

Natural Cure for Spiritual Disease, Part 1 of 3

HOW TO STUDY DHAMMA

by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

A Dhamma lecture given at Suan Mokkh on 3 February 1986

In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhādāsa 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 Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok

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To begin, I would like to express my joy that you have come here to study Dhamma (natural truth). Second, I would like to thank each of you for helping to make Suan Mokkh a useful and worthwhile place.

Today, I would like to talk with you concerning the question: What benefits will we receive from studying Dhamma? If you get any benefits from Buddhism, you will become a Buddhist automatically, whether or not you go through a conversion ceremony. To convert or not to convert is a meaningless issue. The relevant issue, the important thing, is whether you will get anything useful from Buddhism.

So we will talk about the things that you will gain from Buddhism. Only after realizing that Buddhism has benefited you will you know what Buddhism is about. Until you understand what it is that you have received, you can't really know anything about Buddhism. Let's discuss, then, the things that you will obtain from Buddhism. Thus, you will understand Buddhism and will become a Buddhist automatically.

I would like to say that you will get the best, the highest thing that a human being ought to get. There is nothing more worth getting than this; it surpasses everything. We might call this thing, simply, 'new life.' Consequently, the best thing to do here is to talk about the characteristics of new life.

Now, for you to understand what is going to be said, I ask you to forget everything. Please forget all the faiths, creeds, and beliefs which you have ever held. Put them all aside for the time being. Even if you prefer to believe in scientific principles more than any of the so-called religions, leave them completely alone for now. Make the mind empty, free, and spotless, so that you can hear something new. Actually, Buddhism shares many

characteristics and principles with science, but Buddhism is a science of the mind -heart rather than a science of physical things.¹ Buddhism is a spiritual science. For this reason, it may be something new for you.

Dhamma Medicine

The first thing we would like you to realize is that Buddhism, or Dhamma, is a medicine for curing disease. This is a strange and special medicine because it can be taken by anyone, regardless of religion, nationality, ethnic background, education, class, or language. Anyone may use this medicine, for Dhamma is like those modern drugs that cure physical ailments. Such drugs can be taken by people all over the world, no matter what their religion, race, sex, profession, or language. Although we come from different cultures, we can use the very same kinds of medicine. Take aspirin, for example. No matter who and where we are, we can take a few aspirin to get rid of a headache. Dhamma is the same. It is the universal medicine.

We like to say that Dhamma is a medicine for disease (*rogā*). I would like for us to use this Pāli word ‘rogā,’ because it has a clear and useful meaning. Although it’s usually translated as ‘disease,’ *rogā* literally means ‘that which pierces and stabs,’ thus causing pain. We don’t really know where the English word ‘disease’ comes from, so we prefer ‘rogā.’ Its meaning is certain and appropriate: stabbing, piercing, skewering. Dhamma is something that can cure the stabbing and piercing of *rogā*.

The *rogā* with which we’re most concerned is spiritual. We can call it ‘spiritual disease.’ Physical disease pierces the body; spiritual disease stabs the mind or spirit. Dhamma is the latter’s remedy. If we have no spiritual disease, to come and study Dhamma is a complete waste of time. Hence, everyone must look closely in order to know both kinds of *rogā*: physical disease, *rogā* of the body, and spiritual disease, *rogā* of the mind, heart, or spirit. Then look within yourselves right now, is there any spiritual disease in you? Are you free from disease or merely enduring it?

We begin our study of Dhamma by getting to know our own *rogā*. You must look and search within yourself until you see and discover how spiritual disease afflicts you. To do so, you must look inside. If you don’t, you won’t make a proper beginning to your study of Dhamma. Unless we understand the *rogā* from which we suffer, we will only study Dhamma in a foolish, aimless way. Actually, most of you already have some knowledge about your spiritual disease; however, for many of you that knowledge will be slight, scattered, or unclear.

Let’s talk about the disease a bit more in order to clarify it. All of the problems that disturb the mind are problems that arise from aging, illness, and death. These are the first symptoms of the disease. Our minds are disturbed and pestered by problems that result from the fact that we all must grow old, fall sick, and die. These problems are the first thing to look at. Next, there are three general, miscellaneous problems: we get separated from the things we love, we experience things we dislike, and we have wishes which go unfulfilled. These are general problems leading to spiritual disease. Before anything else, each of you must know these problems or *rogā* as you actually experience them within yourselves.

