

VOID MIND



BY
BUDDHADASA BHIKKHU

VOID MIND

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles
Series - No. 2

Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles Series - No. 2

VOID MIND

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Translated from the Thai by Dhammavidu Bhikkhu

จิตว่างหรือสุญญตาวิहारจำเป็นสำหรับมนุษย์

The original translation was previously uploaded to the
Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage website.

This electronic edition published by Buddhadāsa Foundation
& Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives
April 2015

© Buddhadāsa Foundation

All rights reserved. Persons interested in printing this book
for free distribution should contact
info@bia.or.th

for free distribution only



Anumodanā

To all Dhamma Comrades, those helping to spread Dhamma:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

from

Buddha dāsa Indapaṇṇo

Mokkhabalārāma

Chaiya, 2 November 2530

(translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu)

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 Buddhādāsa'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 Buddhādāsa 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 Buddhādāsa'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 Buddhādāsa 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 Buddhādāsa 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 Metta

Buddhadhammo Bhikkhu
21 April 2558 (2015)

Translator's Foreword

“Form is emptiness and emptiness is form” – a phrase from one particular translation of the Heart Sutra, the Mahāyāna text which deals with the concept of *suññatā*, ‘emptiness’ or ‘voidness.’ ‘Form’ here representing one of the five aggregates, the *pañca-khandhas*, being ‘empty’ or ‘void,’ then the remaining four aggregates – feelings, perceptions, thinking, and awareness – must also be ‘empty,’ or ‘void’ too. But what are the aggregates empty, or void of? Empty of any meaning of ‘self’ Buddhādāsa would have said. That’s the rub: we don’t understand ourselves properly, that what we are is essentially what the Buddhists call the five aggregates, so we cling to them as being ‘me,’ take possession of them as being ‘mine’ and get into trouble because we do.

Ajahn Buddhādāsa investigates the experience of *suññatā* as it arises from the bases of *samādhi* and *vipassanā* practice, and as an experience arising naturally during the course of our daily lives. Always willing to explore the different traditions, the Ajahn takes a long, penetrating and occasionally controversial look at this still misunderstood concept.

Dhammavidu Bhikkhu

2558 (2015)

VOID MIND

*Two Dhamma lectures presented on 10 & 17 July 2525 (1982)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma**

Now we will take a look at the ‘void’ or ‘free’ mind, something much misunderstood even though it’s an important matter, the heart of the Buddhist religion.

There are those who misunderstand the ‘void’ mind concept: those in opposition to it, those who make a joke of it, those who criticize it, those who slander and say unpleasant things, those who pretend that it’s something bad, and so on. There are some who say that the mind can’t be void, that there must be some thinking, that if the mind is void, there won’t be any thought, so that the body will be like a piece of wood and incapable of doing anything. We say, however, that all activities should be done with a void mind, but some people don’t understand that. There are even those who claim that if the mind is void of ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ then there’s no-one to be responsible for anything, no-one to try to do anything, to develop anything, and that we would be

* The original *Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles* Dhamma discourses were delivered to the monks and laypeople at Suan Mokkh during the three months of the 1982 rains retreat. The ‘Void Mind’ discourse was interrupted by a rain storm and had to be continued on the following full moon night, so it became two talks now made into one.

somehow imperfect as people because of that. Some also say that if the mind is void, there won't be any patriotic feeling and no regard for religion, even for our own family. There are those who charge that the void mind isn't a Buddhist principle at all. Instead, they say that it's something made up by the speaker to fool people with.

So, we can see how this concept is misunderstood, even though it's very important, because people need to be aware that if the mind isn't sometimes void, then the results can be terminal. People survive because the mind is void from time to time, so they can rest and relax. If the mind is troubled and depressed by the feelings connected with the 'me' and the 'mine,' then madness is a possibility or some nervous disease. If the mind can't stop and can't relax at all, there could even be death. This is something we need to know – that we can survive in a reasonably sane manner because the mind naturally experiences voidness from time to time. And at such times there is physical relaxation and contentment, and the mind is best able to think and to function.

Now, regarding the 'void' or 'free' mind, we will split the matter up into three: voidness by way of *samādhi*; voidness by way of *vipassanā*; and voidness by way of nature, the voidness that happens quite naturally.

The voidness of *samādhi* occurs when someone is in any level of *jhāna*. When fully concentrated, there is freedom from defilement, and the mind is fixed on the components of the *jhāna*, or on the sign of concentration. At such times, the 'self' thought is absent. There's no thinking that 'I' have entered *jhāna*, or that 'I'm' concentrated. If there is, then there is no possibility of it really being *samādhi*. So we need to forget the 'I' completely and leave the mind to

fix on the *nimitta*, on the object of samādhi, until the factors of jhāna arise fully. In all levels of jhāna, the mind has the characteristic of being free of the ‘self’ idea. In the Pāli texts, this is called ‘inner voidness’ – there isn’t anyone doing the knowing. This is freedom. At such a time, there’s no defilement, no *nīvaraṇa* – the obstacles to concentration are ‘put to sleep,’ as it were. The thoughts of ‘me’ and ‘mine’ are absent and there is concentration. In this kind of experience, there is contentedness, purity, and stability, but there is also agility of the mind (*kammanīya*), which is to say that the mind is nimble, quick and able to do its proper duty. Such a mind can do anything well. If the mind isn’t like this, then it isn’t in samādhi and won’t be able to function properly. Hence, we can work with a void mind, especially where it involves the mental work connected with the attainment of the path, fruit, and Nibbāna.

It is said that if the mind is not void and not free, then it’s not in samādhi. But if it is in samādhi, then that is freedom in itself. This is the mind made void by way of samādhi.

