, that is, the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, is still with us. This is the meaning of the word “Buddha” in Dhamma language. The “Buddha” of everyday language is the physical man; the “Buddha” of Dhamma language, is the Dhamma itself, which made him Buddha.

DHAMMA

The second word to consider is “Dhamma” (*Dharma* in Sanskrit). At the childish level of everyday language, this word is understood as referring to the actual books that contain the scriptures, the “Dhamma” in the bookcase. Or it may be understood as referring to the spoken word used in expounding the Teaching. This is the meaning of the word “Dhamma” in everyday language, the language of deluded people who have not yet seen the true Dhamma.

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

1. Nature itself;
2. The Law of Nature;
3. The duty of each human being to act in accordance with the Law of Nature;
4. The benefits to be derived from this acting in accordance with the Law of Nature.

This is the wide range of meaning covered by the word “Dhamma.” It does not refer simply to books, palm-leaf manuscripts, or the voices of preachers. The word “Dhamma,” as used in Dhamma language, refers to non-material things. Dhamma is all-embracing; it is profound; it includes all things, some difficult to understand and some not so difficult.

SAṄGHA

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

The Saṅgha of everyday language is the assembly of monks themselves. The Saṅgha of Dhamma language are those high qualities in the minds of the monks. The Saṅgha proper consists of these four levels: the stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), the once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*), the non-returner (*anāgāmi*), and the fully perfected being (*arahant*, worthy one, undefiled by any egoism). These terms, too, refer to mental rather than physical qualities, because the physical frames of these people are in no way different from those of anyone else. Where they do differ is in mental or spiritual qualities. This is what makes a person a stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner, or *arahant*. This is how the word “Saṅgha” is to be understood in Dhamma language.

RELIGION

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

In Dhamma language, the word “religion” refers to the

genuine Dhamma which can truly serve people as a refuge or point of support. The Dhamma which actually can be for people a basis of support, which really can bring about the end of *dukkha* (suffering, misery, unsatisfactoriness), this Dhamma is the religion. This is the meaning of “religion” as that term is used in Dhamma language. “The religion is thriving” means that this very special something which has the power to put an end to *dukkha* is spreading and expanding among people. To say that the religion is thriving does not by any means imply progress in terms of yellow robes. The religion in everyday language is temples, monastery buildings, pagodas, yellow robes, and so on; the religion in Dhamma language is the truth which genuinely serves humanity as a refuge.

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

In terms of Dhamma language, the religion is “the Sublime or Excellent Way of Life” (*brahmacariyā*), that is to say, life lived in accordance with Dhamma. It is this exalted way of living which is “glorious in its beginning, middle, and end.” By Sublime Way of Life the Buddha meant the way of practice that can really extinguish *dukkha* (suffering). The glory of its beginning is study and learning; the glory of its middle is the practice; the glory of its end is the real reward that comes from the practice. This is the Sublime Way of Life, the religion of Dhamma language. Taken as everyday language, “religion” means at best the teaching; taken as Dhamma language, it means the Sublime Way of Life, glorious in its beginning, middle, and end. The two meanings are very different.

WORK

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

language, the word “work” refers to earning a living. It is something we can’t avoid. We have to work in order to eat, to fill the belly, and to satisfy sensual desires. This unavoidable chore of earning a living is what is meant by the word “work” taken as everyday language. Taken as Dhamma language, “work” refers to mind training—*kammaṭṭhāna*⁵, that is, the practice of Dhamma. The actual practice of Dhamma is the Work.

Ordinary people, those who have not seen Dhamma, work out of necessity in order to provide themselves with food and the things they desire. But for the genuine aspirant, the person who has caught a glimpse of Dhamma, work consists in putting the Dhamma into practice. This kind of work has to be done sincerely, earnestly, and diligently, with perseverance and discernment. Many kinds of high qualities must be present if it is to be completed successfully.

The work of everyday language can be considered at a higher level. Though our work may be of a worldly nature, if we do it the right way, then ultimately that work will teach us. It will bring us to an understanding of the true nature of the mental life; it will enable us to recognize impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood (*aniccam, dukkham, anattā*); it will bring us to the truth, without our making any conscious effort in that direction. So in Dhamma language, “work” refers to the practice that leads to the truth found right in one’s own mind. Even the job of keeping the body fit and clean is a kind of Dhamma practice, insofar as it has to be done with a good, discerning, industrious mind.

In summary, “work” in everyday language means earning a living out of necessity; “work” in Dhamma language means putting the Dhamma into practice. The word “*kammaṭṭhāna*” (mind training) means work, good solid Dhamma practice. This is the meaning of “work” in Dhamma language.

⁵ Literally, “working ground”, meditation or meditation objects.

