

Things to Know before Studying & Practicing Buddhism

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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. Audio recordings are now available from www.suanmokkh.org and www.bia.or.th. 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 Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

For today's talk, there isn't very much to talk about, except for a few facts which you need to know before you begin studying and practicing in the Buddhist tradition. And then after progressing in the study and practice, if you do so correctly and successfully, you will meet up with these very same facts. So then these facts can be used as a sort of test to see if one's practice is correct or not. That's all what we have to talk about today are a few facts that you need to know before beginning your practice of Dhamma.

Today we will discuss certain points which apply to any object or subject of study but we will be applying these five points specifically to Buddhism. The first point that we need to look at is: why we need to study the Dhamma, or why we need to study Buddhism. The second point is: what is this thing that we are studying? What is this thing that we are calling 'Buddhism?' Third is: who is responsible for this thing called 'Buddhism?' Who has proclaimed it? Who owns it? Is there some sort of authority that possesses it? This is the third point. The fourth point is: how to go about the study and practice of Buddhism. And the fifth is: how can we verify, how can we check and make sure that our study and practice of the Dhamma, of Buddhism is correct? How can we verify that our practice is correct? This is the points that we will consider today.

As for the first question, 'why do we need to study Buddhism?' First answer we can give to this is, because we were born from our mother's womb in a condition of ignorance. We were born into this world in a state of ignorance or

not-knowing. To put it more bluntly, we need to study Buddhism because we're stupid. Excuse us for using such a blunt and crude word but we don't want you to overlook this very important point. We came into this world stupidly without any knowledge of the way things are, not even knowing why we were born, or what we're going to do about it once we've been born. And unfortunately when we start at this point of stupidity, and generally we go deeper and deeper, and sink further and further into this condition of ignorance. Instead of working our way out of it, we get caught up in liking, in disliking, in being pleased and displeased with the experiences of life. Well, this habit of being pleased and displeased, this liking and disliking may at first seem somewhat harmless. We often will see it as cute and amusing in a young child. But this approach to life becomes habitual, and it grows and builds, and gets completely out of control, until the point where the mind is entirely enslaved by this. So this is why we need to study Buddhism – because we've been born into this world in a state of ignorance.

Second answer to this first question can be that you have already studied to some degree other religious teachings; or you have been educated and trained in the technics and methods of a certain culture, or some schools of thought, or philosophy, or whatever. The primary culture or religion you have already been introduced to – a way of life, a way of living life. And then you come to study Buddhism in order to see how some other friends go about life. You have, maybe, grown up in a Christian tradition, in a Christian culture. So you want to see how your Buddhist friends approach life in order to compare their – the principles of Dhamma on which Buddhists based their lives. Then you can compare this with the principles of Dhamma that Christians uphold. And this will put you in a position where you are able to choose what is best and most appropriate for you in order that you can use these things for the living of your own lives on a higher and higher level. So this is another reason for studying Buddhism – to see how your Buddhist friends approach life.

Now we come to the second question which is, 'what is Buddhism?' We'd like to begin by making the point that Buddhism is a religion. There are quite a few scholars and people who read the works of scholars who believe that Buddhism is not a religion. This opinion is based on the assumption that a religion must believe in some God of some sort. And so people who think this way will look at Buddhist and say, 'Well, Buddhists don't believe in any God like the Christians or the Hindus do; so it can't be a religion; it's just a philosophy or something.' But Buddhists have the reasons of their own by which we can say that 'Yes, Buddhism is a religion.' If you insist that a religion

must have some sorts of God, then Buddhists will tell you that Buddhism does have a God; but it is not a personal kind of God as conceived of by the theistic religion. In Buddhism, the God is the law of nature. It is an impersonal God. Nonetheless, Buddhism has a God. So this is your criteria for a religion, Buddhism fulfills it although the God may not be the theistic personal God as certain other religions. Second, we would like to point out that the word ‘religion’ itself means a system of practice which brings mankind, or brings humanity in relationship to the highest thing. Religion is some kind of practice, some system of practice which binds or ties mankind to the supreme thing. This supreme thing is the complete and utter extinction of *dukkha* – of all the unsatisfying, unpleasant, disturbing, agitating, and painful states of mind. The elimination of all that *dukkha* is the highest thing. And Buddhism is a system of practice which brings man into touch with, into contact with, that highest thing. So on these criteria, following the standard definition of religion, based on Latin grammarians throughout the centuries, Buddhism qualifies as a religion in this way as well. So don’t go and believe everything you read in book. Buddhism is also a religion.