Look Within

This is why there is the principle that Dhamma must be studied and learned internally, rather than externally. We must learn from life itself. Learn from all the things that you experience within this fathom-long body. Please be certain to learn inside only, and don't bother learning outside. The things that we learn from external sources, such as books and talks, are never enough. Only by looking within can we come to understand these spiritual diseases completely. The external kind of study and learning, such as reading books, discussion, and listening to talks as you are doing now, can do no more than explain the method and means of inner study. Such external study only teaches us how to go about the inner study. Then, you must go and do that inner study in order to understand Dhamma.

I ask all of you to begin your studies from within by studying the problems that you inwardly experience. Please take a look at the problems that arise from aging, sickness, and death. We are afraid of aging, falling sick, and dying; all kinds of problems on many different levels arise from them. We must clearly observe these things in the same way that a geologist examines a rock, as when we take up something with our own hand, hold it up to the light, and carefully examine it until we see it clearly in all its detail. In the same way, we must clearly see the problems that arise from our own aging, illness, and death. Further, we must investigate the problems that develop out of them, such as being separated from beloved things, encountering unloved things, and desiring things but not getting them.

The result of all of the above problems is *dukkha* (distress, hurt, misery), both physical and mental. The symptoms and conditions of *dukkha* are many and varied. It comes in many forms: sorrow, sadness, dissatisfaction, grief, lamentation, tears, frustration, pain, upset, agony, and more. There are Pāli terms for all of these, but what we call them isn't important. We needn't know all of their names, yet we ought to know how these things really feel when we experience them. To begin with, you must know them inside yourselves. All of these are *rogā*, the symptoms of *rogā*, and the results of the *rogā* which we have caught.

Dhamma is the medicine for *rogā* (spiritual disease); thus, the matter we're discussing here is a matter of the mind and spirit. The Buddha was one who came to know this disease, found a cure for it, and used the cure in order to free himself from disease. After doing so, the Buddha was then able to teach us about the *rogā*, its cure, and the way to administer the cure. Please understand Buddha in this way. If you are afflicted by spiritual disease, you ought to be interested in his Dhamma.² However, if any one of you is completely free of spiritual disease, you are wasting time on Dhamma – you can go home. I repeat, anyone who has no spiritual disease is invited to leave.

Developing the Cure

Now let's talk about studying Dhamma, which is the medicine that cures spiritual disease. There are many stages and levels to Dhamma. We begin by studying, as we do with any ordinary subject.³ Maybe we have no real understanding of Dhamma at the start. Although we have read many books and listened to talks, we don't really know Dhamma. We study in order to know, then we have knowledge. Once we have some knowledge, it must be used. In short, for it to be worthwhile, we must know Dhamma, until we have Dhamma, and then use Dhamma.

Let's go through these three things again. Even though we may have read about and

studied Dhamma a great deal, although we may have much knowledge of it, we may not have the right kind of knowledge. This means we don't really have Dhamma. If it isn't the correct knowledge, we won't be able to use it. Thus, we need to study until we have a sufficient amount of the right knowledge. Otherwise we won't be able to use it. Please investigate this fact thoroughly. Therefore, we must have Dhamma, and we must have correct and sufficient understanding of Dhamma. But having the right knowledge isn't enough; we must have a sufficiently large amount of this correct knowledge and it must be very quick. If it isn't quick, it is never on time and in the place where it is needed. We must be agile and expert in the use of Dhamma.

Simply having this knowledge somewhere in the back of our minds doesn't cure the spiritual disease. We must be expert in it; we need to be skillful in its proper use. We need to be deft, agile, and expert, so that we are able to understand the spiritual disease that is already present, as well as any new spiritual disease that may arise. If we have this understanding, it is a good start in becoming able to use Dhamma to cure our disease. So study the disease within yourselves. This is the kind of knowledge that you must develop.

Just One Teaching

You must know that Buddha spoke of just one thing and nothing else: *dukkha* (distress, dissatisfaction, suffering) and the quenching of *dukkha*. Buddha taught about only the disease and the cure of the disease; he didn't talk about anything else. When people asked questions about other matters, Buddha refused to waste his or their time with such things. Nowadays, we spend our time studying all kinds of other things. It's a pity how our curiosity is aroused by matters such as: After death, will I be born again? Where will I be reborn? How will it happen? Please don't waste your time on those things. Instead of reading lots of books, take what time you have to focus on *dukkha* and the complete, utter quenching of *dukkha*. This is the knowledge to store up, this is the studying to do. Don't bother studying anything else!

