

THE HEART OF BUDDHISM

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

A Dhamma lecture given at Suan Mokkh on 14 October 1982

In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhadāsa gave regular lectures during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. All Ajahn's teachings are now available on:

www.suanmokkh.org,

<https://soundcloud.com/buddhadasa> and

<https://www.youtube.com/@buddhadasabhikkhu7829>.

The following is a transcription generously made by a Dhamma volunteer. If you noticed possible improvements to the text and would like to contribute, please kindly contact the volunteer and the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok

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Friends, in the problem of birth, decay, disease, and death, I know you are interested to study, to seek the Buddhist way to give up all problems of life in the Buddhist way. I think I'll help you as best as I can so that you can understand this topic, but I have to tell in advance that my English knowledge is not complete. It is childish English knowledge that is self-taught and self-learned, then you have to think about it, try to understand it carefully to know what I meant to say. We cannot have a teaching as in the classroom. It can be only a private conversation.

You have heard that the Lord Buddha was enlightened concerning the Dhamma. We are, we think of, discussing on the Dhamma. The Dhamma that he enlightened was called the law of *idappaccayatā*. It is a natural law, the law of nature. The law in English is equivalent to the Thai term 'gote.' Now we call it in Thai, 'gote *idappaccayatā*.' The term 'gote' has in its meaning more than 'law,' but we have to use the term 'law' in English. This law is the supreme thing. It can be called 'God.' The Lord Buddha enlightened the law. After that he paid worship to the law suddenly, and he declared that all Buddhas in the past, even in the future, all of them worship this law in the name of Dhamma.

This natural law, it is comprised of six qualifications. We show the God that they are qualifications of God. That is to say, as the creator, the controller, the destroyer, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. The one who has these six qualifications we call him 'God,' but we Buddhists have this natural law as a god. Look at the law as a god who has in reality these six qualifications. It is the only god that can be acceptable by scientists of more than time. It is a natural law that cannot be established by anyone. If there is anyone or anything who establishes it, it is not a law, not a *gote*, especially *gote idappaccayatā*. This law is only one law, which all other laws are included in it. All of them are natural laws, not man-made laws. This law inheres in every atom, every atom altogether to compose our universe or universes, physically and mentally.

We ought to know it as well as the thing that controls us, controls all problems of us. Human beings will be happy or not happy, it is because of doing wrong or doing right to this law, not by the power of a personal god, even as the result of past *kamma*. This has to be discussed another time.

Peacefulness of the world will exist or not exist. It depends to this law of doing wrong or doing right. I'd like you to think of this, to estimate the power of the law. Supposing that even all personal gods intend to punish us, we can give up all the power, we are free from punishment by doing right in accordance with the law. Supposing that all personal gods intend to bless us, but if we do wrong to this *idappaccayatā* law, to be happy for instance, it's no way to receive the blessings of the gods.

You can see that this law controls all things, governs all things, both animate and inanimate, but the problem can arise, appear, only in animate things. The law of *idappaccayatā* as a god, this god is undescrivable, unclassifiable. We cannot know him as a person because he is not like anyone among all we know in this world. That *idappaccayatā* god is the first cause and sustaining cause every time and in every case in our universe. It creates both positive way and negative way, have a result as a negative and positive because it is only natural law. If he is a personal god, he will choose to create it only in a positive way. When we did not want anything in negative part, we have to know the law of a positive part, and we can have result as a positive by practice in accordance with the law.

The way to practice to solve such a problem is called the Dhamma. The actual problem of human beings is a problem of suffering, and it is a problem of suffering of human beings and the society of them. Sentient beings have to suffer when doing wrong to *idappaccayatā* law in the moment of *phassa*.

I'd like you to know this, especially as essence of the Dhamma, repeating it as all sentient beings have to suffer when doing wrong to the *idappaccayatā* law in the moment of *phassa*. Sentient beings have not to suffer, will not to suffer, when doing right, not doing wrong to this law, especially in the moment of *phassa*, or contact. We have to discuss about it further on.

I think that now we will discuss about this natural law in detail. It is the ABC of Buddhist Dhamma. Now I will tell you about *idappaccayatā* Dhamma. Sometimes we call it '*paticca-samuppada*,' the law of cause and effect. The origination of all things is dependent to their conditions. Just speaking we say, dependent origination of all things, but in this case we intend to discuss about only in the case of problems of human beings as sufferings or as dissatisfactoriness of any kind.

To understand *idappaccayatā* process, we have to start from the starting point, that is the thing called *āyatana*. *Āyatana* means the things concernable and to be concerned, and to concern anything else. *Āyatana* inside us we call it 'sense organs,' that is to say: the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body surface, and the mind itself. All these are inside us. The outer *āyatana*, that is the form or the sight, the sound, the smell, the taste, the touch, and the idea or thought for the mind.