When we talk about this thing we called ‘religion,’ we need to be aware of the point that there are two kinds of religions in the world. There is what we can call ‘theistic religions’ – religions that are based on some sort of personal God. And then there are other religions that do not have this kind of personal God, but which we can say have an impersonal God – and this kind of religion we might call ‘atheistic’ if we understand it properly. This latter kind of religion, and Buddhism in particular, are religions that hold that everything happens as a sort of natural evolution. So we can call it, this latter group of religions, ‘evolutionist,’ – ‘evolutionary religion’ – where things happen in an evolutionary way according to the law of nature. The other kind of religion believes in some sort of God that creates things. There is some kind of God pulling the string and running the show. And this group of religions are called ‘creationists.’ So to understand the word ‘religion’ properly, we need to see these different kinds of religions.

The next point we need to consider is that Buddhism is something that must be studied within. Buddhism must be practiced and studied within, from within, and with things that are happening within. It means that we have to deal with these things that are truly happening. We cannot deal with external superficial suppositions and assumption; but to truly study Buddhism, we have to study what is actually happening within experience or within consciousness. So we say that Buddhism must be studied ‘within.’ *Dukkha* is something that

happens within, and the extinction of dukkha happens within. We can only find truth and reality within. So we must take this kind of direction and focus to study Buddhism within ourselves. This is the most important point.

Now we come to the third question, and we have to point out that Buddhism is not something that depends on individuals or persons. Buddhism is not something that teaches the existence of individuals or separate persons. So it's in no way depends on any one individual. Rather, Buddhism teaches about nature and the law of nature. It talks about the evolution of nature and its process. There was a certain man or person who studied nature, who performed that kind of research into the truth of nature, until understanding what those truths were. And then this person went and taught what he had discovered. But this does not mean that that person went and taught things... he didn't just make everything up. That person is not himself any authority in which we must believe. Rather, that is just one person who explored reality and then explained what he'd discovered. In this way, Buddhism is not dependent on any person including that one person. Buddhism is not dependent on any authority and does not require that anyone blindly believes anything. Instead, Buddhism has the characteristic of being something which is verifiable – it can be tested and verified. Buddhism will stand up to any experiments and tests which you wish to carry out upon it. This process of studying nature and uncovering the truth of nature is something that is repeatable as in any properly scientific endeavor. So in this way, Buddhism is not dependent on any person or authority.

We can break this up into separate points to make it simpler and more easy to understand. So first, we'll say that Buddhism is the discovery of the Buddha – the Buddha discovered the law of nature. He studied nature until discovering this law, and then ever after discovering it he taught it. So Buddhism is the discovery of the Buddha regarding the law of nature as is relevant to the elimination of dukkha. This discovery of the Buddha is specifically directed to the elimination of dukkha – to the cessation of suffering. So this is what Buddhism is – the discovery of the Buddha.

Second, we can say that Buddhism is the wisdom of the Buddha. The Buddha discovered all sorts of facts about the law of nature. The Buddha learned many many things. We can compare what the Buddha learned with all the leaves in this forest here – this is the knowledge of the Buddha. From within that knowledge that the Buddha possessed – or the wisdom of the Buddha – he chose to teach only that which is absolutely necessary for us to know. Within that great wisdom of his, he selected the facts that were relevant to help us in our practice of eliminating dukkha. So we can compare this knowledge that the

Buddha actually taught to just a handful of leaves. The wisdom of the Buddha is comparable to all the leaves in the forest but what he taught is just a handful. This handful of things which he taught, we can say, are practical. They are things that are within our ability, things that are practical that we can actually do and perform in this very lifetime. So this is the second aspect we can take to this – Buddhism is the wisdom of the Buddha.