Buddha taught only *dukkha* and the total cessation of *dukkha*. He taught that we must study these two things within our bodies. You can only do this while the body is alive. Once the body dies, you don't have to concern yourselves with this problem any further. But now, while there's life, constantly, continuously, and inwardly study *dukkha* (spiritual disease) and the utter quenching of *dukkha* (the cure of the spiritual disease).

Throughout this world there is little interest in this matter of *dukkha* and its end. None of the world's schools pay any attention to it. In the universities, they don't teach or study it. The only thing taught in our schools and universities is cleverness, the storing up of many facts and the ability to perform mental tricks with them. Students graduate with cleverness and some way to make a living. This is what modern education means – being clever and earning lots of money. *Dukkha* and the quenching of *dukkha* are totally ignored. We believe that all education in today's world is incomplete. It is imperfect because the most important subjects are forgotten; a general base of knowledge and the ability to earn a living are not enough. There is a third area of knowledge that the schools and universities don't teach: how to be a human being. Why do they ignore what it takes to be a proper human being, that is, a human being free of *dukkha*? A proper, well-rounded human being ought to have no spiritual disease, consequently modern education will be incomplete and insufficient as long as it fails to cure spiritual disease.

What Are Human Beings?

It is correct and proper that each of you has come here to undertake the third kind of education: how to be a human being without any problems, how to be free of dukkha. It is good that you have come here and are interested in this topic. In short, use this opportunity to learn what it takes to be a human being.

If someone tells you that you're not yet human, please don't get angry and please don't feel sad. First, you must look and see what it means to be human. So let's take a look at '*manussa*,' the Pāli word for human being. This is a very good word for it has a very useful meaning. Manussa means 'lofty-minded one,' a mind high enough to be above all problems. Problems are like flood waters, but they can't flood the lofty mind. When one's mind is elevated to a high level, we can say that one is a manussa. The speaker isn't sure where the English word 'human being' comes from. Our guess is that it must mean 'high-minded,' also. *Man* is probably related to *mana* (mind) and *hu* ought to mean 'high.' So human ought to mean 'high-minded.'

Dhamma is the knowledge which tells us exactly what it means to be human. We're interested in what it is to be fully human, rather than merely masquerading in 'human' bodies. To be truly human is to be above all problems. Study and learn in order to be completely human. Study, practice, and work to develop a mind, heart and spirit that is above all problems. By problems, we mean dukkha, the thing that, if it arises, we cannot tolerate or endure. When it occurs, we can't stand it and struggle to get away from it. This causes agitation, discomfort, unhappiness, and unhealthiness. Dukkha, our problem, means 'unbearableness, intolerableness.' We can't stand it; we can't put up with it.

Once again, let me repeat that if you have no problems you can go home. You need not waste your time studying Dhamma. However, if you happen to have some problems, just one little problem, or perhaps many, then take a good look at them. Stick around and learn how to look at problems.

I dare say that every one of you has a problem, and further, that you all have the same problem. This one problem that bothers us all is the thing we discussed above. It is the problem that arises out of aging, illness, and death. In short, we don't get the things that we want. We can't maintain this body forever. Life is never exactly what we want it to be; we can't have things our way all of the time. This problem is shared by each and every one of us.

Scientific Approach

We are all in a situation where we must use a scientific method to solve our problem. We must use a specifically scientific approach because the methods of philosophy and logic can't solve the problem.⁴ There are myriad philosophies concerning everything imaginable, but none of them can solve our problem. Philosophies are very popular with people in today's world; they are fun and interesting, but they don't work. This is why we must turn to a scientific method which can and will solve the problem.

It is now time to recall something about which you've probably already heard: the four noble truths (*ariya-sacca*). Please reflect upon this most important matter. The four

noble truths are Buddhism's scientific principles of mind. The four noble truths allow us to study the specific problem exactly as it is, without relying on any hypothesis. Most of you are familiar with the standard scientific method in which a hypothesis is proposed, then tested through experimentation. Such hypotheses are merely forms of guessing and estimation. With the ariya-sacca such clumsiness isn't necessary. Reality is experienced and examined directly, rather than through the limitations of hypothesis, predictions, and guestimations.