SUBLIME LIFE

Let us say something more about the Sublime Way of Life. In the everyday language of the average person who knows nothing of Dhamma, the words “Sublime Life” (*brahmacariyā*) mean no more than abstention from improper sexual activity. But in Dhamma language, Sublime Way of Life refers to any kind of purposeful giving up of mental defilement (*kilesa*) and to any form of spiritual practice which is adhered to rigorously. Regardless of what kind of practice we undertake, if we stick to it earnestly, strictly, and without backsliding, then we are living this most exalted way of life. Sublime doesn’t mean simply abstaining from fornication and adultery. This is how everyday language and Dhamma language differ.

NIBBĀNA

Now we make a big jump to the word “*nibbāna*” (*nirvāna* in Sanskrit). In the everyday language of the ordinary person, *nibbāna* is a place or a city. This is because preachers often speak of “*Nibbāna*, the city of immortality” or “this wonder-city of *Nibbāna*.” People hearing this misunderstand it. They take it to mean that *nibbāna* is an actual city or place. What is more, they even believe that it is a place abounding in all sorts of good things, a place where one’s every wish is fulfilled and everything one wants is immediately available. They want to get to *nibbāna* because it is the place where all wishes are granted. This is *nibbāna* in the everyday language of foolish people who know nothing of Dhamma. Yet this kind of talk can be heard all over the place, even in most temples.

In Dhamma language, the word “*nibbāna*” refers to the complete and absolute extinction of every kind of defilement and misery. Any time there is freedom from *kilesa*⁶ and *dukkha*, there is *nibbāna*. If defilements have been eradicated completely, it is permanent *nibbāna*: the total extinguishing and cooling of the fire of *kilesa* and *dukkha*. This is *nibbāna* in Dhamma language. In everyday language, *nibbāna* is a dream city; in Dhamma language, *nibbāna* is

⁶ Defilements of mind, broadly categorized into greed, hatred, and delusion

the complete and utter extinction of *dukkha* right here and now. Think about it. In which of these two ways is *nibbāna* understood by most people, in particular by the old folk who come to listen to sermons in temples?

PATH AND FRUIT

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

But in Dhamma language, “path and fruit” refers to the destruction of *dukkha* and the defilements which give rise to it. To do this in the right manner, step by step, in accordance with the true nature of things, is the meaning of “path and fruit” in Dhamma language. People are much given to using the expression “path and fruit” in everyday speech. To distinguish this everyday usage from the special usage of Dhamma language, we have to be very careful.

MĀRA

Now we turn to a rather strange word, the word “*Māra*” (the tempter, the devil). The *Māra* of everyday language is conceived as a kind of monster with body, face, and eyes of repulsive and terrifying appearance. *Māra* in Dhamma language, however, is not a living creature but rather any kind of mental state opposed to the good and wholesome and to progress towards the cessation of *dukkha*. That which opposes and obstructs spiritual progress is called *Māra*. We may think of *Māra* as a living being if we wish, as long as we understand what he really stands for.

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

In Dhamma language, the word "*Māra*" means at worst the heaven known as *Paranimmitavasavattī*, the highest realm of sensuality. In general it means any mental state opposed to the good and wholesome, opposed to spiritual progress. This is *Māra* in Dhamma language.

WORLD

Now we shall say something about the word "world" (*loka*). In everyday language, the word "world" refers to the Earth, this physical world, flat or round or however you conceive it. The "world" as the physical Earth is everyday language. In Dhamma language, however, the word "world" refers to worldly (*lokiya*) mental states, the worldly stages in the scale of mental development—that is to say, *dukkha*. The condition that is impermanent, changing, unsatisfactory—this is the worldly condition of the mind. And this is what is meant by the "world" in Dhamma language. Hence it is said that the world is *dukkha*, *dukkha* is the world. When the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths (*ariya-sacca*), he sometimes used the term "world" and sometimes the term "*dukkha*" They are one and the same. For instance, he spoke of:

- the world;
- the cause of the arising of the world;

- the extinction of the world;
- the path that brings about the extinction of the world.

What he meant was:

- *dukkha*;
- the cause of *dukkha*;
- the extinction of *dukkha*;
- the path that brings about the extinction of *dukkha*.

So in the language of the Buddha, the language of Dhamma, the word “world” refers to *dukkha*; suffering and the world are one and the same.

Taken another way, the word “world” refers to things that are low, shallow, not profound, and fall short of their highest potential. For instance, we speak of such and such a thing as worldly, meaning that it is not Dhamma. This is another meaning of the word “world” in Dhamma language. “World” does not always refer simply to this Earth, as in everyday language.