The third point to mention in this matter, is that Buddhism are certain truths which were discovered by the Buddha and which he felt were appropriate to teach. So he taught these truths in a manner and form which he felt was appropriate for mankind to know, study, and practice. We can say that, essentially, these truths that the Buddha taught had four aspects – there're four aspects of these truths, or if we want, we can say there are four truths. First truth or the first aspect of truth is nature. The second aspect is the law of nature. The third is the duty to be performed according to the law of nature. And the fourth aspect is the fruit or result of doing that duty according to the law of nature. This is the truth that the Buddha felt was appropriate to teach. There are four of them – four aspects to these truths. Do not confuse them. Don't mix them up. If you can keep these four truths straight and clear, then it will not be very difficult for you to study these truths properly. But if you go and confuse these, and mix them all up, you're never be able to get clear on this matter. So please listen carefully and keep these four aspects of truths clear and separate – there is nature, the law of nature, the duty according to the law of nature, and the fruit of that duty according to the law of nature. Nature, the law of nature, the duty according to the law of nature, and the fruit of doing that duty according to the law of nature. Nature, law, duty, and fruit. Please remember these and keep them clear. It will be to your immense benefit.

The fourth meaning of Buddhism is that Buddhism is the doctrine of the Buddha – the *ovāda* or doctrine of the Buddha. The Buddha's doctrine is very very simple. The Buddha taught merely two things: the Buddha taught only *dukkha*; and the end, the complete and final end of *dukkha*. This is the doctrine of the Buddha – *dukkha* and its utter cessation. This is all the Buddha taught. This is the original genuine doctrine of Buddhism – *dukkha* and the end of *dukkha*. But since the Buddha's time, there have been many many additions: different schools, teachers, meditation centers, and things floundering up all over Asia, and now in the West as well, that are adding things on, that are tagging a lot of unnecessary things onto Buddhism. The original genuine doctrine of Buddhism is merely *dukkha* and the end of *dukkha*, and that's all that is necessary. So we hope that you will understand this point and will not get

lost or caught up in all these frivolous and unnecessary additions, which have been tagged onto Buddhism over the years, and which seem to be especially common nowadays. So the fourth meaning of Buddhism is the doctrine of the Buddha, which is simply dukkha and the end of dukkha.

The fifth meaning of Buddhism is that Buddhism is the Buddha's way of life – the Buddha's way of living. And the essential characteristic of this way of living is to be 'in the middle,' to be centered, to be in the middle. When we say 'in the middle,' in the middle of what? It is to be in the middle of, to be centered between all the pairs of opposites; for instance, Buddhism is to be balanced between or centered between positive and negative. There are certain famous European scholars who claim that Buddhism is negative or pessimistic. And then on the other hand, there are other scholars who argue that Buddhism is positive or optimistic. They're all wrong. Buddhism is neither negative [n]or positive, neither optimistic [n]or pessimistic. Rather, Buddhism is balanced; it is centered between these extremes of positivism or negativism. Buddhism is 'in the middle.' It's in the middle of all the pairs of opposites: between hot and cold, getting and losing, rich and poor, happy and sad, male and female, good and bad. Buddhism is balanced between all these pairs of opposite, between all these dualisms, between all these extremes and polarity. Buddhism is a state of ordinariness which is in the middle of all these extremes. In Buddhism, there is neither highs nor lows; there is neither being inflated or being deflated; being popped up or wilted. Buddhism's none of these extremes. But it is a cool state of ordinariness which is 'in the middle.' This is the Buddha's way of life. People who do not understand this want to make Buddhism into something positive, or they try to turn Buddhism into some cult of happiness or cult of love. And people get into various extremes, and try and make Buddhism into their, whatever, extreme approach they prefer. But that is not Buddhism proper. That is some aberration. Buddhism itself is balanced. It is 'in the middle.' It is not caught up in any of these extremes. Buddhism is centered between all the pairs of opposite. This is the Buddhist way of life – to be in the middle.

The sixth point we need to make is that Buddhism is the religion of intellectual freedom. In Buddhism, you are free to believe what you wish. Buddhism has no system of dogmas which are forced upon you – you do not have to believe any of these things. Instead, Buddhism leaves it up to the mindfulness and wisdom of each person to see what is actually the truth. The Buddha himself said that you should not believe even the Buddha. The Buddha said, "Don't even believe me. Don't try and make any external personal things into an authority. There is no codification of doctrine which you must accept.

