

The True Nature of Buddhism

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

A Dhamma lecture given at Suan Mokkh on xx August 1989

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).

Today is the last day of your training course, we'd like to once again express our joy that you have come for this purpose, and we'd like to take the opportunity to stress or repeat certain points.

We'd like to express our delight that all of you who came as tourists in the beginning will be returning as pilgrims with a full backpack of wealth to carry with you.

Let us use the word 'God' in speaking about this wealth or this highest thing, that each of us has something that is truly the highest. Buddhists have a 'God' in a Buddhist way; or Buddhists have their own God. Christians have their God. And scientists have the God of scientists.

But even better than that is to end all problems and all questions about God, so that we can be god for ourselves.

A mistake that we have in this modern world is that people believe in religions according to the various authorities of each religion, and so this leads to argument, conflict, and competition among the religions.

When the God of Buddhists can genuinely quench *dukkha*, when the God of Christians can truly quench *dukkha*, and when the God of scientists can actually quench *dukkha*, if it is the true and genuine God it will be able to quench *dukkha*, and then all problems regarding God will be finished finally, once and

for all.

When we can truly quench dukkha then we'll no longer wonder what religion should I follow, or what is God really like and all the arguments and disputes that go on between people who are still in doubt or confusion about religion and God. All this will end when we can actually quench dukkha.

When we talk about seeing God, or seeing the Buddha, or seeing Dhamma, the important thing isn't having seen this thing or that thing or whatever, the only thing that matters is seeing that we can quench dukkha. Seeing our own quenching of dukkha, this is the only thing that is important.

The Buddha once said regarding himself, "It isn't enough to see this body, it is not enough just to see this body walking back and forth across India." There were many people who saw the physical body of the Buddha and didn't get any benefit from that. Or just reading books about the Buddha's life; that still isn't what really matters.

In India in the Buddha's time there were many people who weren't at all interested in the Buddha. There were many who didn't follow Buddhism. There were even some who set themselves up as enemies of Buddhism and even a few who tried to harm or even kill the Buddha. For example there were a number of women who were very angry at the Buddha, they called him the widow maker because their husbands had gone off and become monks and they were very angry about this.

The Buddha, however, said that, "The one who sees how *dukkha* arises and how *dukkha* is quenched, and then understanding thus is able to quench *dukkha* accordingly. This is the one who has seen the Buddha."

You yourselves now have had an opportunity to study how it is that dukkha arises, and you have been studying also *ānāpānasati*, a very skilful means for the quenching of dukkha and so this means that to some extent you have seen the Buddha.

And so seeing the Buddha means to see the actual quenching of dukkha. Seeing the Dhamma is to clearly see the true quenching of dukkha, and to see God in the correct meaning of this word 'God' is to see the genuine quenching of dukkha.

As we said the other day you must have the following: you must have knowledge regarding how to quench dukkha; you must practice for the sake of

quenching dukkha; and then you must receive the fruits of actually quenching that dukkha. These are the things that are necessary for us to have all three of these aspects so that dukkha is finished.

So first of all you must have a sufficiently complete and thorough understanding of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, about the conditioned arising of dukkha. And you must have a sufficiently complete understanding about how to practice according to the principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda* in order to quench dukkha. If you have this understanding then you will have succeeded in coming here. Your time spent here will have fulfilled the purpose of your coming to Suan Mokkh, namely, knowing how to quench suffering.

That you would have a complete understanding about the arising of dukkha and how to quench it from just a ten-day course like this is impossible. However, it's more than possible that you will enough understanding about dependent origination and the way to quench dukkha, that you can continue studying this and to continue practicing according to this understanding until your understanding is complete enough for you to quench dukkha completely, finally.

There's one extremely important fact to consider, the fact that this life is a problem. There are the things that cause these problems, or are the basis for these problems and these are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Then there are the things which come in to stir up the problem: the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and thoughts. Now, this is all completely natural, there is no way to avoid it, this is just the way it is for human beings in this world. So then it's just a matter of dealing correctly with this reality. If one is unable to deal correctly, then all kinds of problems are stirred up every time a sense object makes contact with a sense organ. But if we can deal with this correctly, wisely, then dukkha will not arise and there won't be any more problems.