Now, voidness arises through the practise of *vipassanā*, that is, through clear seeing into the Dhamma, into the way things really are. This is about investigating anything to see it as it actually is, to contemplate the world, for instance, and see it as void of any meaning of ‘self.’ As the texts have it, “*Attena va attaniyena vā suñño loko*”: the world, the whole business – no matter what – the entire world is void of ‘self.’ There is only a flow of *idappaccayatā*. There is no ‘self’ entity involved. There’s nothing that could be clung to as a possession. This entire world is just a *paṭicca-samuppanna-dhamma*. A *paṭicca-samuppanna-dhamma* is something arisen in dependence on other things. The world, because it’s

not ‘self’-existent, must have come to be in dependence on other things, so it’s called a *paṭicca-samuppanna-dhamma*. Mutual dependence can be seen in everything, in all things in the world at large. A stone or a grain of sand cannot exist by itself and must arise in dependence on some thing, must depend on something else. A tree arises in dependence on many things. For an animal to exist, it depends entirely on the necessary conditions being present. Even us, we are born and we continue to live out our lives in dependence on a certain set of conditions being present. The world, the solar system, the sun, the moon, the stars, everything, the entire universe, all are like this. All are dependently arisen. Suppose somebody believes that God makes everything happen. Well, that would be sort of right, but we would rather say that things arise in dependence on the Law of Nature, the law of *idappaccayatā* – the law of conditionality – which is the same as any God. The law of *idappaccayatā* makes everything happen. There wasn’t a sun or a solar system until the law of *idappaccayatā* caused them to appear. When the globe of a world forms, then it supplies the causes and conditions for the arising of everything that will populate it. First, a world is a ball of fire which gradually cools down, gradually hardens and dissolves into the various elements and then into the various things. All of this happens in dependence on the conditions being present for it to happen. Try to remember these words, even if they are a little strange: *paṭicca* means ‘in dependence on,’ *samuppanna* means ‘arisen’ – *paṭicca-samuppanna* means ‘something dependently arisen.’ There isn’t anything that isn’t dependently arisen, except for one thing, except for Nibbāna. But apart from that, all things are so. In this body of ours, every cell is dependently arisen –

every particle, every atom, everything that we believe to be ‘me’ or ‘mine.’

Now, this ‘me’ and the ‘mine’ belief, is it right, or is it wrong? Do we believe in something that disagrees with the truth of nature? Well, Dhamma represents the fundamental truth of nature, and the truth of nature is that everything is actually dependently arisen. When we manage to ‘see’ in this way, then we know that all things are void of ‘self,’ that there is only the flowing on and spinning around of *paṭicca-samuppanna-dhammas* dependently arising and ceasing without end. If we see like this, then we see voidness by way of *vipassanā*. If we have true wisdom, we will see all of the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mind objects – all of those sense objects – as dependently arisen and void. So, don’t fall in love with anything that is void. Don’t fall for the beautiful forms, sweet sounds, fragrant odours, delicious tastes, soft touches, and the sort of feelings that delight the mind. Know the sense organs – the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and the mind – as being void too. In reality, the eye isn’t self-existent. It doesn’t have a ‘self.’ It’s basically the natural element called the ‘*rūpa-dhātu*’ (the material element), which forms the eyeball, the nerve of the eye, and everything to do with the organ called the eye. Then, there is the wonderful element called the ‘*viññāṇa-dhātu*’ (the consciousness element) by which, whenever the eye sees, a form will come to do its duty, will arise to know the seeing. This is the way it is according to nature. There isn’t a ‘self’ who sees. There is just the seeing taking place according to basic, natural principles. Because there is the eye which is complete and there is an external sense object – a visible object to meet the eye – then the consciousness element will

come and do its duty at the eye, and the eye will see the form. The particulars of that then go to the mind to be processed. The mind, however, isn't a 'self' either. If we know in this way, then we know voidness through the vipassanā method. Observe anything. Observe all things together, observe them separately, observe the body internally, the body externally, and observe other people, the whole world. When we see this internally, then we will see it externally too. If we see voidness in ourselves, we will also see it in others. We will see how this world is void, how other worlds are void, and we will know voidness by way of the clear understanding that's born of wisdom.

Now, regarding the voidness that occurs naturally, here we need to understand that the 'normal' mind – the mind when there's nothing interfering with it, when it's without the *nīvaraṇas* (the hindrances) without the *kilesas* (the defilements) – is 'luminous.' At such times it could be called the 'original mind,' as it was in the womb. The intermittent disappearance of that luminosity happens because defilement enters, bringing with it the feelings of 'me' and 'mine.' For example, the mind meets anything that causes satisfaction, and then there is desire (*taṇhā*) followed by a clinging (*upādāna*) to the idea that there is a 'desirer,' a 'me' who desires. It's in this way that the 'self' sense arises, that there comes to be a 'me' who desires, who desires to get something so that it can be 'mine.' 'Me' and 'mine' are really vain and nonsensical, but not in our understanding. There isn't anyone who would allow or could easily accept that the 'me' and 'mine' aren't realities because they are the most powerful feelings in the minds of human beings. But observe how terrible the arising of the 'me' and 'mine' is,

and recognize that they aren't permanencies. Know that they come and go, come and go, that they arise intermittently, and know that if they don't arise, then the mind is in its original, luminous, naturally void state – and without us having had to do anything at all. If there isn't any reason for the mind to lose its luminosity, then it will be in its original state quite naturally, it will be naturally void.

So, the free or void mind can arise in different ways: void because of *samādhi*, void through *vipassanā*, or void because it's returned to its original state quite naturally. However, it needs to be said that the *samādhi* mind – the void mind fixed on an object of *samādhi* – still feels, so it's not that there isn't any thinking. At that time, there will still be feeling, so there will be some form of thinking too. The mind that is void through the power of *vipassanā* considers, investigates, penetrates, and intuits into the reality of things, so it isn't 'void' in the way that a stone, for instance, would be. The luminous, original mind still thinks and feels too, but without the defilements. It's naturally clean and unblemished and can think and feel in the way that is natural to it. The Pāli word for 'mind' means 'think,' so if the mind can't think, then it isn't really a mind at all. Thus 'void' here doesn't mean that there's no thought or feeling. It means void, or free of the sort of feeling and thinking that causes trouble, that brings upset. After all, who likes trouble and strife? The troubled mind can be compared to a fire, in that it's hot in the way of being tense and unbalanced. Now, who likes that? Who likes stress and tension, trouble and strife, unhappiness, and depression? Nobody at all! That stress, trouble, and depression is a 'me' and 'mine' affair, and when 'me' and 'mine' are gone, then there is the 'normal' mind, a

mind without stress, without depression. This mind we call ‘void,’ but it’s not void in the same way that a stone would be. The normal mind is contented, cool, a useful mind, and, better still, it’s able to understand everything deeply, to know *aniccam*, *dukkham*, and *anattā*, to know the deep *dharmas*, and thus is able to escape from suffering. Hence, the mind free from the defilements, from the feelings of ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ is very useful because it allows us to live contentedly, to think well and clearly, to advance in deep matters so that we can perhaps realize Nibbāna, or if we prefer, come to know God. Consequently, we consider this to be important and necessary knowledge, which is why we offer it to you.

