

Wat Pah Nanachat Talks series II, Part 1 of 3

IDAPPACAYATA AS THE HEART OF BUDDHISM

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

A Dhamma lecture given at Suan Mokkh on 28 December 1991

In 1991, foreign-born monastic disciples of Venerable Ajahn Chah, led by Ajahn Sumedho, made a second group pilgrimage to Suan Mokkh to pay respects to Tan Ajahn Buddhadāsa, who was held in high esteem by Ajahn Chah. Tan Ajahn spoke with them about the fundamental Law of Nature at the core of the Buddha's realization and teaching. Tan Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. All Ajahn's teachings are now available on:

www.suanmokkh.org,

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

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

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

email to: suanmokkh_bangkok@bia.or.th.

First of all we must ask you to understand that this will just be a discussion or an informal conversation because we don't have the strength to give a Dhamma lecture. To give a proper lecture takes quite a bit of breath or wind, and we don't have that. So, we ask you to understand today that we'll just have a discussion together.

Further, this will be an inner discussion. By 'inner' or 'internal' we mean that we'll just speak within certain limits, almost speak as friends, as comrades who are living the Dhamma life, and just have a direct straightforward conversation within certain specific limits.

Some of the things are like secrets within us – there're inner secrets that we all have. So this conversation will be a mutual consultation where we discuss these things back and forth to help each other have a deeper understanding of these inner secrets. In short, we'd like to talk about the heart, that essence which is the heart of Buddhism.

Now, all of us who are Buddhists have not yet realized or attained the heart of Buddhism – we haven't yet gotten to the heart of Buddhism. At first, it may sound like we are insulting others or looking down at them, which is a rather ugly kind of behavior, but this truth is still there.

The word 'Buddhism' has changed in its meaning. So, much of the time what we're talking about when we say 'Buddhism' has changed from what was originally meant by 'Buddha Sasana,' especially when we talk about Buddhism, this Buddhism. Often, we're not very clear what we mean and it's not in line with the original meaning. First of all, the Buddha Sasana should not be an 'ism.' Of all these isms we have around here, Buddha Sasana should not be mixed up with any of them. All of you should be able to observe that these isms and isms come from the reasoning and intelligence of human beings who have studied life in the world, and then come to some conclusion or summary on their own. Therefore, the more we study Buddhism, the less we know Buddhism. The more we study the Buddha Sasana, the more we don't understand the Buddha Sasana. So please don't study Buddhism. Please just study Dhamma – the Dhamma which is the truth of nature. Don't worry about all this Buddhism and all these isms. Merely study the truth, the Sacca Dhamma of nature.

All this Buddhism that people are interested in is mainly for talking or for believing, for passing tests, for arguing about, debating, and showing off one's cleverness until it becomes just another school of philosophy that is unable to end dukkha, that is unable to quench dukkha. Don't worry about all of that stuff. You can forget about it all and focus solely on the Dhamma, which can do away with all dukkha.

In other words, the Buddhism that we study, learn, and memorize or the Buddhism that we turn into fancy Dhamma talks to show how clever and beautiful we speak, or the Buddhism for passing tests so we can get a degree in Buddhist studies, or the Buddhism that becomes a philosophy – none of this is really Buddhism. It's not actually what Buddhism is about because none of it can end dukkha.

Studying Buddhism for 10-20 years, still unable to end dukkha, still unable to get rid of attachments, in fact, more proud, more arrogant, more boastful than ever before, more attachments than ever before – this is what we mean by saying that the more we study Buddhism, the more we don't understand it.

Now we have Indian Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Mongolian Buddhism, Sri Lankan Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, Burmese Buddhism, Khmer Buddhism. We've got dozens – we don't know how many kinds of Buddhism. But none of them has gotten to the essence of Buddhism, none of them is really the heart of Buddhism. So, they can't solve the dilemma of dukkha. In fact, Buddhism is just the truth of nature, this truth of nature which has then been discussed, and then fixed up, decorated, expounded, and concocted into all the dozens of different forms of Buddhism, none of which are able to end dukkha.

What they are amount to is just the Buddhism that people talk about in China, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, or whatever. We have all these dozens of kinds of Buddhism that people talk about in their different countries, and then the different ceremonies and rituals and practices that they bring along with all their talking. But it's so far unable to end dukkha. It just goes on and on but never really solves the essential problem of dukkha.