This is a problem that exists both at home and outside the home. It exists in our families, in the work place. It is a problem for ourselves, for our friends, and for all the people we know. This is a problem that's everywhere, and so we ought to find out how to solve it.

Next we'd like to come to the fact about belief. Belief is a very basic thing in religion. In all religions there is some form of faith and way of believing. This is in all religions, each religion will have its way of belief. If one is going to study Buddhism, then one must believe one's own experience of the truth of

things. Each thing has within it a truth of how that thing is, of what that thing is. Our belief is in this experience of the truth of each thing that we come to realize.

It might sound strange to you but we say that ‘we learn about Buddhism but we don’t have to believe the Buddha.’

That’s the way the Buddha wanted it. He didn’t want anyone to believe him as a teacher or anything like that. He didn’t ask people to believe him, what he hoped was that people would believe the truth that they experienced themselves in things that he was pointing to. To have that direct experience of things and believe in that truth.

For example, the Buddha taught that *taṇhā* (desire) is the cause of *dukkha*. But he didn’t want us to believe this just because he told us, instead he wanted us to look at this *dukkha* and to examine desire and see how it is that desire causes *dukkha*. We’ve got both of these things in our lives, both desire and suffering, so the Buddha wanted us just to look at these and see the truth in them that he pointed to.

The most important thing to remember is that for the whole process, the whole stream of dependent origination: how it is that consciousness arises, the way feeling arises, the way desire arises, the way attachment arises, the necessary thing is that we must see this in that thing itself, how each of these arises must be seen in the thing itself. Don’t ever forget that the truth of something appears only in that thing and nowhere else. We can only see the truth of something in that thing. And so for this whole flow of dependent origination we must see the truth of each one of these in each of them, in each of these links. This is what the Buddha taught. And he said if all we do is go and believe him then we’re just as stupid as before, we haven’t got any smarter.

If you just go and believe somebody else when they tell you how sugar tastes, how sugar is sweet and how salt is salty, if you just believe this then you are as stupid as ever. And it’s the same with all *dhammas* (natural truths) that the Buddha has pointed to, that we need to experience the truth of those things and this is what should believe in and only this. The truth of the things that we experience ourselves and we should believe in our own experience of these things. Otherwise, it’s just a blind faith in which we are as dumb as ever, we don’t learn anything and we have no increased ability to help ourselves.

So one must study and practice according to the principle of the *Kālāma Sutta*. This was a discourse of the Buddha in which he told us that one should

not believe something just because it is widely spread about, or just because it's a common rumour, or just because it's a tradition that has been passed along for many years. Or just because it fits with logic. Or just because it fits with philosophical speculation. Or just because it agrees with one's own opinions. We shouldn't even believe something just because it is common sense. And surely we shouldn't believe something merely because the speaker is attractive, charismatic, or seems believable. We shouldn't believe something merely because the speaker is 'my teacher.' Instead we only believe the truth that we directly experience ourselves, the truth of that particular thing, this is all that we believe. (We've got copies of this that maybe we can distribute later so that you can use this principle in your practice.) In Buddhism we don't want you to believe in any authority other than the direct experience of the truth of things in those things.

And so our belief in dukkha and in the cause of dukkha is based only in seeing the truth in dukkha, seeing the truth in desire, that desire in the cause of dukkha, this is how we believe in Buddhism. To see for ourselves that suffering does not arise from past actions, whether earlier in this life, or some so-called 'past life'; and that suffering does not arise because God created it, or because it was determined by God. These were the words of the Buddha that, "Suffering does not happen because of past actions or because of the will of God, but suffering only happens because we act incorrectly regarding eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind."

Many people who come here wonder why it is that we never talk about past lives or so-called 'reincarnations.' The reason for this is because in Buddhism there is no such thing as reincarnation; this is not taught or believed in Buddhism. Because in Buddhism there is no 'self' to go and get incarnated or reincarnated; so there's absolutely no basis in Buddhism for a belief in reincarnation.