There are no books which you must hold as sacred. There are no teachers that you must accept as infallible. Rather, you use your own mindfulness and wisdom to see which of the teachings will actually work. And when we say 'work,' we mean what will be useful and successful in the elimination of dukkha. This is something you can see for yourself. Anything that works, anything that will eliminate dukkha, that is right. So you do not have to rely on any authority. You can experience Buddhism yourself, and know what is true Buddhism through your own experience. You can verify it. Anything that is truly Buddhism will be something that will eliminate dukkha. So Buddhism is this intellectual freedom. It is the religion of intellectual freedom. It does not demand that you believe anything. And this makes Buddhism unique among all the different religions and sects, because any true forms of Buddhism will not demand that you believe anything. Rather, it will just encourage you to examine the facts, and test the facts, and see what truly will eliminate dukkha. This is the sixth point.

We'd like to stress that in Buddhism there is no dogmatic system. There is no creed that you must memorize and accept. Buddhism is not trying to force you to believe anything. You're totally free to accept only what you know to be true yourself. We're not saying to go and believe anything you want – that is just to fall under the influence of some dogmas. We're saying believe only what you know to be true. Buddhism is not trying to force any dogma down your throat. Please be very very careful on this point.

The seventh and final point we'll make is that Buddhism will stand upon scientific principles, or we can say simply Buddhism is scientific. What we mean by this is that Buddhism deals with reality. We take actual things and then perform certain tests upon those things. We deal with reality, not just abstractions or theories. But Buddhism deals with reality itself and tests that reality; and everything taught in Buddhism can be tested and verified. This is what we mean when we say Buddhism is scientific or is based in scientific principle. With this scientific orientation to Buddhism, that is to emphasize that you are not required to believe in anything. A truly scientific approach or spirit does not accept anything on the basis of belief alone. Rather, we would take whatever is being discussed, work with it, experiment with it, until we can verify what the truths of that thing are. So this is what Buddhism does. We feel that some day, when the world and when the education systems in the world have truly progressed scientifically, when what is taught in our schools is based purely on scientific principles rather than on emotions and selfishness, then this will be something that will be very easy for everyone to understand.

Unfortunately nowadays, although science itself has progressed very far, the average person has a very naïve faith in science. Most of us don't really understand what the scientists are talking about, but we still very ignorantly believe everything they're telling us rather than going and verifying things by ourselves. In Buddhism, it is essential to do that activity or duty of self-verification. Now most people think of science as something that deals with material and physical things and so they are often unaware of the science of the mind or of the spirit. But Buddhism is essentially this latter kind of science – the science of the mind, the science of the spirit. So to study this kind of science, you do not need fancy laboratories and expensive equipment. You've got everything you need right here. So this is the seventh aspect of Buddhism which we want to point out to you – it is scientific, it deals with real things. And if we study and experiment with those real things until we discover the truths for ourselves; and in this way, we do not have to uphold any dogmas, we do not have to be dependent on faith or on any external authority. So Buddhism, in the end, is the highest kind of science – a science that you, personally, can verify in the mind and of the spirit.

So on this point, we encourage you, even to do more than that, we would like to push you to study the truth that we called the *ariya-sacca* – the Four Noble Truths. We encourage you very strongly to study these things: to study the Four Noble Truths; to study *idappaccayatā* – the law of cause and effect, the law of nature; to study *paṭiccasamuppāda* – the dependent origination of things, that things in their arising are dependent on other things. This is the heart of Buddhism: the Four Noble Truths, *idappaccayatā*, dependent origination. So if you really study these things, the more clearly you understand them, the more you will see that Buddhism is genuinely scientific. If you just go and believe this stuff, then you'll never know whether it is scientific or not, because you'll never get beyond your foolish prejudiced belief. But if you actually look into these things, study them honestly and sincerely, then you will see that Buddhism is a science. You will see that the Four Noble Truths, that the law of cause and effect, and that dependent origination, that these are all scientific. They deal with real things and can be verified; they can be tested. And you can do this within your own ability and limit. None of these is beyond your ability. It's something that any normal human being can do. So we encourage you to study these things and discover the scientific basis of Buddhism. You don't have to believe it; but you do have to go out and study it, and experiment, and do the necessary work.