Now you can see for yourself the eye to contact with the sight, the ear to contact with the sound, the nose to contact with the smell, the tongue to contact with the taste, the body

surface to contact with the touch, the idea to contact with the mind. Then we have six pairs of *āyatana*.

Now we study upon them in the *idappaccayatā* process. Begin as an example with the first pair, the eye and the form. The eye depends on the form that gives rise to eye-consciousness. Now we have three things: eye, form, and consciousness. These three things coming together in function, we call ‘contact,’ or ‘*phassa*’ in Pali. The very important moment to know, to study: the contact is the moment to raise ignorance or not. If it is the chance of raising of ignorance, it will go in a bad way to raise the problem of suffering.

If in the moment of contact we have adequate mindfulness and wisdom to govern the contact to be in the rightness, then no way, no room, no chance for ignorance. Then it is the contact that cannot be the starting point of suffering. We have to study, to practice, to train, to have mindfulness and wisdom to use just in time of contact, but we will discuss upon it later on. Now I will tell you further. If the *phassa* or a contact is an ignorant one – we will call it the ‘blind contact’ or ‘ignorant contact’ – such a contact will give birth to blind feeling, feeling with ignorance. Pleasant or unpleasant feeling, but having ignorance in it, we call it ‘blind contact’ or ‘ignorant contact.’ Such contact will give birth to ignorant want or blind want. As usual, we can call a blind want as a desire. In Pali when we call it ‘*taṇhā*,’ we mean blind want, ignorant want, or wrong want – not simply a want. You have to know this. If you use the term ‘desire,’ it means blind want – the want of ignorance, the want by means of ignorance. Such want, blind want, will give birth to attachment, or ‘*upādāna*’ in Pali. Attachment from blind want, from ignorant want, then it is ignorant in itself – to attach to anything that comes into contact with it, attach it in this or that meaning, and finally attachment as the thing is ‘my’ or that thing is ‘I.’

You have to know five *khandhas*, in Pāli, or *skhandha* in Sanskrit. Attached to five *khandha*: The first *khandha* is this body. When the body is in its function, the ignorant mind attaches to it as ‘I’ in some cases, and as ‘mine’ in some cases. And then we can see someone get angry with his body, regard it as ‘he,’ ‘himself.’ Someone regards it as ‘his’ and ‘his body.’ In the first case attached to the first *khandha*, the *rūpa-khandha*. In Pali we call it *rūpa-khandha*, aggregate of corporality.

The second *khandha*: the feeling. When we have a feeling of any kind in the mind, the ignorant mind regards it or attaches to it as ‘I’ who feel, but in other cases it attaches to it, regards it, as ‘my’ feeling. We have regarded it as ‘I’ or as ‘my.’ It is the same attachment.

The third *khandha* is called ‘*saññā*,’ a perception: perceive something as this, as that, as those, such as ‘my’ happiness, ‘my’ suffering, perceive it as ‘good,’ as ‘bad.’ The perception of the mind was attached to be the ‘I’ who perceives in some cases. The perception in other cases has been attached as ‘my’: ‘my’ perception. You can understand this, that the same thing can be attached to in two ways: as the doer and the done.

Now, the fourth *khandha* for attachment: the fourth is called ‘*saṅkhāra-khandha*.’ *Saṅkhāra* in this case has a special meaning. Literally it means ‘to form,’ but to form in a mental way, that is to think. *Saṅkhāra* means to condition, to wrest, or to cause. Now we meant to think, because to think is to wrest, to cause the conception now taking place in the mind of the ignorant one, the one to attach it as ‘I’ think. In another case he attaches as ‘my’ thought. You notice this, consider this by yourself, as it goes in two ways as such.

Now to the last *khandha*, the fifth: *viññāṇa-khandha*, aggregate of consciousness, to know all things that come to be in contact with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and the mind itself. The ignorant one will attach to consciousness, the body of consciousness, as ‘I,’ ‘I’ who makes consciousness. And another time attach as ‘my’ consciousness. Two ways again.

Now we have five attachments. You can see that one can attach to many things – outside and inside – attaching to it, grasping at it mentally, as ‘I’ or as ‘my.’ Ignorant concept is not a real thing, not in the reality of the thing, but by means of ignorance the conception arises in such way as ‘I’ or as ‘my’ in many, in anything, in the case.