BIRTH

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

In Dhamma language, the word “birth” refers to the birth of the idea “I” or “ego” that arises in the mind throughout each day. In this sense, the ordinary person is born very often, time and time again; a more developed person is born less frequently; a person well advanced in practice (*ariyan*, noble one) is born less frequently still, and ultimately ceases being born altogether. Each arising in the

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

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

DEATH

Now let’s consider the word “death.” Death in everyday language means that event which necessitates putting something in a coffin and cremating or burying it. But in Dhamma language, the word “death” refers to the cessation of the idea mentioned just a moment ago, the idea of “I” or “me.” The ceasing of this idea is what is meant by “death” in Dhamma language.

LIFE

Let’s talk about the word “life.” This word in everyday language, the language of immature people, applies to anything that is not yet dead, that still exists, moves about, walks, and eats. In the more precise language of biology, it refers the normal functioning of

the protoplasm, of the cell and nucleus. The normal functioning and development of these is referred to as “life.” This is an even more materialistic kind of everyday language.

In Dhamma language, “life” refers to the truly deathless state, the unconditioned, *nibbāna*, life without limitations. This is life. If we are speaking everyday language, “life” has the ordinary familiar meaning. If we are speaking Dhamma language, “life” refers to the deathless state. When there is no birth, there is also no death. This state is the unconditioned. It is what we call *nibbāna*, and what in other religions is often spoken of as the life everlasting. It is life that never again comes to an end. It is life in God, or whatever one cares to call it. This is the real life, life as understood in Dhamma language.

PERSON

Now we come closer to home, to the word “person.” We think nothing of using the word “person, person, person” all the time. Everyone is a person. But we ought to be careful here, because the word “person” has two different meanings. In everyday language, “person” refers to a creature with a body shaped like what they call a “person” or human being.

But in Dhamma language, the word “person” refers to certain special qualities implied in the word “human”—which means “possessing a lofty mind” or “high minded”—certain high mental qualities. This is not so difficult to understand. If someone criticizes a friend saying, “You’re not a person!” what does he mean? The one criticized has a human body just as does the one criticizing. Why, then, is the first accused of not being a person? The point is that he lacks the special qualities implied in the word “human.” Lacking these, he is accused of not being a person. Thus, the word “person” has two different meanings. In everyday language, it refers to a creature of human form; in Dhamma language, it refers to the higher mental or spiritual qualities implied in the word “human.”

GOD

Now we consider the word “God.” In everyday language, “God” refers to a celestial being with various creative powers. This is the God of everyday language. The “God” of Dhamma language is rather different. It is a profound and hidden power, which is neither human being, nor celestial being, nor any other kind of being. It has no individuality or self, and it is impersonal. It is natural and intangible. It is what we call the Law of Nature, for this Law is responsible for creation and for the coming into existence of all things. Natural Law governs all things. Natural Law has power over all things. Hence in Dhamma language, the word “God” means, among other things, the Law of Nature, what Buddhists call Dhamma. In the Pāli language, the Law of Nature was referred to simply as “Dhamma.” Dhamma, just that one single word, implies all of the Law of Nature. So Dhamma is the Buddhist God.

WOEFUL STATES

Now let us direct our gaze downwards. Let us look at the “four woeful states” (*apāya*). The woeful states are the nether worlds. Normally four of them are recognized: hell (*naraka*), the realm of the beasts (*tiracchāna*), the realm of the hungry ghosts (*peta*), and the realm of the frightened ghosts (*asura* or *asurakāya*). These four as a group are called the “four woeful states.” They are vividly depicted in temple murals. Hell, the beasts, the hungry ghosts, and the *asuras* are all depicted according to traditional beliefs, which means all four are thought to apply only after death. In other words, the four woeful states as understood in everyday language are interpreted materialistically. The denizens of hell, the beasts, and so on are thought of as actual lowly, “flesh and blood” creatures.

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

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

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

The term “hungry ghost” (*peta*) in everyday language refers to a creature supposed to have a tiny mouth and an enormous belly. It can never manage to eat enough and so is chronically hungry. This is another possible form in which we may be reborn after death. These are the hungry ghosts of everyday language. The hungry ghosts of Dhamma language are purely mental states. Ambition based on craving, worry based on craving—to be afflicted with these is to be born a hungry ghost. These symptoms are just like those that result from having a mouth the size of a needle’s eye and a belly the size of a mountain. Anyone suffering from an intense craving, a pathological thirst, anyone who worries and frets excessively, has the same symptoms as a hungry ghost. Such a person can be said to have been reborn a hungry ghost right here and now. It is not something that happens only after death.