Now we come to the third question which is 'who does Buddhism belong

to,’ or ‘on whose authority does Buddhism exist?’ The answer to this is no one. Buddhism doesn’t belong to anyone. There is no one who has authority in Buddhism. But if we ask the question – ‘who teaches Buddhism?’ Who can teach Buddhism?’ we can answer – the ones who know the law of nature; ones who have woken up from sleep, from the sleep of ignorance; and those who have opened up or blossomed like a fresh bright flower. These are the ones who can teach Buddhism. Anyone who knows, is awake, and has open forth, can teach Buddhism. In fact, even you can teach Buddhism to the degrees that you know are awakened and have opened up. To that degree, you can teach Buddhism within the limitation of your knowledge, awakening, and opening; you’re able to teach Buddhism. The Buddha is the supreme example of the one who knows, is awakened, and has opened up. This is the Buddha – the awakened one par excellence. And then there were the disciples and students of the Buddha who also taught Buddhism based on their knowledge that came from their knowing, awakening, and opening. And then even us – those of us listening here – we can also teach Buddhism to the degree that we know are awakened and have blossomed. These are the ones who teach Buddhism. The meaning of ‘Buddha,’ or in Thai [*phut*] *Putta*,’ is the person, the individual who has, who knows, has awakened, and has blossomed forth into truth. This is the meaning of ‘Buddha.’ There’s the Buddha who has opened up completely; and then there are these little Buddhas whose awakening and knowledge is only partial. Whether the perfect Buddha or a little Buddha, one is capable of teaching Buddhism. So when we talk about the authority in Buddhism, we must say that there is no one who has an authority. There is just nature and the law of nature. But anyone who has knowledge of the law of nature, who has awakened to the law of nature, and who has opened up to the law of nature, that one is able to teach Buddhism.

Now we come to the next question which is ‘how do we practice this thing called Buddhism?’ How do we do it? How do we do ‘Buddhism?’ The answer is to develop, to produce, to give rise to the truth which we mentioned earlier. In Pāli there is the word ‘*bhāvanā*’ which means to develop or to produce, to make happened – make this truth happened within the mind, develop the mind, use various technics which are available to train and develop the mind, develop certain faculties and skills of the mind which are useful, in order to give rise to these truths so that the mind sees these truths clearly. We’ll remind you that the truths we’re talking about are nature, the truth of nature, the truth of the law of nature, the duty according to the law of nature, and the fruit of that duty according to the law of nature. As these truths develop, when the mind sees into and realizes these truths more and more deeply, whatever

development of the mind is bringing this about, that is the practice of Buddhism. Buddhism is essentially giving rise to these truths in the mind. This is something you can verify for yourself. There's a lot of information going around in the world these days. Some of it is supposedly Buddhism; some of it is supposedly some other kinds of spiritual practice. But unfortunately much of that information is wrong; it is incorrect information. So you're going to have to verify things for yourself. You can't just believe it because on the cover of the book it says 'Buddhism,' or spiritual practice or something like that. You're going to have to verify it. The way to verify this is if one's practice is correct, then certain things will happen. If the practice is correct, and there are many many different techniques which can work, but if the technique you're using is correct for you, then the mind will become clearer, and brighter, and calmer, and purer. Regarding these truths the mind will be clearer about. It will have less doubt and more realization of these truths of nature, the law of nature, the duty according to the law of nature, and the fruits – the results of that duty. There will be less and less selfishness, the defilements – the mental defilements of greed anger, confusion, fear, worry – these defilements will begin to fade away. They will become less and less strong, and they will disturb the mind less and less. There will be the greater realization of these truths and the defilements will disturb the mind less and less. There will be less and less dukkha. This you can verify. So even if some teachers tell you that 'This is the right method, this is the right practice,' and even goes and tells you that he can read your mind and knows what you're doing is right, you are fool if you believe him. Instead, you have to look at what's actually happening, what is happening in the mind. Is the realization of truths happening; or is the mind getting more confused, more agitated, more clouded, more defiled, more polluted? This is something that we have to see for ourselves; no one else can tell you. Don't go and believe teachers because teachers can never really know; you can only know yourself. A good teacher can help you but you must depend on yourself. This is how to practice Buddhism – by giving rise to these truths in the mind.