What, then, are the four noble truths that you must look into? They are:

1) dukkha; 2) the cause of dukkha; 3) the quenching of dukkha, through quenching its cause; 4) the way or path that quenches dukkha by ending its cause.

These are the ariya-sacca. They have the features of science, the reasoning of science, and the methodology of science. In short, we apply these truths to real things as they actually happen in life, without using any hypotheses.

Merely reading books won't enable you to do this science. Books lead to more hypotheses, ideas, and opinions. Even in a book about Buddhism, the four noble truths become just more hypotheses. Such is not science. It is only philosophy, which is always inviting us to play around with hypotheses. So we often get stuck in endless circles of suppositions, propositions, and arguments. There is no true Dhamma in that; the reality of actually quenched dukkha is lacking.

The Real Thing

If we want to be scientific about it, practice with the real thing and forget the hypotheses. Study the real thing itself: study dukkha as you experience it. Look at the cause of dukkha by experiencing that cause. Observe through direct personal experience the other side of the coin – the end of dukkha. Lastly, investigate what you must do to end dukkha. This approach is scientific. For as long as you aren't doing this, you're doing philosophy. You'll only have a philosophical Buddhism. Don't get stuck in views and theories. Look inside, study inside yourselves, see these truths as they actually happen. By merely playing around with ideas about Buddhism, you will never find the real thing.

If you study Buddhism from books only, no matter what your sources, or how you study, in the end you'll always come away with the feeling that Buddhism is a philosophy. This is because the authors of most books on Buddhism approach it as a philosophy. They actually believe that Buddhism is a philosophy, which is totally wrong.

Forget About Philosophy

Regarding this idea that Buddhism is a philosophy, put it aside and lock it up in a drawer. In its place, practice by studying directly in the mind, as they happen, dukkha, the cause of dukkha, the end of dukkha, and the way that leads to the end of dukkha. Study these until you experience the quenching of actual dukkha. As soon as you experience this, you'll know that Buddhism is no philosophy.

You will know instantly that Buddhism is a science. It has the structure, principles,

and spirit of science, not of philosophy. At the same time, you'll see that it is a religion, one with its own particular character, that is, a religion entirely compatible with modern science. Everything that is truly understood by science is acceptable to Buddhism, the religion which is a science of mind and spirit. Please understand Buddhism in this way.

You may be one of the many who believe that a religion must have a God and that anything without a God can't be a religion. Most people believe that a religion must have at least one God, if not many. Such understanding is not correct. A wiser view is that there are two kinds of religion: theistic and non-theistic. Theistic religions postulate a God as the highest thing and consider belief in that God to be all-important. Consider Buddhism to be non-theistic, for it doesn't postulate any belief in a personal God. Buddhism, however, has an impersonal God, that is the truth (*sacca*) of nature according to scientific principles. This truth is the highest thing in Buddhism, equivalent to the God or gods of theistic religions.

You should study the word 'religion'; it doesn't mean 'to believe in God.' If you look up this word in a good dictionary, you'll see that it comes from the Latin *religare*, which means 'to observe and to bind with the Supreme Thing.' Ancient grammarians once thought that *religare* came from the root *lig*, to observe. Thus, religion was "a system of observance that led to the final goal of humanity." Later scholars considered that it came from the root *leg*, to bind. Then religion became "the thing that binds human beings to the Supreme Thing (God)." Finally, both meanings were combined and religion was understood to be "the system of observance (practice) that binds human beings to the Supreme Thing." The Supreme Thing needn't be called 'God.' If, however, you insist on calling it 'God,' then recognize that 'God' can have two meanings: personal God and non-personal God.

The Buddhist God

If you prefer to call it 'God,' you should understand that Buddhism has the law of nature as its God. The law of nature – for example, the law of *idappaccayatā*, which is the law of conditionality – is the Buddhist God. *Idappaccayatā* means:

*With this as condition, this is; because this arises, this arises. Without this as condition, this is not; because this ceases, this ceases.*⁵

This is the Supreme Thing in Buddhism; this law of nature is the Buddhist God. In Buddhism there isn't a personal God; its God – the law of nature – is a non-personal God. Because Buddhism, in fact, has a God, it is a religion.

Many Western writers and scholars of Buddhism say that it isn't a religion, since it has no God. Thus, they make a terrible blunder, not knowing anything about the non-personal God. If they knew of it, they would see that it is more real and true than any personal God. Then, they wouldn't write that Buddhism isn't a religion. They would write that Buddhism is another kind of religion. Religions with personal gods are one kind of religion, while Buddhism is the other kind, the kind with an impersonal God.