There is another form of naturally occurring ‘voidness’ which manifests when we sleep because at such times, the mind is void, but as there’s no thinking when we are asleep, then it’s another kind of voidness, not the one we want here. Dogs and cats can experience this kind of voidness too, so it isn’t a matter of skilful, virtuous living. Nonetheless, it does help life to be restful, relaxed and not too crazy. This sort of voidness, however, isn’t enough to normalize the mind. For that to happen, it needs to have the voidness that arises through it being well and correctly controlled in accordance with Dhamma, and through not allowing the kilesas to arise because if the mind is full of defilement, it can’t rest. There is sleeplessness, and there can be madness. The *nīvaraṇas* and kilesas cause sleeplessness, bring a shortfall in rest and relaxation, and such a state of affairs can end in insanity or death. So, recognize that voidness is a necessity, something human beings must have, something that sustains the mind, allows it to be normal, to be cheerful and bright, to grow and prosper, to be luminous, and to become superb. Whenever

the mind is fresh and bright, cool, happy, and peaceful, then take good note of it because this kind of mind is without the defilements. It's not being worried by the 'me' and 'mine.' Perhaps when we know this void mind as something beneficial, then we will try to sustain it.

So, it's not that the void mind doesn't think about or feel anything, that it doesn't feel responsibility, doesn't recognise good and evil, or whatever. That's a counter-argument of the foolish void-mind contingent because there are those who really don't understand this at all and who talk about the sort of void mind that would, for instance, understand killing things, killing people as not being an evil matter, who make out that the void-minded would be incapable of doing anything useful or beneficial. But they misinterpret the meaning of the void mind.

This, then, is the matter of the 'free,' or 'void' mind. If the mind is void, there is contentment, freedom from depression or anything of that sort; there is normalcy, well-being, calmness, and then, when we think or do anything, we can think and do whatever we have to do well. We will also be in a position to experience deep truths because when the mind is void, then it's one hundred or one thousand times more skilful than, for instance, a computer. If the mind is troubled, however, if there is the heat of suffering, tension, or depression, then we can't think or do anything particularly well. Most importantly, however, this voidness sustains our lives. If we were without water to drink, we would soon die, and in the same way, if the mind wasn't sometimes void, wasn't ever free, we would soon go mad. There has to be enough voidness to slow down thinking and relieve unhappiness, to allow the mind to relax and to

become normal again. If there were a depressed mind, a hating mind, a troubled mind for just one day – it would be different for different people – we could go mad, and if the mind was like that for several days, then we would probably go completely haywire and might even die, simply because we would suffer too much.

So, maintain the mind well and allow it to develop the characteristics of a ‘void’ mind.

We will take the opportunity here of talking about the word ‘void’ a little more. ‘Void’ is a rendition of the Pāli word ‘*suñña*,’ while ‘*suññata*’ means ‘void-ness.’ Previous generations heard these words quite a lot because they frequently cropped up in sermons, but these days they’re not often mentioned and had not been much preached about until we brought them out again. Now, we say that the word ‘*suñña*’ is misunderstood and that it actually means ‘void’ in the same way that the word ‘vacuum’ means ‘airless.’ A vacuum is without air, is ‘void’ of air, but that doesn’t mean that there’s nothing at all. People interpret this word according to their tastes, and they do translate it as ‘void,’ but as ‘void’ in the sense of ‘nothingness.’ Thus it’s translated partially correctly because it does mean ‘void,’ but not ‘void’ in the sense of there being nothing at all because that would have no value and no use. *Suñña* means ‘void’ or free of something, in the same way that a vacuum is free of air. Hence, it’s the sort of ‘voidness’ that has use. We ought to understand this word properly. In the Pāli texts it has, “*Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ suññaṃ*,” which translates as “*Nibbāna is the ultimate voidness.*” Now, would we translate that as ‘*Nibbāna is the ultimate nothing*’? *Nibbāna* is the ultimate freedom, the ultimate voidness, but what is it void

of? Well, ask yourself the question: what do people want to be free from? They want to be free from the undesirable, from the *kilesas* (the defilements), from *dukkha*, from all that troubles and disturbs, from all of the various problems. Nibbāna represents absolute freedom from those things. The people who interpret Nibbāna as the ‘ultimate nothing’ destroy its meaning completely. In the texts, there are many other passages that reveal this ‘void’ as something other than mere nothingness. The Buddha’s mind dwelt in the ‘suññatā abiding’ (*suññatā-vihāra*), that is, he dwelt with his mind touching suññatā, free from any disturbance, knowing all things as they really were – as void of ‘self.’ Now, if it were said that the Buddha dwelt with an empty, vacant mind experiencing nothingness, that would make the Buddha worthless, or make him out to be mentally deficient. The Buddha dwelt in the void, free from the things that disturb, entirely free of the ‘self’ delusion. We should understand the meaning of ‘suññatā’ properly. It means free or void of ‘self,’ that everything is void of ‘self,’ of ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ Something that we can grasp easily is the voidness of a stone: a stone on the ground doesn’t have a ‘self,’ so it’s obviously void of the meanings of ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ However, when we come to consider our offspring or ourselves, we don’t see this voidness. We see a ‘self,’ we see ‘me,’ and we see ‘mine.’ The ‘me’ and ‘mine’ happen in accordance with natural principles, but they aren’t real. The mind can think in any way at all, but when it thinks wrongly, the results are going to be wrong too, and it’s then that there can be *taṇhā* (ignorant desire) and *upādāna* (clinging) to the desire as being ‘me’ or ‘mine.’ These concepts can easily arise from any appropriate experience. ‘Void’ means free from the meanings of ‘me’ and

‘mine.’ Void of the thought, the perception of ‘me,’ of the understanding that this is ‘me,’ of the clinging to the idea of a ‘self,’ of the underlying tendency of the mind to ‘self’ belief, and void of the familiarity with ‘me’ and ‘mine.’

There is voidness on all levels: the mind is void of defilement and void of *dukkha* (dis-ease, distress, suffering) – this is worthy of our interest.