We can summarize this practice that needs to be done in the following way. We begin with training the mind. The mind of the so-called 'normal' or 'common' person is always wandering around under its, following its own desires and prejudices. It's like a wild animal in the forest. It just wanders around according to its own wishes. It has no self-control – this is the mind of the so-called 'normal' person. So we begin the first stage of this practice, or what we call mental development or *bhāvanā*, is to train the mind, take this wild animal and bring it under our control. We train this wild animal – the mind – until it reaches the point where we can say it is domesticated. It's no longer an

animal wandering around the jungle but it's a useful animal around the house – a farm animal or a pet that accomplishes some useful purpose at home. Then the animal is tamed. So we train the mind until it is tamed; it is developed. This is the first aspect of mental development – to bring this wild mind under control, under our control. Once the mind is tamed, once it has been domesticated and brought under control, then it is used. It looks at, studies, and comes to understand certain things that need to be understood. So then the trained mind – the tamed domesticated mind – looks at the things that need to be looked at, and understands the things that need to be understood. That means when there is dukkha, the mind examines that dukkha and comes to understand it. And when dukkha is extinguished, the mind looks at that and understands it. The mind studies things according to the law of nature, according to *idappaccayatā*. It sees how *paṭiccasamuppāda* – the law of dependent origination, – how everything happens because of a cause and that this cause forms a series of inter-related arisings. This can all be studied using the mind that has been trained. This is the second stage of mental development. The first stage can be called *samatha* or tranquility practice. The second stage can be called *vipassanā* practice. Now this word *vipassanā* is nowadays very popular but it is often used incorrectly. Some people think that they can go ahead and do this *vipassanā* practice with the mind that has not been adequately trained. That may be very very difficult to do. So the proper practice of Buddhism begins with *samatha* – this taming of the mind. And then when the mind is sufficiently trained, then we can begin the practice that is called *vipassanā*. The tranquility meditation leads to a mind that, we say, is *samādhi* or concentrated. It is a mind that is pure, stable, and active. This is the mind that is *samādhi* – pure, stable, and active. It is a mind that is ready to work. It is a mind that has been trained to a stage where it is a very skillful instrument; and then the mind that is *samādhi* embarks upon *vipassanā* practice. *Vipassanā* practice is the studying of the truths that need to be understood, and this results in wisdom or *paññā*. So we can talk about *samatha* and *vipassanā* as the two stages of mental development. Or we can talk about *samādhi* and *paññā* as the two stages of this development. These two stages must be pointed out must take place on a foundation of morality and virtuous conducts. If one is living a very messy filthy life, then there is a very little chance of any success in either stages of mental development. So there is the tranquility (concentration) stage, and there is insight (wisdom) stage and both of these stages must occur out of foundation of morality, of clean living. So this is the summary of the development – the mental development – which is the practice of Buddhism.

And now we come to the fifth question – ‘what is the result, what is the

final goal of Buddhism?’ There is no other goal in Buddhism other than the extinction of dukkha. There’s nothing but the elimination of unsatisfactoriness, of suffering, of mental fear, worry, anger, pain, despair, anguish. This is the elimination of this dukkha; this is the only goal of Buddhism; there is no other goal. This is a goal that you will know for yourself whether it has been successfully reached or not. Nowadays there are teachers who are telling their students that they have either finished or not – this is meaningless. A teacher cannot tell you. There’s even some charlatans who are passing out certificates and diplomas saying that so and so is an enlightened being – this is meaningless. Just because you have taken part in some rituals or ceremonies, because you’re given a certain colored robe or certain beads or hats or medallions or whatever, these are just externals which do not in any way signify that the final goal of Buddhism has been reached. The only way to know is through observing the mind. If there is any dukkha left then the final goal has not been reached; no matter what ceremonies you’ve been through; no matter how many retreats you’ve attended; no matter what books you’ve read or certificate you’ve been given. But even you’ve done no retreat, and your teacher still say you’re an idiot; if there is no dukkha remaining, then the final goal has been reached. This is a general explanation of the final goal. We will now give ten or twelve examples of what it is we’re talking about here to give you something very detailed to help you understand this point. (And the translator will do his best to translate this clearly.)

We’ll take them one at a time. The first is the steady lessening and abandoning of sexual love, or love that is lustful. So that all that remains is love which is pure. This is the first.

The second one is the steady abandoning of anger. Often we take a very very small matter and blow it up into some big issues with which we can get very angry. So the lessening and then the final end of anger – this is the second.