Attachment is now taking place in the process of *idappaccayatā*: Such attachment gives birth or gives rise to existence, or *bhava* in Pali, the existence of something now of the illusive self, existence of the self from attachment. Attachment on an illusive thing, by illusive thought, and can have illusive existence or *bhava*. Now there exists ‘of self,’ even in infancy stage. We call it ‘*bhava*’ or ‘existence.’

That existence gives birth or gives rise to birth, or *jāti* in Pali. Now the self is full bloom as a self, a proper self to the case, proper to the case, suitable to the case, to be one ‘I,’ one ‘man,’ one ‘self.’ Now there is a self, the supposing thing as self, or inanely as ‘I.’ Now illusive ‘I’ takes place in the process of *idappaccayatā*.

The ‘I’ thinks and does or speaks in the way of attachment. Then the ‘I’ begins to do, to think, to speak in ignorant ways, such as ‘this is I,’ ‘this is my possession.’ Even ‘this is my birth,’ ‘this is my decay,’ ‘this is my disease,’ and ‘this is my death,’ for instance. All things come to be problems of such a self, giving problems to the mind for the mind to suffer, to have suffering, to have dissatisfaction in any case. This is *idappaccayatā* in the way or process to raise problems of suffering to the mind, in reality to the mind, but as we said, to the man.

Now, if we have the adequate mindfulness and wisdom, we can have mindfulness and wisdom adequately just in time of the contact. We will repeat the process from the very beginning again. The eye depends to the form, gives birth to eye-consciousness. These three things coming together in function, the function of becoming called ‘*phassa*,’ or ‘contact.’ Now in this case the man having adequate mindfulness and wisdom just in time of contact or *phassa*, they can use mindfulness and wisdom to govern the contact, not to be ignorant contact, it must, will be, wise contact.

Such a wise contact will not give birth to blind feeling, but wise feeling as the cause. That is, wise contact gives birth to wise feeling. Wise feeling cannot give birth to blind want, but to wise want, or want with wisdom. Differentiate from the first case of ignorant contact. Now, wise contact or awakened contact gives birth to wise feeling, pleasant or unpleasant, but wise feeling, the feeling with wisdom by means of mindfulness. Such a feeling cannot raise a blind want or desire, but gives birth to wise want, which cannot be called ‘desire.’

Then we have wise want. The wise want cannot give birth to attachment, then no attachment for the illusive concept of ‘I’ or ‘my,’ then no existence for the ‘self’ and no birth of the ‘self.’ No ‘self,’ that is, no ‘I’ which will be as no ‘my.’ Then nothing to come to contact with the ‘I,’ because without ‘I,’ then there’s no problem of the mind, any kind of problem. Now, *idappaccayatā* in the process of no problem, of not able to give the problem to the life.

Now you can see two ways or two kinds of *idappaccayatā*. The first runs by ignorance, ending with the problem of suffering. The second runs by means of mindfulness and wisdom, and ending of all problems.

This is the law, the natural law, not a law established by anyone. The law is a thing in itself. We have to know this, such as Lord Buddha enlightened it, enlightened it, concerning it, he knows it as the Supreme Dharma, prepare worship to it at the time of enlightenment. We have this, this Dhamma – the law of *idappaccayatā* – as the Supreme Thing. It can be called ‘Buddhist God,’ but not ‘personal god.’ It is an impersonal or non-personal god. I’d like you to know this. It is the way, Buddhist way, to be emancipated from all problems.

Now, I’d like to remind you to what I have said that this is the ABC of Buddhist Dhamma. Everyone has to start the studying or practice on the Buddha-Dhamma in, on, upon this thing because it’s ABC of Dhamma. That is from the eye and from the ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, of yourself in daily life when it is, when they are in functions of seeing, of listening, of smelling, of tasting, of touching, and of thinking. Not from a book, but from the actual thing in the body as organs of the body contact other things around the body. In daily life you have your eyes, your nose, your tongue in what way you know their functions or not. You have to study from such actual things. If you want to study Buddha-Dhamma, to know Buddha-Dhamma, you have to begin your study upon these things – the so-called ‘ABC of Buddhism’ – not to begin your study from big, immense system of Indian philosophy before Buddhism or as such useless to do such a thing. I want you, I’d like you to study Buddha-Dhamma by starting your study from these six pairs of *āyatana*: six sense organs and six sense objects when they are in their function in your daily life, not from the book, not from a sermon, not from a preaching. It’s useless to do that if you want to get at the heart of the Dhamma.

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Transcribed by Bill Weir (arizonahandbook@yahoo.com) in June. 2023

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This Dhamma teaching is also available as free ebook under the title
“The A, B, C of Buddhism”: <https://www.suanmokkh.org/books/123>
(*Transcribed and arranged by Stephen R. Schmidt*)