And so these so-called 'past actions' or 'old *kammas*' have absolutely no connection to suffering here and now, there's no relationship whatsoever; and reincarnation just has nothing to do with Buddhism. Nonetheless, there are many Buddhists who believe in reincarnation. Even in Thailand there are many people who cling to this belief. In India in the Buddha's time it was just the same way, there were many people who believed in reincarnation. And when the Buddha spoke to these people he told them, "The eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, this is old *kamma*." (*Kamma* by the way just means 'action,' although

it is explained in many confused ways these days; but it just means ‘actions.’ Old *kammas* means old actions, past actions.) The Buddha said that this old kamma is merely eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. But those people were probably too stupid to understand and maybe you yourselves are having trouble understanding how it is that the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind are old kammas. This is all the Buddha said, this is the only old kamma the Buddha talked about.

The Tipiṭaka, the three baskets which have preserved the Buddha’s teaching, are full of things like this which Buddhists still don’t understand. But over and over again when somebody would talk to the Buddha and when they wanted old actions, when they wanted to talk about or believe in old deeds and how this old kamma effects this life, the Buddha said, “Here, eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind that’s your past *kamma*.”

This belief in old kamma was one that came from other belief systems that had existed in India for many years before the Buddha’s time and it wasn’t the Buddha’s intention for us to go and believe in such things. The Buddha stressed repeatedly that happiness and suffering do not arise from old actions. That happiness and suffering arise just because of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, or he would say that “The eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind those are the old *kamma*.” But people didn’t listen, or they didn’t want to understand, or they were not intelligent enough to catch the meaning.

If we act foolishly, incorrectly towards *paṭiccasamuppāda* at the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind then there is hell instantaneously. But if one acts correctly regarding dependent origination at the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind then there is heaven instantaneously. Heaven and hell have nothing to do with past actions or unless we say that it’s just the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind which are the old kamma.

And we also want you to know that when we say things like this to you, when we try to point out these facts, that we will be severely criticized in very unpleasant, crude, and nasty language. Defamed, insulted not just criticized but they will very angrily drag Ajahn Buddhadasa’s name through the mud of their own minds by the conservative and orthodox Buddhists both in Bangkok and in places like Sri Lanka.

Now the next point, the one that happiness and suffering have nothing to do with God creating it or willing it. In India in the Buddha’s time they didn’t have

the word ‘God,’ because ‘God’ is an English word. But the word they were using then was *Īśvara* which is the Sanskrit form, or *issara* is the Pāli form. And the Buddha said, “*Na issara nima na hetu*” [27.50 ??] which means ‘God is not the cause of happiness (*sukha*) and suffering (*dukkha*).’ That these things, happiness and suffering, occur depending only on whether we practice correctly or incorrectly regarding the law of *idappaccayatā*. When there is the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind if we respond wisely in line with the law of *idappaccayatā* there will be happiness, *sukha*; but if we act incorrectly, foolishly, blindly according to this law of *idappaccayatā* then there will be suffering. That’s all there is, it has nothing to do with some God willing or creating or determining these things. So if we act correctly regarding the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind then even a herd of gods could not make you suffer; and if we act incorrectly according to the law of *idappaccayatā* then even a herd of gods could not help you.

But I’ve told you already that there is in fact in Buddhism a ‘God’; Buddhism has a ‘God.’ However, the Buddhist God is not a personal God. The Buddhist God is an impersonal God, that is the highest truth or law regarding the arising and quenching of *dukkha*. This impersonal God is the God of Buddhism, please remember this.

And so please don’t believe all those books written by Western scholars that say that Buddhism is atheist. This just isn’t true. Buddhism is theistic. However, this God is an impersonal one. And so don’t waste believing what these guys write in their books because they don’t understand Buddhism.

Remember that when the Buddha teaches something we listen and then we take it and consider it, we examine it carefully until we see the truth of that thing. For example, when they say that ‘God wants us to love our neighbours.’ On this one we don’t have to go and believe God, or believe just because God is supposed to have said it, but we can examine the facts and see what happens when we love our neighbours. Instead of just believing this blindly we can consider it and put it into practice, and then see for ourselves what it is to love our neighbours and what results come from loving our neighbours. Then we only need believe what comes from our own experience. It’s irrelevant really whether God or whoever said it. We need to see and believe through our own direct experience of the truth of each thing.