If we regard the defilements as being all about selfishness, then of the root defilements of *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha*, *lobha* (greed) will manifest as the desire to get something, to make something ‘mine’; *dosa* (aversion) will manifest as desire too, and possibly as anger because of not getting something to be ‘mine’; while *moha* (delusion) will manifest as infatuation, spinning around, understanding that it is ‘me’ who is interested but who is uncertain as to how to respond to the situation. All the forms of defilement are a matter of ‘self.’ As for *dukkha*, the word has two basic levels of meaning and if they get mixed up there can be problems: it’s said that all *saṅkhāras* – anything ‘conditioned,’ anything arisen in dependence on a cause – are *dukkha*, which means that all conditioned things are impermanent, prone to change, and thus quite naturally *dukkha*. A stone, for instance, as an impermanent thing must have the characteristic of being *dukkha*. As for *dukkha* as suffering, that only appears if clinging occurs, because then it will be a matter of mental *dukkha*, of suffering, for whoever does the clinging. Even a stone, if we cling to it as ‘mine,’ means suffering for the mind to bear with. *Dukkha* in its first meaning accords with the principle that if anything is unstable, changing, or impermanent, then it’s *dukkha*. This isn’t mental suffering but the basic characteristic of *dukkha*, that which can give

rise to suffering. So, ‘dukkha’ – one meaning is to have the quality of being dukkha, and another is of pain in the mind, mental pain. If the mind is void, it doesn’t have the suffering, the mental pain, because there is the knowledge that all things have the basic characteristic of being dukkha, and that to cling to them will be a problem. Thus, there is recognition of the benefit of not clinging, which is what prevents suffering from arising.

The void mind is free from foolishness and able to think intelligently in conjunction with full mindfulness and right knowledge. When the mind is depressed or unhappy, then whatever mindfulness and wisdom we possess is forced, halting and sketchy. When the mind is void, without depression or unhappiness, it has the attributes that allow it to perform perfectly – full mindfulness and a clear understanding. Foolishness comes from the defilements, from *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha* (greed, aversion, and delusion), but sweep out the defilements completely, and the mind clears up completely, and then mindfulness and wisdom return to guide our activities. Thus, voidness is useful, endowing the mind with the attributes that allow it to do its duties properly. The mind freed from the defilements is more mindfully aware than at any other time.

We can experience normal mindfulness and clear understanding on condition that the mind remains undefiled. Thus, observe that when the mind is freed from that which makes it unhappy, when it’s free from the defilements, free of ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ it is bright and contented and exhibits what we might call ‘normal’ awareness.

Now, let’s suppose for a moment that a pill could be made for us to swallow that would produce the void mind.

But even if that could be done, it wouldn't produce the sort of void mind we are talking about. Even if scientists could make a medicine for us to take which, once taken, produced voidness so that there was no dukkha, no heat at all, it wouldn't be the voidness we are talking about here. Rather, it would create an addiction which would prove ultimately very harmful. We shouldn't look for quick fixes, like some kind of pill that will easily bring us the free mind, bring Nibbāna. It would be madness to do that, and it can't happen. If there is to be the voidness of the Buddhists, then it must be a matter of mental correctness.

So, looking at the benefits of voidness – the voidness of the void mind, what is its value? What is its use?

From what has already been said, we know that there will be contentedness along with the efficiency peculiar to the void mind, but now we want to point out the advantages clearly. Making the mind void will be the same as getting a taste of Nibbāna, a sample of Nibbāna from time to time, because whenever the mind is free from the kilesas, then we get a touch of the ultimate. We experience a little Nibbāna, a sample of it, just for a time, and perhaps this might happen several times during the course of one day. Hence, we have temporary *nibbanic* experiences to sustain us. It's necessary that we experience this form of Nibbāna often enough during the day and night for us to stay reasonably normal. Otherwise, we would have nervous problems and perhaps become really mad. So, having some mental freedom is the same as having a little Nibbāna infiltrate life every day. We would also have above average mindfulness and wisdom. Generally speaking, people have average mindfulness and wisdom, but if we want to upgrade, to have miraculous

mindfulness and wisdom, then we need to make the mind void, let the mind be free. If we want to study well, to speak well, to write well, to compose well, to do anything well, then let the mind be void and mindfulness and wisdom will do their various duties marvellously. Deep, wonderful thinking can happen when the mind is void of defilement, when the mind gets out from under the pressure of the kilesas. If the defilements still have the mind by the throat, then there is no possibility, no way that it can think freely, or do anything particularly well, and then even writing a letter properly will be difficult – even talking will be difficult. Hence, we would have the power of the free mind to enable us to do our duties well. Now, here is something funny: when the mind is void, then the King of death won't be able to find us; the King of death will search for us but he won't find us. When the mind is freed from the feeling of being 'me,' it doesn't feel that 'I' will die, thus it doesn't know 'death.' The Buddha said this: *"One who has mindfulness and sees the world as void, then the King of death seeks for, but doesn't find them."* Dwell seeing all worldly things as void and we won't entertain any fear of death. Then the King of death won't be able to find us, and we will have escaped his grasp. Let him seek wherever he will, as much as he wishes, but he won't find the void-minded because such a one is free of 'me' and 'mine' and dwells 'above' birth, ageing, sickness, and death. In Thailand, we chant about how we ordinarily have sickness, old age, and death and cannot escape them, which is true because we are ignorant and have 'self' belief, and then we get what we deserve. That is, we get 'born' to age, get sick, and die. It's what we deserve – we have a 'self,' a 'me,' so we're not free and have to be born in order to die

over and over again. The Buddha once told his attendant, Ānanda: “*Ānanda, whenever anyone dwells with us [the Buddha] as their kalyāṇamitta [kalyāṇamitta means ‘good friend’], they, being ordinarily subject to birth will escape it, being ordinarily subject to ageing will escape from it, being ordinarily subject to sickness will escape it, being ordinarily subject to death, will escape death.*” But how is it that we can escape birth, ageing, sickness, and death by taking the Buddha as our good friend? Well, the Buddha taught freedom from ‘self’ belief. He taught how to let go of it, and being free of ‘self,’ then birth, ageing, sickness, and death may search for us but they won’t find us, that is, we won’t have a ‘self’ to be born, to age, to get sick, and to die. Make the mind free of ‘self’ and then birth, ageing, sickness, and death won’t be able to dominate it. This will be a benefit of voidness.