Most religions believe in a Creator, usually an individualistic God with a personality. The Buddhist Creator is impersonal. This non-personal God, the law of Dhamma or nature, is the law of *idappaccayatā*:

*Because this is, so this is. Because this is, thus this is.
Because this is, so this is.*

This is the law of conditionality, the natural evolutionary process of this causing this which in turn causes this and so on in endless concocting. Buddhism has a Creator, but it is the non-personal God. If you are able to understand the difference between these two kinds of Gods – impersonal law of conditionality and personal Creator – it will be easy for you to realize what Buddhism is.

When things happen in this way, you'll realize that this matter of dukkha and its quenching happen according to the law of the impersonal God. Then you'll understand Dhamma correctly and live in harmony with Dhamma. You'll see it as science rather than mere philosophy. The distinction between science and philosophy will ensure that your study of Buddhism is correct and in line with Dhamma.

If you have this knowledge and use it, you have the medicine for curing spiritual disease. By taking this medicine, the heart is emancipated; it is saved, that is, freed from all dukkha. Every religion teaches emancipation; however, only Buddhism teaches freedom from all of the problems discussed above, in fact, from all problems. Thus, there is no problem or dukkha to dominate us; this is called 'emancipation.' We have been cured of all the diseases discussed above.

I hope that you understand the general principles, the meaning, and the genuine goal of Buddhism. If you do, you'll steadily solve your problems because your understanding will be correct from the start.

If you understand what has been said, you will proceed smoothly in the study and cure of spiritual disease. As time has run out, more details must wait until the next talk. Before closing, I would like to express my joy at the right action of all of you who have come to work on this problem of spiritual disease.

Once again, I thank you for helping to make Suan Mokkh a useful place.

Footnote

- ¹ In Buddhist terminology, there is no real distinction made between heart and mind. The intellect and the emotions are not seen as being polar opposites. Rather, it is all *citta*, which can be translated ‘mind,’ ‘heart,’ ‘mind-heart,’ or ‘psyche.’ We use these terms as synonyms.
- ² Here, Dhamma is both natural truth and the knowledge of natural truth which enables us to end the disease, that is, *dukkha*.
- ³ Here, study is not just intellectual learning. It involves thinking, investigation, training, experimentation, and direct experience, with emphasis on the training and experience
- ⁴ Ajahn Buddhādāsa makes a clear distinction between philosophy and science, as he understands the two terms. By the former he meant mere theoretical speculation devoid of practical application, while the latter can be directly experienced and personally verified through practice. In short, the difference between mere thinking and wisdom.
- ⁵ Some translators render these lines “*this ... that ...*,” but the Pāli original explicitly repeats “*this ... this ...*” We leave it to the reader to reflect why.
- ⁶ The most basic meaning of the word ‘*dhamma*’ is ‘thing’ or ‘phenomenon.’ Here it has the sense of ‘quality’ or ‘virtue.’ You will find, however, that it has many meanings, levels, and ramifications. See the Glossary, for a start.
- ⁷ The system of meditation generally taught at Suan Mokkh. See *Mindfulness With Breathing*, by y Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu (Wisdom Publications, Somerville, MA: 1996).
- ⁸ ‘*Ekaggatā-citta*’ should not be confused with ‘*ekaggatā*.’ Although both may be rendered ‘one-pointedness,’ they are used in different contexts. The latter term refers to a factor of *jhāna*. The former term refers to the ‘mind with a single purpose or object.’
- ⁹ *Kilesa*: disruptions and contaminations of the mind’s natural peacefulness and radiance. They are discussed in Chapter III.
- ¹⁰ For more on *suññatā*, see Ajahn Buddhādāsa’s *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree* (Wisdom Publications, Somerville, MA: 1994).
- ¹¹ See Ajahn Buddhādāsa’s *Practical Dependent Origination* (Dhamma Study & Practice Group, Bangkok: 1992) and *Under the Bodhi Tree: Buddha’s Original Vision of Dependent co-Arising* (Wisdom Publications, Somerville, MA: 2017).
- ¹² *Kilesa* is usually translated ‘defilement.’ We use it both in a general sense, covering all the aspects and levels of things which dirty, pollute, or tarnish the mind, and in a specific sense, limited to the most noticeable aspect of defilement, the selfish thoughts and emotions such as lust, anger, fear, worry, laziness, and envy.