Now to the *asura* or frightened ghosts. In everyday language, an *asura* is a kind of invisible being. It goes around haunting and spooking, but is too afraid to show itself. In Dhamma language, the word “*asura*” refers to fear in the mind of a human being. To be reborn as an *asura*, it is not necessary for the body to die. Whenever one is afraid, one is simultaneously reborn an *asura*. To be afraid without good reason, to be excessively fearful, to be superstitiously afraid of certain harmless creatures—this is what it is to be reborn as an *asura*. Some people are afraid of doing good. Some are afraid

that if they attain *nibbāna*, life will lose all its flavour and be unbearably dull. Some people do have this kind of fear of *nibbāna*. To be afflicted with unjustified fear of this kind is to be reborn as an *asura* right here and now.

These are the four woeful states as understood in Dhamma language. They are rather different from the woeful states of everyday language. Now there is a point worth thinking about in connection with this. If we don't fall into the woeful states of Dhamma language, then we are sure not to fall into the woeful states of everyday language. For instance, if we avoid making the mistakes that lead to affliction with anxiety, then we avoid falling into hell in this life. At the same time, we need have no fear of falling into hell in some later lifetime after death. Again, if we avoid being stupid like the beasts, ravenous like the hungry ghosts, and frightened like the *asura*, then we are free of the kinds of unskillful attitudes that might cause us to be reborn after death as beasts, hungry ghosts, or *asura*.

So it behoves us to interest ourselves only in these woeful states that we are in danger of experiencing right here and now. The kind that we may experience after death can be put aside. There is no need for us to concern ourselves with them. If we avoid right here and now the hungry ghosts and other woeful states as understood in Dhamma language, then no matter how we die, we are certain not to fall into the woeful states of everyday language. If we live and practice properly, we avoid falling into the woeful states here and now, and we are certain not to fall into the woeful states that are supposed to follow death.

Most people recognize that heaven and hell are simply states of mind. Why, then, are they so foolish as to misunderstand the meaning of the four woeful states, which are so much a part of life? True enough, the heaven and hell of everyday language are external realms—though don't ask me where— and they are attained after death; but the heaven and hell of Dhamma language are to be found in the mind and may occur at any time, depending on one's mental make-up. This is how the woeful states of Dhamma language differ from those of everyday language.

HEAVEN

“Heaven” in everyday language means some wonderful, highly attractive, celestial realm up above. Spend a certain amount of money in merit making and you’re entitled to one mansion in heaven, where there are angels by the hundreds. In Dhamma language, however, “heaven” refers first of all to infatuating sensual bliss of the highest order. This is the lower heaven, the heaven of sensuality. Higher up is the heaven called the *Brahmaloka*, where there are no objects of sensuality. It is a state of mental well-being that results from the absence of any disturbing sensual object. It is as if a certain person with a hunger for sense objects had indulged himself until becoming thoroughly fed up with all sense objects. Then he would want only to remain quite empty, still, untouched. This is the state of freedom from sensuality, the condition of the *Brahma* gods in the *Brahmaloka*. The ordinary heavens are full up with sensuality, the highest of them, the *Paranimmitavasavattī* heaven, being completely full of sensuality. The heavens of the *Brahmaloka*, however, are devoid of disturbance from sensuality, though the “self,” the “I” still persists.

AMBROSIA

Now let us discuss the word “ambrosia,” the elixir of immortality. In everyday language, ambrosia is a kind of liquor that celestial beings imbibe to make themselves invulnerable before going out again to slaughter and cause general havoc. This is the ambrosia of everyday language. The ambrosia of Dhamma language is Dhamma at its highest, the truth of not-self (*anattā*) or emptiness (*Suññatā*). This highest Dhamma, the truth of not-self or emptiness, makes a person immortal because it brings freedom from the “self” idea. When there is no “self,” how can there be death? So in Dhamma language, the elixir of life is the truth of not-self or emptiness. As for the liquor which is traditionally supposed to confer eternal life on whoever drinks it, that is the ambrosia of everyday language, the language of foolish people, the language of people who have not perceived or penetrated to the truth.

EMPTINESS

A moment ago we mentioned the word “emptiness” (*Suññatā*). Let us now have a closer look at it. *Suññatā* is a Pāli word. *Suñña* means “void” or “empty,” and *-ta* is the equivalent of “-ness.” *Suññatā* is emptiness or voidness. In the everyday language of people who have not seen or penetrated to the truth, emptiness means simply the absence of any content whatsoever, a physical void, a vacuum, a useless nothingness. This is emptiness in everyday language. Emptiness or *suññatā* in Dhamma language is quite different. Here everything of every kind and variety may be present in any quantity—everything, that is, with the single exception of the ideas of “me” and “mine.” Everything may be present, everything of every sort and kind you can think of, the entire lot of both physical and mental phenomena, with just this one exception—there is no idea of “me” and “mine.” No “I,” no “my,”—that is emptiness as it is understood in Dhamma language, the language of the Buddha.