The mind free from the influence of defilement, without the *nīvaraṇas* (the hindrances), without the *upakkilesas* (the defilements), without the *anusayas* (the underlying tendencies of mind), without the *āsavas* (the inflows), is a powerful mind. Some schools of thought hold that the void, the free mind is an impossibility and that we must have the defilements throughout our lives, that there isn’t going to be any time when the mind will be free from them. Now, we say that they aren’t always present because there isn’t anything that is permanent. There isn’t anything that’s eternal, that’s truly unchanging. The defilements come and go from the mind in dependence on the causes and conditions being present, so end the causes and conditions, and the defilements will end too. Through developing sufficient mindfulness and clear understanding, we can live producing the right sort of conditions in such a way that the defilements that would

normally arise wouldn't get the opportunity, and even the smaller problems like the five *nīvaraṇas* wouldn't happen. The mind of an ordinary, worldly person isn't void, isn't free because it's afflicted by defilement, by *taṇhā* (craving) and by *upādāna* (clinging, attachment). What is 'craving' like? Craving drags the mind here, there, and everywhere. What is 'clinging' like? Clinging binds the mind to the object of desire. Someone who lives with craving and clinging isn't free. Now, if we know what craving and attachment are like, then we will also know what freedom from them is like. We will know the void mind. The void mind is 'clean' and 'unblemished.' In ordinary usage, if something is blemished, then it's said to be soiled or dirty in some way. In the mental world, this 'dirt' is called '*kilesa*' (defilement). 'Kilesa' means 'a dirty thing.' If the kilesa enters, then the mind isn't clean. Being free from defiling things and being unblemished is another characteristic of the void mind. If there's nothing to disturb it, then the mind is content; if there is some disturbing factor, then it's not. The mind of the average person is usually uneasy and insecure, so that whenever anything a little odd occurs, it's easily disturbed. If it wasn't for the defilements, the mind would be at peace. The void mind is said to be 'cool,' 'cool' because of the absence of any 'heat' – the defilements represent the 'heat' that arises into the mind because of the way we deal with sense experience. It's because we are careless when we see, hear, smell, touch, taste, think, imagine or whatever, that there comes to be the 'heat' of greed, aversion, and delusion, the heat of defilement, to disturb the mind. If there's no defilement, there won't be any 'heat' either. There will be 'coolness' instead. 'Nibbāna' means 'cool.' Whenever the

mind is away from the kilesa, it's 'cool,' and even if it's just a little touch of this coolness, lasting just for a short time, it will still be Nibbāna. We could call that 'occasional,' or 'accidental' Nibbāna, which though it's just a brief encounter, yet displays the characteristics of Nibbāna, of the void mind. Further, the mind stops wandering around. Essentially, it's the kilesa of *taṇhā* (craving) that makes the mind wander. Craving or ignorant desire pulls the mind here and there, causes it to wander after the various sense objects, the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and the mental objects arising at the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or in the mind. There is a parable in the Pāli texts which illustrates this: *"Go and catch six kinds of animals – a snake that lives in a hole in the ground, a crocodile that lives in the water, a bird that lives mostly in the air, a monkey that lives in a tree, a fox that lives in a cemetery, and a dog that lives in a house."* These animals have their own peculiar habitats. Catch them and tie them up and they will each still be drawn towards their natural homes: the bird towards the sky; the animal that lives in a house towards the house; the one that lives in the forest towards the forest, etc., etc. These are analogies for the mind being pulled around by *taṇhā* – desire arising towards the things we see, hear, smell, etc. Because there is something pulling it in so many directions, the mind isn't free, isn't void. When there's no more pulling, then it's said to be stilled. That stillness, that stopping is voidness. The void mind has clarity, while the confused mind doesn't. Instead, it's disturbed by the kilesas that come in to trouble it. So take out the things that obstruct its clarity, and it can then function properly and do its duty. When anything is obstructed or hindered, it can't act properly. The mind is the

same – if it has the kilesas obstructing it, then it's not clear. It's a stupid mind without wisdom, not a quick or smart mind. Clarity is another characteristic of the void mind. The void mind is also '*kevalī*.' This will probably be a strange word for just about everyone to hear, a word that, although it's in the Buddhist texts, it is almost never heard. '*Kevalī*' is a Pāli synonym for the Arahant (true human being) and has the meaning of being joined with or integrated into the 'whole,' that is, being 'complete.' When the mind is free it goes to the great voidness. The mind is usually not free, rather it's imprisoned, but it can escape from prison, and it can become integrated into the all-encompassing void. Voidness is the same thing as *kevalī*. *Kevalī* is thus another name for the Arahant, the Arahant being void, or free. The *kevalī* mind, freed from its bindings and without the usual causes and conditions (*saṅkhāra*) to concoct it, is *amatā* (deathless), and it is Nibbāna (gone to the other shore).

So, voidness is freedom from the *kilesas*, from the *nīvaraṇas*, and especially from *taṇhā* and *upādāna* (craving and attachment). Without the kilesas, without suffering, the mind is peaceful and undisturbed. It's cooled, without 'heat.' It's stilled and it doesn't wander around like the mind of an ordinary individual. It's clear and bright and knows all things as it should according to nature, and it's *kevalī*, attained to the universal voidness. All these are characteristics of the void mind, the free mind.

Try to observe the mind and see if it displays any of these characteristics. Even having some will be better than none. The fact is that we do, as is appropriate for us as individuals, have times when the mind has some of the qualities of

voidness. We want to give a better understanding, so we will explain the two concepts ‘voidness’ and the ‘void mind’ a little more.

Now, voidness is one thing, and the ‘void’ mind is another. The mind is void or free whenever voidness enters it. Thus, the void mind and the voidness aren’t the same thing, but they can’t be separated either – if there is both the mind and the voidness together, then there is the ‘void mind.’ Voidness, if it does nothing, is useless, but if the mind has voidness, then it isn’t being disturbed by the defilements, and it experiences contentment. So, as already mentioned, it’s free, smooth, peaceful, cool, still, and bright – it’s *kevalī*. And because the mind really ‘sees’ voidness, it’s content with that and protects it. It avoids clinging and grabbing at anything and protects the freedom, the voidness, so that it dwells apart from suffering.

So, the mind has voidness and is then a ‘void’ mind, with the ‘voidness’ making the mind void. There is contentment because of that. There’s no need for ‘me’ to interfere because contentment is experienced by the mind itself, and if the mind is content, then that’s enough. After all, it’s the mind that does the thinking, so it’s the mind, still with ignorance, that thinks there is a ‘me.’ Because we can think, then we think that we have a ‘self,’ but it’s really because the mind can think that there is the ‘self’ thought; it’s really the mind that feels it to be so. This is *māyā* (illusion). A *māyā* isn’t a reality – it’s an illusion that tricks the mind into seeing something unreal as real.