- ¹³ Divine Eye and Divine Ear are believed to be results of highly perfected mental concentration (*samādhi*). They're commonly viewed to be magical, and the foolish may meditate solely to gain these powers.
- ¹⁴ Please note that feeling (*vedanā*), here, does not mean 'emotions.'

Afterword

The talks which comprise this book were the first of many series of talks Ajahn Buddhadasa gave during the monthly meditation courses held at Suan Mokkh over the last nine years of his life. Subsequently, the themes of these three talks were expanded upon in greater detail. Recordings of most of these talks, as well as transcripts, are now available online at www.suanmokkh.org. As we are able, these will be edited for future publication. For more on the subject of Spiritual Disease, see *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree: The Buddha's Teaching on Voidness* (Wisdom Publications, Somerville, MA: 1995).

For more about mindfulness with breathing (*ānāpānasati*), the system of meditation generally taught at Suan Mokkh, see *Mindfulness with Breathing: a Manual for Serious Beginners* (Wisdom Publications, Somerville, MA: 1996).

Glossary

A guide to Ajahn Buddhāsa's use of terms

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

Aniccaṃ, impermanent, not-lasting, transient (or *aniccatā*, impermanence, flux, instability). Conditioned things are ever-changing, constantly arising, manifesting, and ceasing. This is the first fundamental characteristic of conditioned things.

Anusaya, tendencies: familiarity with defilement. When a defilement occurs, it makes the later occurrence of a similar defilement more likely. The more these underlying tendencies build up, the more we react to experiences in defiled ways. Sometimes the pressure is strong enough for something to escape even without an external provocation, that something is called a '*nīvaraṇa*.'

Arahant, worthy one, one far from defilement, one who has broken the wheel of birth and death, one without secrets: the mind totally and finally free of greed, anger, and delusion; void of 'I' and 'mine'; which has ended *kamma*; which is unaffected by *dukkha*. The *arahant* should not be regarded as a 'person' or 'individual.'

Ārammaṇa, sense objects: sensible phenomena discriminated and perched upon by sense consciousness (*viññāṇa*), which thus establishes itself.

Ariya-sacca, noble truth, ennobling realities: truth which frees one from all enemies (*ari*), namely, defilements and *dukkha*. Usually expressed in the fourfold formula: the fact that *dukkha* happens; the truth that there is an origin of *dukkha*, namely, *taṇhā* (craving); the truth of the quenching of *dukkha*, by quenching craving; and the truth of the practice leading to the quenching of *dukkha*. Although the traditional formula is fourfold, "Truth is but One, there is no second."

Attā, 'self,' ego, substantial soul, [Sanskrit, *ātman*]: the instinctual feeling (and illusion) that there is some 'I' who does all the things to be done in life. Through ignorance and wrong understanding this instinctual sensibility is identified with and becomes 'ego.' No personal, independent, self-existing, free-willing, lasting substance or essence can be found anywhere, whether within or without human life and experience, not even in 'God.' (Cf. *anattā*, *idappaccayatā*, and *suññata*.)

Avijjā, ignorance, not-knowing, wrong knowledge: the lack, partial or total, of *vijjā* (correct knowledge) regarding the things that need to be known (e.g., the four noble truths, *suññata*, *tathatā*), as well as knowing things in the wrong way, i.e., as permanent, satisfying, and self. The most original cause of all *dukkha*. Without Dhamma practice, ignorance grows into increasingly wrong knowledge.

Ānāpānasati, mindfulness with breathing in and out: the only meditation or *vipassanā* system practiced and taught by the Buddha, it covers all four foundations of mindfulness and perfects the seven factors of awakening, leading to liberation. Ajahn

Buddhadāsa considers it the best way to realize *suññata*.

Citta, mind, heart, psyche: that which thinks, knows, and experiences. In a more limited sense, citta is what ‘thinks,’ can be defiled by *kilesa*, can be developed, and can realize Nibbāna. Although we cannot know citta directly, it is where all Dhamma practice occurs.

Dhamma, thing, phenomenon, nature, natural thing, virtue: all things, mental and physical, conditioned and unconditioned, are dhammas.

Dhamma, truth, nature, law, natural truth, duty, order, ‘the way things are’: this impossible to translate word has many meanings, the most important of which are nature, the law of nature, our duty according to natural law, and the fruits of doing that duty correctly according to natural law. (See *paṭicca-samuppāda*.) Also, teachings pointing to Dhamma.