If one goes and believes the Buddha or God immediately then that this blind faith, which is incorrect faith, foolish faith. But if one only believes after having

examined the truth of that thing and seeing the truth in it, then that is correct faith; and this is the sole intention and purpose of the Buddha, not that we believe in him but that we believe in our own experience. For example, when the Buddha says something like, “To do good is good and to do evil is evil.” We don’t have to believe the Buddha we can just look and see for ourselves that this in fact true. This is the purpose of the Buddha – that we believe in our experience.

If someone comes and tells us that salt is salty and we go and believe them then we’re stupid. If we go and believe that salt is salty just because they told us then we don’t know anything and we are probably worse off because we’re blind in this belief. But if we go and taste the salt for ourselves, then we know, ‘oh this is what saltiness is like’; we know this clearly and directly, and so this belief is not stupid. And so all the *dhammas* of Buddhism, all the teachings of Buddhism have this characteristic that the truth of each dhamma appears right there in that dhamma and nowhere else. It doesn’t appear in the speaker’s mouth or in the book. So to blindly believe what is taught to us or what we read is stupidity. We need to taste the truth of that for ourselves and believe only our own taste, direct and personal taste of it.

When I say to you that ‘to believe what the Buddha says or what God says without examining it for yourself is merely blind faith,’ when I say this, I’m going to be insulted and disparaged by both Buddhists and Christians, but I put up with this abuse in order to help you to have a correct understanding of things. I think that you ought to know this to understand the situation in this world.

So the truth of everything manifests in that thing. For example, the truth that salt is salty exists only in salt and nowhere else. Or the truth that sugar is sweet exists only in sugar. And this is true also of every *dhamma*, every teaching of the Buddha, that the truth of that exists not in the words but only in the thing itself, and so we must taste it for ourselves to know that truth. So this is why the Buddha when he talked about Dhamma, the first adjective that he used when he discussed Dhamma was the word *sandiṭṭhiko* which means ‘to see for oneself,’ to know for oneself, to experience oneself. The Dhamma can only be seen, known, and experienced in this way.

And so we follow the Buddha, we practice the way the Buddha taught because we see in ourselves, we have confidence in ourselves. If you understand this it will be very good for you.

Sandiṭṭhiko – *diṭṭhi* means to see, *san* means oneself, by oneself, for oneself, or it can mean within. So when we say that the Dhamma is sandiṭṭhiko, we mean that everything has its truth within itself. And we to see Dhamma, to see the truth must see the truth by ourselves, for ourselves, within ourselves; there is no other way. If it's not sandiṭṭhiko it's not Dhamma, it's just more blind faith. It's only the truth if it is sandiṭṭhiko, seen by oneself, for oneself, within oneself.

The next adjective the Buddha used was *akāliko*, which means 'not associated with time,' not relying upon time, not having anything to do with time. And what this means is that all actions automatically naturally have a reaction. The result of any action has nothing to do with time. We don't have to wait for the result. Which means it doesn't depend on some God or external power to create the result; that when there is an action there will naturally be a result. So this means that with *paṭiccasamuppāda* we must act correctly according to this, and the results will happen by themselves according to the natural way, the natural law of things, it isn't dependent on some God. This is called *akāliko* (beyond time, unconcerned, unconnected with time). These things aren't a matter of time or anything such as God that creates time.

(He wants me to use a better translation.) 'Not depending on time,' not depending on time.

For example when you hit a drum the sound arises immediately; the drum doesn't need anyone to come and help it make the sound. Hit the drum and there is the sound. It is not dependent on time; it's *akāliko*.

The next adjective is *ehiṇissiko*, which means that 'the truth is right here so that you can call anybody and say come and look;' you can see it right here. The truth isn't hidden anywhere, it is right there for everyone to come and see. And so that means if we hit the drum we can tell anybody to come and look, see you hit the drum and it makes the sound. There is nothing mysterious or hidden about it the truth is right there for everyone to come and see. This is *ehiṇissiko*.

And so in learning about Dhamma, in practicing Dhamma, in tasting the fruits of Dhamma practice, every step and stage of this process is *ehiṇissiko*. We can invite anyone to come and see that it is true.

The next one is *opanayiko*, which means two things: it means both that 'we ought to have that Dhamma within us,' and that 'it's possible to have that Dhamma within us.' *Opanayiko* is that we should have and we can have all this Dhamma that we have been talking about, we can have it right here in

ourselves.