Now, *suññatā* (voidness), if it’s the ultimate variety, is arranged into four modes and is referred to as ‘*cātu-koṭika-suññatā*,’ which means ‘four-peaked,’ or ‘four-pinnacled.’

The *koṭi* part of the Pāli word means a peak, a high place, like a tower for instance, so *catu-koṭika* means having four peaks. *Suññatā* then, simply put, has four modes or kinds. If something is the ultimate, it's called *koṭika*, so the ultimate four-peaked voidness is referred to as '*catu-koṭika-suññatā*.' The first peak or the first mode is that there isn't anything that could be called 'me.' The mind feels that there isn't anything that could be 'me.' Secondly, there isn't the anxiety usually associated with or connected to the 'me' thought. The first peak is that there isn't a 'self,' a 'me.' The second refers to the absence of the associated anxiety. The third peak is that there isn't anything that could be called 'mine,' and the fourth peak is the absence of the anxiety generally connected with anything thought of as being 'mine.' Thus, there are four peaks in two pairs. It's a matter of 'me' and 'mine' again. Examine and find out if these kinds of feelings are in the mind: 'me' and the anxiety that comes with it, and 'mine' plus the associated stress – the direct feelings of 'me' and 'mine' as well as the indirect feelings of anxiety coming from them. Ultimately there won't be the slightest feeling of 'me' or of 'mine' or any of the associated anxiety either. It will be absolutely, definitely finished. There won't be any doubt about it. This will be the highest voidness, the four-peaked *suññatā*. It's preserved in this way in the Pāli texts.

Now, should laypeople know about this subject or not? Think about that because it's customary among some groups in Thailand to hold the view that laypeople don't need to know about this matter. We were criticized by a Bangkok group for teaching laypeople matters, including *suññatā*, which they said were too high for them. Nevertheless, we are of the opinion that laypeople need to know about *suññatā*.

After all, it's because they don't know about it that they have to suffer. *Suññatā* is useful and helpful to people who have to live in the world. Once, the head of a group of householders went to the Buddha and asked him what would be most useful, most helpful for people such as them, for worldly people who have families and still live the worldly life. The Buddha said that *suññatā* could be of great benefit to them. One layman who was especially famous was *Anāthapindika*. Both the Buddha and his disciples taught *Anāthapindika* about other matters, but they didn't speak to him about *suññatā*. When he was seriously ill and had reached the last days of his life, *Sāriputta* went to visit him and did talk about it, whereupon the seriously ill *Anāthapindika* bemoaned the fact that for a long time he had listened to the Buddha and his disciples teach, but they hadn't taught him about *suññatā* at all. Only today had they explained it to him, just today when he was near to death, which meant that he would only get the benefit of such knowledge for a short time. It was regrettable, but had he known about *suññatā* earlier in his life, then he could have got more from it. So he expressed his disappointment by moaning and groaning a lot. People should think about that and get to know *suññatā* well in advance, long before death comes, because knowing about voidness can mean being free of suffering for a good part of life. Coming to know *suññatā* only on the day of one's death means getting just a little taste of the good life, so we ought to know about it as early in our lives as is possible, and then we would have the chance to sustain the void mind, the free mind for a longer time. People in the world have to live with *dukkha*. In fact, they have to live with the mass of suffering more than the clerics do, so they have a greater need to know

about its quenching. Suññatā, no matter how high flown or deep it may seem to be, is nevertheless a necessary matter for the layperson to know about. After all, someone in great pain would need a doctor more than someone with little pain. In the same way, people with a lot of dukkha should know a lot about suññatā. That would be fair and equitable.

Now, it's predicted in the Pāli texts that in the future people, won't be interested in suññatā, which will spell ruin for the religion. The Buddhist religion will be ruined because when people lose interest in suññatā and turn to some new thing that's not concerned with voidness, that doesn't come from the Buddha, it will signify the end of the religion. This 'new thing' is described in the texts as something put together by philosophers, by bookish people. It will be something new, some new teaching which will be popular but will be foreign to the concept of Nibbāna. It will be something those who come after the Buddha will teach, but which won't be the Buddha's actual words, so that they will explain the quenching of dukkha by another method, not by suññatā, and explain it in such a manner that it will attract people. If people are interested in this kind of thing, then they won't be interested in suññatā, and that will make the religion seem like nonsense. When people are more interested in something because it sounds nice, because it's new, then it's the beginning of confusion. Things that attract people foolishly tend to bring forgetfulness of the Dhamma, and when the Dhamma is forgotten, the *vinaya* (monastic discipline) will go the same way. Therefore, it's necessary that we keep to the basic principle that nothing should be clung to as 'I' or 'mine,' and we must maintain that one important basic principle as the firm foundation of the Buddhist religion:

‘suññatā’ – nothing should be clung to as ‘I’ or as ‘mine.’ If people hold to this basic tenet, then the whole of the Buddhist religion, the Mahāyāna and Theravāda, or part of them, or any branch, offshoot, group, sect or creed will retain knowledge of suññatā – but without it, there won’t be a Buddhist religion. So, recognize suññatā as being the heart of the genuine Buddhist religion. If we take out suññatā and replace it with something else, then it’s the end, the end of the genuine *Buddhasāsanā* (Buddhist religion). The Buddha offers a metaphor for this in the tale of the drum, the sacred drum of a Khattiya (Sanskrit: *kshatriya*) tribe in ancient India. The Khattiyas were warriors and this particular tribe had a sacred drum which they couldn’t replace, couldn’t make anew because it was sacred. They couldn’t replace it because if they did, it wouldn’t be sacred anymore. Now, some parts of the old drum began to decay, and they replaced these with new wood, but then other parts decayed which they also replaced. They continued on like this, replacing and replacing until the drum no longer contained any of the original wood at all. The point here is that the original and correct Buddhist religion disappears because another matter that isn’t suññatā is brought in to replace it. Suññatā is then lost and there isn’t a trace of it left. Be well aware that if we take suññatā out, then we let in the ‘me’ and the ‘mine.’ Taking out the matter of ‘not-self’ means taking out *anattā* and replacing it with *attā* (‘self’), which will spell the end of the true Buddhist religion.