Dukkha, distress, anguish, suffering, misery, ill-being (or *dukkhatā*, unsatisfactoriness, imperfection): the spiritual dilemma of human beings. Etymologically, *dukkha* can be translated ‘hard to endure, difficult to bear’; ‘once seen, it is ugly’; and ‘horribly, wickedly void.’ In its experiential sense, *dukkha* is the quality of experience that results when the mind is concocted by *avijjā* into craving, clinging, egoism, and selfishness. This feeling takes on many forms – from the crudest to the most subtle levels – such as disappointment, dissatisfaction, frustration, agitation, dis-ease, and despair. In its universal sense, *dukkhatā* is the inherent condition of unsatisfactoriness, imperfection, and undependableness in all impermanent, conditioned things (*sāṅkhāra*). To fully understand the meaning of *dukkha*, one must realize that *sukha* (happiness, bliss) is also *dukkha*. Nibbāna (i.e. *suññata*) is the only thing which is not *dukkhatā*.

Idappaccayatā, conditionality: everything is conditioned by and depends upon other conditioned things. This applies to how things arise and how they fall apart. Ajahn Buddhadāsa considered it to be the ‘Buddhist God.’

Khandha, aggregates, groups, bundles: the five subsystems or basic functions which constitute the human being. These groups are not entities in themselves; they are merely categories into which the functional aspects of our lives can be analyzed. None of them are ‘self,’ ‘of self,’ ‘in self,’ or ‘my self’; they have nothing to do with ‘selfhood’ and there is no ‘self’ apart from them. When they cling or are clung to, the five are known as the *upādāna-khandha* (aggregates of clinging, clinging together bundles). The five are:

rūpa-khandha, form-aggregate, particularly the body, its nervous system, sense receptors, and sense inputs (the world);

vedanā-khandha, feeling-aggregate: the dimension of pleasure and pain accompanying almost all experience;

saññā-khandha, recognition-aggregate: the discrimination, labelling, and evaluation of sense experience;

saṅkhāra-khandha, thought-aggregate: thought processes and emotions, including volition, desire, attachment, and ‘birth’;

viññāna-khandha, consciousness-aggregate: the basic knowing that distinguishes something within each of the sensory fields (visual, auditory, etc.), creating a sense ‘object.’

Karuṇā, compassion: wanting to help due to awareness and understanding of *dukkha*, both one’s own and that of others. One of the ‘divine dwellings’ through which we outgrow egoism.

Kilesa, defilements, impurities: the harmful thoughts and emotions that tarnish, dirty, and pollute mind. These reactive passions are merely passing clouds that obscure mind’s natural luminosity. While the three primary categories of *kilesa* are greed, hatred, and delusion, they proliferate with endless creativity.

Manussa, human being, high-minded being: a mind above the ebb and flow of worldly conditions.

Nibbāna, coolness, quenching: the Supreme, the ultimate reality in Buddhism; the purpose and meaning (*attha*) of Buddhist practice and highest potential of humanity. Nibbāna manifests when the fires of craving, clinging, defilement, and selfishness are cooled. When they are thoroughly cooled, Nibbāna manifests perfectly, totally, timelessly. Not a place, for Nibbāna is beyond existence and non-existence, not even a state of mind, for Nibbāna is neither mental nor physical, but a *dhamma* the mind can realize and experience in this life.

Nīvaraṇa, hindrances, obstacles: disturbing moods and mental qualities which interfere with the mind’s task, whether worldly or spiritual. Half-strength defilements, they arise from the tendencies toward defilement built up through carelessness and need not be triggered by outside objects. To overcome them, correct *samādhi* is needed. The traditional list of five are sensuousness, aversion, sloth and torpor, restlessness and distraction, and doubt.

Paññā, wisdom, penetrating insight, intuitive understanding: correct seeing, knowing, and understanding of the things we must know in order to quench *dukkha*, namely, the four noble truths, the three characteristics, dependent origination, and voidness. The various terms used for ‘knowing’ are not meant to express an intellectual activity, although the intellect has its role. The emphasis is on direct, intuitive, non-conceptual comprehending of life as it is here and now. Memory, language, and thought are not required. Buddhist tradition considers *paññā* to be its characteristic quality rather than faith or will-power.