The world is empty. Empty of what? Empty of self and anything belonging to self. With this single exception, everything may be present, as long as nothing is regarded as “me” or “mine.” This is the emptiness of Dhamma language. When the Buddha spoke of emptiness, he was speaking Dhamma language. Foolish people understand this as everyday language and take it that there is nothing in the world at all, just a vacuum! If the word “emptiness” is misinterpreted like this in terms of everyday language, the Buddha’s teaching of emptiness becomes meaningless. Those foolish people come out with many strange assertions that have nothing whatever to do with emptiness as taught by the Buddha.

I hope you will take an interest in this and bear it well in mind. This word “empty” applied to physical things naturally means absence of any content, but in the metaphysical context, it means that though every sort of thing may be present, there is utter absence of “I-ness” and “my-ness.” In the physical world, the mental world, or anywhere at all, there is no such thing as “me” or “mine.” The conditions of “I-ness” and “my-ness” just do not exist. They are unreal, mere illusions, hence the world is described as empty. It is

not that the world is devoid of all content. Everything is there, and it can be made use of with discernment. Go ahead and make use of it! Just one thing though—don't go producing the ideas of “me” and “mine”!

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

STOPPING

Now we come to the word “stopping.” Stopping in the sense of not moving, not stirring, is everyday language, the language of the ordinary person. This is one of its meanings. In Dhamma language, the language of the Buddha, “stopping” has a different meaning. To simplify matters we shall consider an example. When Aṅgulimāla spoke of “stopping,” he meant one thing; and when the Buddha used the same word, he had in mind something quite different. If you have heard the story of Aṅgulimāla, you will be familiar with this dialogue between him and the Buddha.⁷ Aṅgulimāla, in using the word “stop,” was speaking everyday language; the Buddha, when he used it, was speaking Dhamma language.

In the language of the ordinary person, stopping means coming to a standstill, not moving; but in the language of the Buddha, stopping means becoming empty of self. If there is no self, what is it that goes running about? Why not have a think about this point? If there is no self, where is the “I” to go running about? Obviously the “I” has stopped. This is stopping in the language of the Buddha—absence of any self to be grasped at and clung to, absolute emptiness of selfhood.

⁷ Aṅgulimāla Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya II 86.

To stop is the same as to be empty. This is what is meant by stopping in the Buddha's language. One may be physically running about and yet be said to have stopped, because no "self" is left to run about. Every form of wanting and craving has stopped. There is no "I" to want anything anywhere, no "I" to go running about. A person who still has desires goes running about looking for every kind of thing, even looking for merit and goodness. Running about, looking for this and that, here, there, and everywhere—this is running. But if one manages to stop desiring completely, to stop being a self, then even though one may go flying around in an aeroplane, one can still be said to have stopped. Learn to distinguish these two meanings of the word "stop" and understand them properly. It will help you to understand the teaching of emptiness also.

LIGHT

If we discuss only these profound questions, you are bound to become drowsy, so now we shall take an easy word—namely, "light." When we speak of light, normally, we are referring to lamplight, sunlight, electric light, or some other kind of physical light. This is everyday language. In the Dhamma language of the Buddha, the word "light" refers to insight, wisdom, higher knowledge (*paññā*). Even when the Buddha went and sat in a pitch dark cave, there was still light in the sense that in his mind there was the light of insight, of higher knowledge. On a moonless, starless night, when all lamps have been put out, it is still possible to say there is light if there is insight and higher knowledge in the mind of the one who practices earnestly. This is light in Dhamma language.

DARKNESS

Now "darkness." In ordinary everyday language, darkness is absence of light, which makes it impossible to see. In Dhamma language, darkness is lack of insight, ignorance of the truth, spiritual blindness (*avijjā*). This is true darkness. If a person lacking true insight were to go and sit right in full sunlight, that person would

still be in darkness, the darkness of ignorance as to the true nature of things. This is the difference between the meanings of darkness in Dhamma language and in everyday language.

KAMMA

We come now to the word “*kamma*” (Sanskrit, *karma*). When ordinary people say, “That’s *kamma*!” they mean “Too bad!” Bad luck as punishment for sins previously committed is the meaning given to the word “*kamma*” by ordinary people. But in Dhamma language the word “*kamma*” refers to something different. It refers to action. Bad action is called black *kamma*; good action is called white *kamma*. Then there is another remarkable kind of *kamma* which is neither black nor white, a *kamma* that serves to neutralize the other two kinds. Unfortunately, the more people hear about it, the less they understand it. This third kind of *kamma* is the realization of not-self (*anattā*) and emptiness (*suññatā*), so that the “self” is done away with. This kind of action may be called Buddhist *kamma*, the real *kamma*, the kind of *kamma* that the Buddha taught. The Buddha taught the transcending of all *kamma*.