Now, let’s look at the basis of *suññatā*, that is, *aniccam*, *dukkham*, and *anattā*. *Aniccam*, *dukkham*, *anattā*, these three words taken together are suññatā: *aniccam* (impermanent, not stable, uncertain, unsteady); *dukkham* (abhorrent,

hard to bear with); and *anattā* (‘not-self’). Take *aniccam*, *dukkham* and *anattā*, put them together, and *suññatā* is born. *Suññatā* is *aniccam*, *dukkham*, and *anattā*. Suppose someone ‘sees’ *aniccam*, *dukkham*, and *anattā* fully and completely. Then they will ‘see’ *suññatā* and know that whatever they experience is free, void of ‘self.’ An easy to grasp and clear meaning of *suññatā* is ‘void of “self.”’ When we are void of the ‘me’ illusion, then there can’t be a ‘mine’ either. The ‘mine’ depends on the ‘me,’ so, if we are free from the ‘me,’ that’s enough; the ‘mine’ is gone too. Now, if we have *sati-paññā* (mindfulness and wisdom), we will see that everything around us, both within and without, has the characteristic of being *suññatā*. The void mind has to see everything as void, and then it stops, becomes still and doesn’t chase after and cling to anything. We can examine ourselves to see if the mind is inclined to cling to anything at all, even to *Nibbāna*, because if mind is correct, truly correct, it won’t do that. When the mind doesn’t cling, that, then, is the *nibbanic* mind, the ‘cool’ mind – cool because everything that was once seen as being ‘mine’ is now seen as *tathatā*, as being just what it is, as being ‘just like that,’ as something that can’t be owned. So, we don’t aim to take anything to be ‘mine.’ From the lowest to the highest, the mind is then free and dwells with *Nibbāna*. If the mind takes *Nibbāna* as ‘mine,’ then it won’t be true *Nibbāna*. Be well aware that the condition for *Nibbāna* is to let go and not grasp at anything, so don’t take *Nibbāna* to be ‘mine’ because if we do it will be a false sort of *Nibbāna*. True *Nibbāna* can’t be owned by anybody. Don’t cling to anything – that will be enough. Let go! Let the mind reach the void and there won’t be any suffering, the mind won’t have *dukkha*. Don’t take the mind

to be ‘me,’ and don’t take the mental freedom to be ‘mine.’ Don’t take the happiness the mind receives because it’s free as ‘mine’ – there’s no need for anything to be ‘mine.’ Allow everything to be ‘just like that,’ ‘tathatā,’ ‘just like that.’ Just let things be what they are. If mind sees ‘suchness,’ knows everything as being ‘just like that,’ then it also knows that it can’t own anything.

We will need to know this ‘suchness,’ this ‘just like that,’ well. If we can understand everything as void, then all things will be understood in this way, and then the mind will be ‘just like that,’ the body will be ‘just like that,’ any feelings and thoughts will be ‘just like that,’ everything will be ‘just like that,’ operating according to the Law of Nature (*idappaccayatā*). All things are ‘just like that,’ just what they are and not otherwise. This is the meaning of *tathatā*. When the mind is free or void of ‘self,’ it doesn’t take anything to be ‘mine’ because it knows *tathatā*, knows that all things are ‘just like that.’ They are simply natures functioning according to the Law of Nature, the law of *idappaccayatā*. *Idappaccayatā* can mean ‘just like that’ too. For instance: it’s just like that, just like that, just like that (‘just like that, just like that, just like that,’ refers here to the conditions that give rise to suffering, being themselves ‘just like that’) and the result is suffering, or it’s just like that, just like that, and there is happiness. *Tathatā* (‘just like that’) doesn’t refer specifically to happiness or suffering, but indicates the truth of both *sukha* and *dukkha* as well as the true nature of the conditions underlying their arising and ceasing. Thus, the conditions are ‘just like that,’ ‘just like that,’ ‘just like that,’ then ‘suffering.’ That which we don’t like appears, or it’s like that, like that, like that until happiness and contentment arise.

Observe that both happiness and suffering are ‘just like that,’ just what they are according to nature, and that they arise ‘just like that’ in accordance with the Law of Nature, the law of idappaccayatā. When the mind learns to dislike suffering, it no longer goes in the way that allows it to happen. Rather, it practises to follow that mode of idappaccayatā, which doesn’t allow it to occur. It does this because it has gained the knowledge that there isn’t anything that should be clung to as ‘me’ or ‘mine,’ that when there is clinging of this sort, it – the mind – gets bitten, knows suffering every time. The mind is then chastened by the experience and turns into the way that doesn’t bite, that doesn’t hurt. Thus, we come to know the need to walk in the way of correctness, to encourage the correct mode of idappaccayatā, the one that doesn’t cause biting and that doesn’t hurt, so that the mind is free and dwells in the void.

Some people don’t understand this matter at all and prefer captivity, like the captivity coming from indulgence in the delight connected with sexual activity, or whatever. That isn’t being free. People return again and again to the delightful and don’t see voidness. It would be better for us to dwell equanimously – to be above both delight and revulsion would be the proper way to live. At present, if something delights, it’s clung to, and if it repels, it’s clung to; it’s all clinging, all a matter of ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ Dwelling in equanimity, not clinging to anything, we would live in the middle way between the extremes. Consider, for instance, the feelings of being replete and of being hungry, something a child could understand: a child would choose to experience the first of those two, but being full up with food, feeling replete, is that peaceful? Feeling full up disturbs the mind,

but feelings of hunger disturb the mind too, so it would be better to be in the middle, to be above feeling full up or feeling hungry. Hence, don't cling to those two feelings and avoid having to experience happiness and suffering. Take to the in-between, that which isn't either and which won't bite. Feeling full up isn't free, feeling hungry isn't free, feeling full of food is uncomfortable, feeling hungry is uncomfortable – if there's no 'me' to feel full or hungry, then that's freedom, that's voidness.

So, don't cling to anything, don't cling to the feelings of being full up, or to those of being hungry. Don't cling to the delicious or to the repulsive. We can see for ourselves how the delightful and the repulsive are able to confuse the mind – they both confuse, but they confuse differently. The mind undisturbed by such things would be a free, void mind, a mind without suffering.