The third point is hatred will be lessened. Hatred – we’re always getting caught up in this and we waste so much time with hating this and hating that, and hatred accomplishes absolutely nothing. It’s an utter waste of time. So the third point is that we will lessen hatred until it is finished, until it is no hatred left. We won’t waste any more of our time with this thing.

Even hatred towards things which are hateful, such as when people leave garbage all over the place, we won’t feel hatred about that. We won’t let any of this hatred come and disturb the mind.

Fourth is we’ll steadily be less and less afraid. Since we’ve been little,

we've been taught to fear all kinds of things: ghosts, animals, ourselves, the police, the government. We've been taught to fear all kinds of things. This fear, all this foolish unnecessary fear will slowly lessen until there's none of it left.

The fifth point is that there will no longer be anything which can stimulate the mind. There's nothing which can excite and stir up the mind. You can go to watch any kind of show, and it will no longer see marvelous, fantastic, or strange. All these stimulating exciting things will no longer have that kind of power and influence over the mind. Even if you went to the moon, it would just seem something absolutely ordinary and natural. It would just be what it is. You would not get all excited and worked up about it because it would just be what it is, the way things are, something completely natural and ordinary. We can say *tathatā*. It's just thus, just such, just such the way it is.

The sixth point is there will be less and less anxious thinking, less and less anxiety. We all tend to get caught up in a kind of thinking about something which is very anxious. The mind is stirred up and worried about something, and so go it goes on and on and on thinking about something. This kind of thinking is very hot, very disturbing. There is absolutely no peace involved in this kind of anxious thinking. And so this would slowly, this would steadily be abandoned until there is no more of this anxious thinking left to disturb the mind.

Number sixth was something that anxious thinking is related to the future. Number seventh is its counterpart related to the past. So there will be no more kind of sentimental melancholy missing of things which have passed away. The past is gone. We often get caught up in thinking about things which have happened, about people we have known, or maybe a wife that has left us, or a boyfriend who has left us, or a puppy that died, or some possessions of ours which were stolen. We no longer get caught up in this thinking about past things, this kind of thought, the missing, the ache and sentimental pain of missing things which have occurred in the past. This slows down and then ends.

Next is the lessening of envy. We often stir ourselves up and burn ourselves with envy of other people – they have something we want, or they're more skillful or more intelligent or more beautiful, or who knows what. We make some kind of assumptions about them and are envious of what they have or what they are. This doesn't hurt that other person in the least bit; they're just doing along with doing what they are doing. But this envy disturbs us to an incredible degree. It's keeping us from sleeping at night; it interferes with our natural state of peace and coolness. So this is the eighth thing – it's envy. It's

abandoned until there is no left. The mind no longer gets caught up in envy.

The next one is to look down on others, to have a disparaging and insulting attitude towards others, where we raise ourselves up and look down on others and say that they are worse than us, they are more stupid than us or whatever, that somehow they are inferior to us. This is the ninth thing – it will fade away, until none of it is left.

The tenth one is that we stop criticizing others. We stop getting into all kinds of critical arguing. We stop getting into fights with other people. The Buddha himself made very much of this point. He said that “The Tathāgata [which is how he referred to himself] never says a word which is critical or disparaging of others.” The Buddha did not go around saying “You are wrong, you are wrong; he is wrong; I’m right.” But the Buddha said, instead, was that “This is how I see it; you may see things differently but this is the way I see it.” He would very forthrightly explain how he saw things and his understanding, and he would do that without any reservation. But he did not do the very defiled act of insulting others, or saying they were wrong, and of criticizing them directly. He did not get into argument of that sort. For example, the Buddha was often in situation where he was speaking to people in India who believed in the typical view of Brahmanism. Everybody at that time believed in some heavens and hells which existed separate from this world and which after death the mind, or body or whatever, would transmigrate; the soul, the *ātman* would transmigrate to those places. The Buddha would say “Ok, you believe in these heavens and hells; we don’t; we believe in the heaven and hell which exist here in this body, at the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind; our understanding of heaven and hell is here at the eyes, ears, tongue, nose, body, and mind.” This is how the Buddha spoke. He didn’t accuse the other people of being wrong. He just stated what he thought to be right. So this tendency of ours to accuse others of being wrong or getting caught up in this criticism of others, this defilement will lessen. Both our speaking in such a filthy way and also our thinking in this way will lessen until it disappears.