Paṭicca-samuppāda, dependent co-arising: the profound and detailed process of conditions that concoct *dukkha*. Due to ignorance, and dependent on sense organ and sense object, there arises consciousness (*viññāna*). These three things working together are contact (*phassa*). Upon this ignorant contact, there arises feeling (*vedanā*), craving (*taṇhā*), clinging (*upādāna*), becoming (*bhava*), birth (*jāti*), decay and death (*jarā-maraṇa*), and all the forms of *dukkha*.

Phassa, the meeting and working together of sense organ, sense object, and sense consciousness (*viññāna*). When a sensual stimulus makes enough of an impact upon awareness – that is, has ‘meaning’ – to draw a response, either ignorant or wise, beginning with *vedanā*.

Sampajañña, wisdom-in-action, functional wisdom, ready comprehension, clear comprehension. While *paññā* (wisdom) is developed, or ‘stored up,’ through introspection and insight, *sampajañña* is the immediate and specific application of wisdom to, and into, a particular situation or experience. While *paññā* understands that ‘everything is empty free of self-existence,’ *sampajañña* understands that ‘there is no self in this.’ All understanding relies on mindfulness for its appearance, recall, and application.

Samādhi, concentration, collectedness, unification of mind: gathering together of the mental flow and secure establishment of mind. Proper *samādhi* has the qualities of purity, clarity, stability, calmness, readiness, and gentleness. Its primary characteristic is non-distraction. The supreme *samādhi* is the singleness of mind (*ekaggatā-citta*) that has Nibbāna as its sole concern. In a broader sense, *samādhi* can be translated ‘meditation,’ meaning development of the mind through the power of *samādhi*.

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

Saññā, recognition, classification, evaluation, perception: once mind has made contact (*phassa*) with a sense object and then feels it (*vedanā*), e.g., as pleasant, a concept, label, or image is attached to the experience. *Saññā* involves recognizing similarities with past experience and discriminating the value of the object.

Sati, mindfulness, attention, awareness, recall, recollection: mind’s ability to notice and observe what it’s doing and feeling, and how it’s reacting. *Sati* is the vehicle and transport mechanism for *paññā*; without *sati*, wisdom cannot be developed, retrieved, or applied. *Sati* allows us to be aware of what we are about to do and is characterized by speed and agility.

Sati-paññā, mindfulness and wisdom: *sati* and *paññā* must work together. *Paññā* depends on *sati*, arising through mindfulness of life’s experiences and applied to present experience through mindfulness. Without sufficient wisdom, mindfulness is misused.

Suññata, emptiness, voidness: all phenomena are empty and free of anything that is properly ‘me’ or ‘mine.’ Nothing substantial and independent can be found in conditioned phenomena. *Suññata*, is intended as a practical tool for investigating experience and the futility of clinging.

Tathatā, thusness, suchness, just-like-that-ness: neither this nor that, the reality of non-duality and the interdependence of seeming opposites. Things are just as they are (void and dependently originated) regardless of our perceptions, likes and dislikes,

suppositions and beliefs, hopes and memories.

Tilakkhaṇa, three characteristics, three marks of existence: inherent features of all conditioned things, namely, the facts of impermanence (*aniccatā*), dukkha-ness (*dukkhatā*), and not-self (*anattatā*).

Upādāna, clinging, attachment, grasping: to hold onto something foolishly, to regard things as 'I' and 'mine,' to take things personally. Not the things attached to, but the lustful-satisfaction (*chanda-rāga*) regarding them. The Buddha distinguished four kinds of *upādāna*: attachment to sensuality, to views, to precepts and practices, and to words concerning self. (To hold something wisely is *samādāna*, undertaking.)

Vedanā, feeling: the mental response to or affective tone of sense experience (*phassa*), the realm of pleasure and pain. Feeling comes in three forms: pleasant or agreeable (*sukha-vedanā*), unpleasant or painful (*dukkha-vedanā*), and indeterminate, neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant (*adukkhamasukha-vedanā*). *Vedanā* is a mental actor. Sometimes, however, a looser sense of the term is used regarding physical sensations. This primitive activity of mind is not equivalent to far more complex emotion.

Viññāṇa, consciousness: knowing sense objects through the six doors (eyes, ears, etc.). The most basic mental activity required for participation in the sensual world (*loka*); without it there is no subject-object experience.

Vitakka, thought conception, thinking.

Vicāra, experiencing a thought-object or theme.

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