Come to understand voidness well. Otherwise the opportunity of being Buddhist will be missed. We will be Buddhists who don't know about *suññatā*, who waste the opportunity of being Buddhist. It's much the same as wasting life because of not knowing what should be known. This 'not knowing' can't be excused. Not knowing *suññatā* will bring an unfortunate result, so it ought to be known. "I didn't know; please excuse me from suffering" cannot be given as an excuse. The law of *idappaccayatā* won't allow it; God won't allow it. *Idappaccayatā* is an immutable, unalterable law: *because there is this, then this can arise; because this isn't, then this isn't going to be either*. It goes along in this way all of the time. The Law of Nature is in this body of ours: *because there is this, this arises*, so should we do the wrong thing, then some physical disorder, some form of

dukkha will happen immediately. Because we cling to things as ‘mine’ and don’t allow them to go along according to the law, we get ‘bitten,’ and then there has to be mental suffering. If we are to avoid suffering, we will need to acknowledge idappaccayatā and learn to behave accordingly, that is, come to see that, whatever it is, it’s tathatā, it’s ‘just like that,’ so that we aren’t deceived into clinging to anything. This is to know ‘voidness,’ when the mind doesn’t cling and is freed from all suffering.

The void mind is exceedingly sharp and functions entirely according to the law of idappaccayatā. The void mind is peaceful and complete, and does everything in line with the Law of Nature. So, if we want to be free from any form of suffering, then we should dwell with a void mind. We should ‘abide in the void,’ abide in the *suññatā-vihāra*, and not allow any sense contact to happen carelessly with a mind that isn’t free. So, whether standing, walking, sitting, lying down, or whatever, do it with a void mind. Do it without the feeling that anything is ‘mine.’ People have to work in some way. Almost without exception, everybody has to work, so when we work, we should do it with a clever, bright mind, a void mind, and not with a mind that is ponderous and heavy. Don’t work with a tense mind, a clinging mind; do it with a clear mind, a void mind. When resting do it with a free mind because if the mind isn’t free, if it isn’t void, there’s no real rest and relaxation. When we do anything – working, meeting with people, relaxing, and so on – we do it with a free mind. If the mind isn’t free, if it’s irritated, disturbed by something, it suffers. Even when dealing with a troublesome matter, the mind should remain still and void. We will need to do our best when we fall ill. When we are sick, it’s most

important to be sick with a free mind because then we will recover quickly, or if we should happen to die, we will die well. If anyone would recover from illness quickly, then they should keep the mind void, free from clinging during the time that they are ill, being aware that the malady is really ‘just like that,’ just ‘thus.’ Sickness is *tathatā* (‘just like that’) and doesn’t really have any power to oppress, to ‘bully’ the mind. Sickness is something quite ordinary, not anything we should be afraid of, not anything capable of creating suffering. If we recover from sickness, it’s ‘just like that’ too. There’s no undue mental disturbance. It’s not something that needs to trouble or please the mind. So if we are ill, then we let it happen with an ordinary mind, a steady mind, without the ‘me’ and ‘mine’, without the ‘me’ who’s sick, without the ‘me’ who’s going to die, etc. Work with a void mind, relax with a void mind, meet people with a void mind, experience deadly illness with a void mind, die with a void mind – if we should die, then let the end come with a void mind, without the ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ and there won’t be any suffering at all. There is a saying that most people nowadays don’t understand: “There is sickness, but there isn’t anyone who’s sick” – there is the sickness but there isn’t anyone who experiences it. We believe that ‘I’m’ sick, ‘I’m’ going to die – ‘me,’ when in truth, this ‘me’ doesn’t exist. It sounds odd: there is the sickness, but there isn’t anyone who is sick; there is dukkha, but there isn’t anyone who experiences it – there is the feeling of dukkha, but there isn’t anyone who suffers it, or anyone who owns it. There is just the mental feeling. There is the doing of the many and various things, but there isn’t anyone who does them. In reality, they are induced through the law of idappaccayatā.

There is walking, but no-one walks; there is walking to the temple, for instance, but there isn't anyone who does it, because the 'walker' isn't a person – it's a stream of idappaccayatā. If one can see in this way, it's called 'seeing suññatā.' Thus, try to practise so that the mind doesn't cling to anything and there won't be any problems. Instead there will be the coolness, the quenching of suffering – but there won't be anyone who is cooled, quenched.

Nibbāna is the ultimate voidness, free from suffering, void of 'self.' Nibbāna may be the ultimate voidness, but there will still be the feelings normal for one who's alive and has the senses. Like the feeling arising from anything that comes into contact with the body in whatever way – there will still be these kinds of feelings, but as there won't be any clinging, then there won't be any suffering, even when there are the feelings associated with hunger, sickness, tiredness, or whatever. Life will still go along, and the body will still function and must feel hunger, thirst, desire to defecate and urinate, and so on and so forth. Hence, there will still be feelings because the body will still be sensitive, but there won't be a 'me' who does the feeling, so there won't be any suffering – only the disturbances natural to a living being. If hunger, thirst, pain, desire, eating, excreting etc., produces a troublesome feeling, then it's a natural event. Just recognize that it's idappaccayatā – it's happening naturally, and don't make it into dukkha. Don't cling and allow the kilesa to make it into suffering. We should practice like this.

Suññatā is necessary for one who would be dukkha-free. Anyone wanting to be free from suffering will have to dwell in the void, not clinging to anything as 'me' or 'mine,' with a mind in which the defilements don't arise and suffering

doesn't happen. Knowing this, we can try to practise so that we don't waste the good luck that is brought us into contact with the Buddhist religion and with the opportunity of ending suffering. Suññatā, or a life lived with suññatā, is a matter that Buddhists, laypeople included, need to know about.

Therefore, let's help each other to learn about suññatā. Let's help each other to practise it and get the result, the benefit, until we are able to 'abide in the void,' to live life with a free mind, a void mind, minus the nervous diseases we are prone to now. At present, people the world over suffer from nervous disorders because they aren't suññatā. Take a look – the human world is a nervous place.

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

Dhammavidu 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 Dipabhavan Meditation Center at Samui Island. As a translator, he has been particularly interested in *The Dhamma Proclamation Series*, a multivolume collection of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's major teachings.

Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles Series

- 1. *Idappaccayatā - The Buddhist Law of Nature*
- 2. *Void Mind*
- 3. *Living in the Present **
- 4. *Concerning Birth **
- 5. *Concerning God **
- 6. *Nibbāna from Every Angle **
- 7. *The Whirlpool of Saṃsāra **
- 8. *The World and Dhamma **

* forthcoming

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*
- *It All Depends **

Online Resources

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

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.