And the last one is *paccataṃ vedittabo* which means ‘no one can experience it for another.’ You can’t experience the Dhamma for a friend, or your teacher can’t experience the Dhamma for you. That no one can experience the truth for another. This is the last adjective that the Buddha used to describe the Dhamma, *paccataṃ vedittabo*, it is something must be experienced personally.

So please remember these adjectives about Dhamma then we can always tell whether what is being talked about is real Dhamma or just another bit of blind faith. There is *sandiṭṭhiko* – to see by oneself, for oneself, within oneself; *akāliko* – not dependent on time; *ehi-passiko* – the truth exists so that everyone can be invited to come and see; *opanayiko* – something we ought to have and can have within ourselves; and *paccataṃ vedittabo* – no one can experience it for another, it can’t be experienced for us by someone else.

Let’s see how this applies to your practice of mindfulness of breathing. In the first tetrad concerning the breathing one practices until one can regulate the breathing, until one has mastery over the breathing. Then the breathing can be calmed, the body can be calmed. This is something which is *sandiṭṭhiko* – you see it for yourself, you see it in yourself by practicing it. It is *akāliko* – it doesn’t depend on time the results of this will appear immediately when this done. It’s *ehi-passiko* – the truth of it is right here for anyone to come and see. *Opanayiko* – it’s something that you ought to have and can have within you, and it’s [*paccataṃ vedittabo*] – something that is experienced personally not by someone for us. This is one example of how just the calming of the breathing, how our body is at ease and how our mind is totally at ease, how this arises is *sandiṭṭhiko*, etc.

So when you’re hot, when you feel very hot physically, you can use the breathing to cool oneself down, so you don’t have to go and turn on a fan or anything.

Or if you have a cut and you’re bleeding, if you establish mindfulness on the breathing and make the breathing more refined, more gentle, more calm then the blood will escape more and more slowly. The blood will flow less and less.

Or whenever you want to relax you can just use the breathing, make it more calm, more refined in order to relax yourself. You don’t have to go the beach to relax you can just sit right here and use the breathing. You don’t have to go anywhere else and this is much less expensive.

Then for the second tetrad we can have happiness, rapture, contentment, all of these pleasant feelings we can have them whenever we want. We can summon them immediately by making the breath refined and calm as we are practicing. One can have these whenever one needs them if one has practiced the second tetrad successfully.

If we practice the third tetrad successfully then we will be masters over our mind. This means that we can use the mind however we need to, however we want. We can have the mind be in whatever state we wish, there will be total mastery over the mind so that it can be used in whatever way we need if we practice the third tetrad successfully.

And then if we complete the fourth tetrad then we can have Nibbāna any time and any place that we want it. Whatever we want, whenever we want it we can have the quenching of heat, the quenching of thirst, the quenching of *dukkha* at any time and any place once we have succeeded in the fourth tetrad.

And the most important thing is that we have freedom from the defilements whenever and wherever.

And then we can see that henceforth this life will never bite. This life won't bite anymore. It will be a life of peace, a life of freedom, a life of happiness.

So this is how success in Dhamma practice is. That it will be *sandiṭṭhiko*, you will see it for yourself, by yourself, in yourself; *akāliko*, it doesn't depend on time; and *ehi-passiko*, you can call your friends over to see the truth of it; it's *opanayiko*, something that you should and can have inside; and it's *paccatam vedittabbo*, no one can experience it for you.

So finally you will be able to see for yourself that Buddhism is a science of nature. Buddhism is not a philosophy, it's not a logical system or some speculative theoretical system, but it's a science of nature, a direct experience of the reality of nature. It is a scientific study and practice of and within nature. This is the true characteristic of Buddhism. If it isn't in this way, if it's not a science of nature then it's not really Buddhism, it's just philosophy or something masquerading as Buddhism or maybe just blind faith masquerading as Buddhism.

And when we use the word 'science' we must add the word 'spiritual' in front to make it clear; it is a spiritual science of nature.

And so you can *sandiṭṭhiko*, you can see for yourself that Buddhism is

appropriate for this nuclear age or this computer age.

And so we can build a world, we can create a world that is truly satisfying by applying these principles.

So finally let us say once again that we are very happy that you came like tourists and you leave as pilgrims with a true God in your backpack.

And so that's the end of the talk, we thank you for being very good listeners.

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