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

The practice of the Noble Eightfold Path is *kamma* neither black nor white, and it is the end of all *kamma*. This is *kamma* in Dhamma language. It is very different from the “*kamma*” of immature people, who exclaim “That’s *Kamma*!” meaning only “Too bad!” or “Bad luck!” *Kamma* understood as bad luck is the *kamma* of everyday language.

REFUGE

Consider now the word “refuge” or “support” (*Saraṇa*) In everyday language, a refuge or support is some person or thing outside of and other than oneself which one may depend on for help. For instance, people may depend on employers, ghosts, good luck omens, or guardian angels. Anything or anyone other than oneself that is relied upon—this is the meaning of “refuge” or “support” in everyday language.

The “refuge” or “support” of Dhamma language is to be found within oneself. Even when we speak of going to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha for refuge, we really mean going to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha that are to be found within ourselves, within our own minds. Only then can they really serve as our refuge. So these supports are to be found within ourselves: our own efforts bring into existence the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha within our own minds. According to Dhamma language, one is one’s own refuge. Refuge is within oneself, not somewhere outside.

HEART OF BUDDHISM

This brings us to the expression “the heart of Buddhism.” In discussions about what constitutes the heart of Buddhism, all sorts of strange ideas are brought forward. Some people recite this or that formula, such as VI-SU-PA.⁸ This sort of “heart” is everyday language, the language of stupid people. People with no knowledge of Dhamma will just rattle off a couple of Pāli words or some other cliché and proclaim this to be the heart of Buddhism.

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

⁸ VI, SU, and PA stand for *Vinaya, Sutta, and Paramattha (= Abhidhamma)*, the three sections of the *Tiṭṭaka*. Such sets of initials are still commonly used for memorizing Dhamma Topics, but through the influence of Mantrayana, they are regarded by many as magical formulas. Each set is called the “heart” or “essence” of the topic concerned.

“Sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāyā.”

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

What I have said so far ought to be sufficient to enable you to realize how a single word may have two different meanings. An intelligent and discerning person will be capable of considering both modes of speaking. “A wise person is one who is careful to consider both modes of speaking.” “Both modes of speaking” means both of the possible meanings of a word. One is the meaning the word has in everyday language; the other is the meaning that same word has in Dhamma language. A discerning person must consider both meanings, as we have done in the numerous examples dealt with above. The words we have considered so far as examples are rather high-level terms. Let us now consider some more down-to-earth examples. I apologize if some of these appear a little crude.

EATING

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

The expression “eating a woman” sounds most peculiar in

Thai. But in Pāli and Sanskrit it is a perfectly ordinary expression. To eat a woman does not mean to carry off, kill, cook, and eat her. It means to have sexual relations with her. This is what is meant by “eating” in this case, and this is what the word “eating” means in Dhamma language.

On the other hand, the Pāli word “*nibbhogo*” (having nothing to eat) is used to describe the Buddha and *arahants* (fully enlightened beings), for they are no longer involved in colours and shapes, sounds, odours, tastes, tactile stimuli, and mental images. Because they are above involvement in these six kinds of sense objects, they are people with “nothing to eat.” Get to know this broad usage of the word “eat” in Dhamma language. It will make it easier to understand the more profound aspects of the teaching.

SLEEPING

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

AWAKE

To be “awake” normally means to have roused oneself from sleep. But in Dhamma language, it means to be always mindful, to be always fully aware. In this condition, regardless of whether one is physically awake or asleep, one can be described as awake. People who practice mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) are always fully aware. Even if they go to sleep, they are immediately fully aware again the moment they wake up. When they are awake, they are awake; and when they are asleep, they are also awake. This is what it is to be “awake” in Dhamma language.

PLAY

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

ANGEL

Next, the word “angel” (Thai *nang-faa*, literally, “sky woman”). In everyday language, this word refers to the exceptionally beautiful female inhabitants of heavenly palaces. They are personifications of physical beauty. But in Dhamma language, “angel” refers to the Buddha-Dhamma. Generally people restrict this meaning to the Dhamma written and studied in books, but in truth it encompasses all Dhamma, for all Dhamma is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful in the end (as explained above regarding the Sublime Way of Life). Thus, even the word “angel” has different levels of meaning; and “angel” in Dhamma language is the hope of all worthy Buddhists.

FEMALE & MALE

Now, let us look at the words “female” and “male.” In everyday, worldly language, these words mean the two sexes—the female sex and the male sex. In Dhamma language, however, they refer to the distinguishing marks and signs of certain duties which Nature has assigned to human beings: duties which must be performed co-operatively, in partnership. Female and male have nothing to do with the exchange and consumption of sexual flavors. Rather, they point to the fact that human beings must exist in the world and that the species must not become extinct. This means that

the human race must be preserved through the duty of reproduction for as long a time as is necessary for humanity to realize the highest Dhamma—*nibbāna*. The duties called for by this necessity must be divided between the female and male. Once the female and male exist, they help each other to lighten their burdens by dividing their everyday responsibilities and work, which, when done correctly, is Dhamma practice.