Forgive us but we will raise a very striking example of this point – this getting into fight argument, and disagreement. Jesus Christ, in various places in the Christian scriptures, is recorded to have gotten into some kind of violent disagreement with certain other people at that time. And we can see what kind of enemies that this kind of behavior will create. Now we see that Christ, unfortunately, only had a few years, maybe three or four years, in which to teach. So sometimes it’s not easy to compare what he did with the Buddha. But in this point we can see very clearly that at some time Christ found it necessary

to argue or to get into violent disagreement with others, to directly criticize what they were doing. The Buddha, on the other hand, never did this. He felt that to do so would needlessly lead, cause enmity and create enemies, which he felt that it was unnecessary. So the Buddha very strongly emphasized that this is something that should never be done. And so even we can see this example that the Buddha in all his many many years of teaching would never tell the other side that they were wrong in order to get into some kind of argument or something. But the Buddha would essentially just say “This is the way things are,” and would proclaim the truth as he thought.

The eleventh is possessiveness, where we cling to something so much as ours that it causes all kinds of problem. The primary example of possessiveness is between husband and wife. Some husbands are so possessive of their wives that they get very very upset if their wives go anywhere without them or talk to another man. The same thing happens with many women, if their husbands come home late from work, because of their possessiveness, they’re very distraught and upset because they’re worried that their husbands are off with someone else. This kind of possessiveness causes all kinds of pain and anguish to many many people. But if the practice of Buddhism is progressing, this possessiveness will slowly disappear, or maybe quickly disappear, but it will disappear.

The last example is that we start letting go of our inability to see *tathatā*. *Tathatā* is to see reality, to see the way things are, to see the suchness of things. Everything is just such. They’re not this way or that way; but they’re just the thusness or suchness of that thing. Everything is *tathatā*. Our inability to see things as the way they are gets us caught up in ignorance and misunderstanding. We work on the basis of many assumptions and prejudices that things are ‘selves’ and they are ‘soul’ and that they are ‘this way’ or ‘that way.’ This misunderstanding – the inability to see *tathatā* (suchness) – slowly will disappear, and in its place will grow the steadily increasing perception and awareness of suchness, the suchness of things. This is the twelfth of these things which will fade away and disappear with the correct practice.

So these are the twelve things that will lessen and disappear if your practice of Buddhism is correct. So please remember these things, memorize them. Take this list of twelve things and remember them, and then you can use them to test yourself. You can examine yourself regularly to see if you are making progress in Buddhism. Are you practicing correctly or not? We don’t measure correct practice in Buddhism by how long we can sit with our legs crossed, or how many days we can go without eating or things like this. The

way to measure progress is whether these twelve things are lessening or not. So please remember them, memorize them; and then you can yourself see and verify whether you are making progress or not. A teacher can never look into your mind completely and see what is actually happening there. You are the one who must examine yourself. So please remember these twelve things in order to do so.

So today we've discussed five facts that are very important to the study and practice of Buddhism. First one we've talked about is 'why we must practice Buddhism.' The second is 'what is Buddhism?' And the third is 'who does Buddhism belong to, who is the authority of Buddhism?' Fourth is 'how to practice Buddhism,' and five are 'what results will happen to the practice of Buddhism.' These are the five facts which we've talked about today. So far you've been able to listen to them from somebody else, and we tried to make them clear for you so that you know what Buddhism is about, and so that you can go ahead with your study and practice correctly. So this point we've just been talking about them because that's all we can do right here – talk about them – and then later you can think about them. But after you have practiced these things, you've actually gone through and done these things, then at the end you will realize 'Hey it's true!' You will see that these facts are genuinely true. At this point, all you can do is listen and think about them. But if you actually practice them, if you get down and do the practice that is necessary; then you will realize that this is true. So this is what you need to know in order to practice Buddhism. We offer them to you. We leave them for you to think about, to consider, and to practice. And we sincerely hope that all of you will be able to realize these facts and truths, that you will be able to do what is necessary, and that you will receive the benefits of this practice. These benefits are what? – are the things that all human beings are to realize. So we sincerely hope that you will be able to realize them. So on this note, we request that today's talk ends.

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