In Dhamma language, the signs of the duties which Nature has stipulated in this way are known as “female” and “male.” This isn’t the lowly meaning assumed in everyday language. We shouldn’t think of female and male solely in terms of an instinctual animal activity. Rather, we ought to think of them as signs of the division of those duties which can be carried out properly only in co-operation.

MARRIAGE

From this we’ll move on to “marriage.” In everyday language, everyone understands this word to mean the ceremony that joins a woman and man according to social customs. That’s marriage in worldly terms. However, in Pāli, the language of Dhamma, the word “marriage” is *samarasa*, which translates as “having equal (*sama*) flavor, taste, duty, or function (*rasa*)” through Dhamma or in Dhamma. This means that two people with correct wants and needs are united as one. Physical contact between them is unnecessary, though there may be other forms of contact, such as letter writing.

Marriage is possible even though the skin and flesh of the two partners never touch. This is because their wants are the same and their responsibilities are equal. For example, both genuinely want to transcend *dukkha* using the same principles of practice. Both persons are satisfied in the unified Dhamma practice and in the fruits mutually desired. This is what we call “having equal flavor” which is marriage in Dhamma language and in Pāli. The meanings of words in Dhamma language are always as clean and pure as in this example.

FATHER & MOTHER

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

“Matraṃ pitraṃ hantvā akataññūsi brāhmaṇa.”

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

Our father, the one responsible for our birth, is ignorance or not-knowing (*avijjā*); our mother, the other one responsible for our birth, is craving (*taṇhā*). The words “father” and “mother” in Dhamma language were given these higher meanings by the Buddha. So the “parents”—*avijjā* and *taṇhā*—have to be killed, destroyed completely, for *nibbāna* to be realized.

FRIEND

The word “friend” in worldly everyday language refers to a companion, someone who does things that please one. But in Dhamma language, “friend” or “companion” refers to the Dhamma, and in particular to that aspect of the Dhamma that enables us to free ourselves from *dukkha*. The Buddha specifically mentioned the Noble Eightfold Path as humanity’s supreme friend (*kalyāṇamitta*). In Dhamma language, “friend” means the Noble Eightfold Path: right understanding, right intention, and so on up to right concentration. This is what “friend” means in Dhamma language.

ENEMY

An enemy in everyday language is someone whom we hate and who is out to do us harm. But our enemy, as this word is

understood in Dhamma language, is our own misdirected mind. Our very own mind and the misuse of it—that is our real enemy. The misdirected mind is our enemy, not someone outside of ourselves. The enemy that the ordinary person has in mind is the enemy of everyday worldly language. The enemy of Dhamma language is the misdirected mind. The enemy exists any time that the mind is misdirected. It is born in the mind and of the mind. With the mind well directed and fixed on Dhamma, the enemy is absent and the friend is there instead.

PUTRIDNESS

Now, let us ask, what is “the putrid, foul-smelling thing”? In everyday language it may be rotten fish or something of the sort, but in Dhamma language it is something very different. The Buddha referred to the mental defilements (*kilesa*) as putrid, foul-smelling things. Excessive desire, self-centeredness, and obsession with the ideas of “me” and “mine”— these are putrid, foul-smelling things.

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

LAUGHTER

Consider, for example, laughter. The Buddha once said, “Laughter is the behaviour of an infant in its cradle.” Think about it. We like to laugh heartily, even though it is the behaviour of an infant in its cradle. It doesn’t even embarrass us. We like it. We go right on laughing heartily, guffawing loudly. Why did the Buddha say that

“Laughter is the behaviour of an infant in its cradle”? Think of an infant in its cradle and the way it lies there gurgling and grinning at you.

The laughter of the noble ones is different. They laugh at all compounded things (*saṅkhāra*), which are impermanent and changing, unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and not-self. Because they know, they can laugh at compounded things and at craving, which henceforth can do them no harm. This is the right kind of laughter, the kind that has meaning and worth.

SINGING

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

DANCING

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

The dancing of the *ariyans* is *dhammanandi*. They “dance” and jeer at the defilements, proclaiming their liberation. They are

no longer bound hand and foot, arm and leg. Their limbs are free. They can “dance” because they are not bound down by attachment. This is how the noble ones dance.

BLINDNESS

Think it over. If we know only the language of common people, we can't possibly understand this kind of talk. The wise person says: “The birds see not the sky,” and the foolish person doesn't believe it. Why don't birds see the sky? Because they are flying in the sky. The wise person says: “The fish see not the water,” and again the foolish person doesn't believe it. It never occurs to such people that fish living in water cannot see the water because the fish are in such close contact with it. They know nothing about water. Likewise, earthworms always burrowing in the earth never see the earth. And the worms that live in a dung heap, that are born and die in a dung heap, never see that dung heap.

Lastly, “humanity sees not the world.” People living and moving about in the world still do not see the world. If they really saw the world, they certainly wouldn't stay stuck in it. They would be sure to get free to the world and dwell with the Dhamma. People who are bogged down in the world, like worms in a dung heap, know only worldly everyday language. They don't know Dhamma language. The reason they don't know Dhamma language is that they are stuck fast in the world like the worms in their dung heap, the earthworms in the ground, the fish in the water, and the birds in the sky. People don't know Dhamma language. Not knowing Dhamma language, they cannot comprehend Dhamma.

WALKING NOWHERE

Here is a good example of Dhamma language: “Walking, walking, and never arriving.” The average person will not grasp the meaning. Here “walking” refers to wanting something and going off in search of it. “Never arriving” refers to peace, to *nibbāna*, which

remains unattainable. *Nibbāna* is attained by not wanting, not desiring, not hoping, not yearning. So there is no need to walk at all; by not walking, *nibbāna* will be realized. Walking, walking, and never arriving. Wanting, wanting, and never attaining. The more we want anything want to get this or that, want to be this or that—the more inaccessible it becomes. All we must do is to give up wanting something and we get it in full, straight away.

SILENCE

In Dhamma language, it is said, “Talk is not loud; silence is loud.” This means that when the mind is well concentrated, still and quiet, the voice of Dhamma will be heard. Again it is said, “These things that can be talked about are not the real Dhamma; about the real Dhamma nothing can be said.” Everything that I have been saying in this talk is still not really Dhamma, it is still not the actual thing. My words are nothing more than an attempt to explain how to arrive at and understand the real thing. The real thing cannot be discussed. The more we say about Dhamma, the further it recedes from us. We can talk about only the method which will guide us along, which will tell us what to do in order to arrive at the real thing, the genuine Dhamma. So we must stop talking.

This being the case, we shall leave off our comparison of everyday language and Dhamma language. I suggest you think it over and decide whether or not you agree with me concerning our failure to understand Dhamma. Some of us have been listening to sermons and lectures and expositions of Dhamma for ten years, twenty years, thirty years, and more. Why is it, then, that we still don’t understand Dhamma, see Dhamma, penetrate Dhamma? The reason we don’t understand is simply that we don’t listen in the right way. And why don’t we listen in the right way? Because we are familiar only with everyday language and have no acquaintance with Dhamma language. We hear Dhamma language and take it as being everyday language. We are just like those foolish people who always take the word “emptiness” in its everyday sense, completely miss the Dhamma sense, and then make all sorts of ridiculous assertions about it.

Such are the unhappy consequences of not being familiar with both everyday language and Dhamma language. People in this position have not got their wits about them. They lack discernment, the quality the Buddha was referring to when he said:

*Appamatto ubho atthe adhigaṇhāti paṇḍito,
Diṭṭhe dhamme ca yo attho, yo ca'ttho samparāyiko.
Atthābhisamayādhiro paṇḍito ti pavuccati.*

The wise and heedful person is familiar with both modes of speaking: the meaning seen by ordinary people and the meaning which they can't understand. One who is fluent in the various modes of speaking is a wise person.



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

Rod Bucknell (formerly Ariyananda Bhikkhu) first became seriously interested in Buddhism in the mid-1960s during a visit to Thailand. He took ordination as a bhikkhu under the guidance of Ajahn Paññānanda at Wat Chonlaprathan Rangsit, and soon became interested also in the teachings of Ajahn Buddhādāsa.

During the four years he spent in the Saṅgha (1967-1971), he translated six of his works altogether (*Buddha-Dhamma for Students*, *Two Kinds of Language*, *Another Kind of Birth*, *Why Were We Born?*, *Handbook for Mankind*, and *Looking Within*), usually in close consultation with the Ajahn. Despite his return to lay life, Rod maintains a close interest – both scholarly and practical – in Ajahn Buddhādāsa’s teachings, and has published several related articles including ‘The “Three Knowledges” of Buddhism: Implications of Buddhādāsa’s interpretation of rebirth.’

He is currently retired after having worked for eighteen years as a lecturer in the Department of Studies in Religion at the University of Queensland, Australia.

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.



“Two Kinds of Language: Everyday Language & Dhamma Language” shows how to discriminate between the two levels of language which are intertwined in all spiritual speech and literature. Both levels of language must be acknowledged and understood if we are to benefit from the Buddha’s teaching, and Ajahn Buddhādāsa gives many examples of how to do so.”

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