Stop and think about all the books and texts on Buddhism that have been printed through the centuries. First there is the Tipitaka, and then all the commentaries and then the sub-commentaries and all the other ancient books on Buddhism. And then we have the more modern books which have been written in modern style and made poetic and beautiful, written by the experts and intellectuals. Think of all these books we have – the original texts and all the later books and commentaries on Buddhism. I think that it must add up to at least a hundred or a thousand tons of paper that have gone into all these texts and books. But why is it that all this paper has been used but still we haven't been able to quench dukkha? Why is it that in this world we can't end dukkha? Why is it that human beings can't get free of dukkha, although we have spent all this paper on all these books?

This little essence, which is the heart of Buddhism, where is it in all those books? Where can we find this heart of Buddhism that will end all dukkha? I'd like to affirm and attest that the heart of Buddhism can be found in just one word. In just one word we can express that which is essential in Buddhism. That word is *idappaccayatā*, *idappaccayatā*, *idappaccayatā*.

This word, this single word, must be understood thoroughly and then practiced. We must be able to put it into practice. Normally we call it by another name. More commonly we speak of *patīccasamuppāda*. But in the Pāli, often the longer term is used *idappaccayatā patīccasamuppatho*." Often the full term appears there. In fact, *idappaccayatā* and *patīccasamuppāda* are the same thing. Here, when we talk about the essential principle, we can talk about *idappaccayatā*.

The meaning of *idappaccayatā* is that all things have their causes and conditions and then happen according to the influence or power of those causes and conditions. Everything that exists – all things have causes and conditions – and what happens to things the way they develop is solely according to those causes and conditions. This is the law of *idappaccayatā*.

All of this can be expressed in four sentences. Just in four sentences we can clearly express exactly what is meant by *idappaccayatā*. Please listen very carefully, pay careful attention, and remember these words.

The first sentence is: All things manifest and develop according to causes and conditions, all things arise and develop according to causes and conditions.

The second sentence is: That if we practice wrongly regarding this law of *idappaccayatā*, then dukkha will occur; dukkha is born when we practice wrongly regarding this law of *idappaccayatā*.

The third sentence is: That if we practice correctly according to *idappaccayatā*, then there is no dukkha.

The fourth sentence is: That if we can regulate or master the law of *idappaccayatā*, then nibbāna will appear totally, fully.

Let us go through these again. First, all things appear and happen according to causes and conditions. If we act wrongly towards this law of *idappaccayatā*, then dukkha arises. If we act correctly towards the law of *idappaccayatā*, then there is no dukkha, dukkha isn't born, and when we can be victorious over, when we can master the law of *idappaccayatā*, then there is nibbāna.

A way to explain these so that it's easily understood is that by "all things" we mean everything – living things and inanimate things – things which science would call 'phenomena' as well as the 'noumenon.' All things, without any exception, arise or appear and then proceed and carry on according to the law of *idappaccayatā*.

Material things, our actions, the results of our actions, material objects, mental things – all of these appear, occur, arise through causes and conditions and then proceed and further develop according to causes and conditions. This goes on continuously, it has no beginning, it has no end, it goes on continually without any exception. All things arise and carry on according to the law of *idappaccayatā*.

Even the idea of God – the thought of God which is just an idea that arises in human minds – this idea and all the other thoughts about God arise and develop according to the law of *idappaccayatā*. They're concocted through the power of this law.

If you like to think that everything was created by God, then this could only have happened through the law of *idappaccayatā*. Creation could only happen through the law of *idappaccayatā*. If you prefer to see it in solely natural terms that within nature there is a natural evolution taking place, then that evolution occurs solely through the law of *idappaccayatā*. All things are subject to this law and follow this law. This natural law is universal and is absolute. Every atom in the universe, in the cosmos, is under the power of this law of *idappaccayatā*.

This is the truth of nature expressed in the first sentence that all things arise and carry on according to the law of *idappaccayatā*. The Buddha's awakening was awakening to the law of *idappaccayatā*. But when the Buddha taught human beings about this law and discussed specifically the situation of human beings, then he used another word, the word *paticcasamuppāda*, which is more specific. *Idappaccayatā* is universal – it applies to both living things and non-living things. But *paticcasamuppāda* refers specifically to the arising of dukkha and sukha in the life of human beings.

The Buddha said whoever sees *paticcasamuppāda* sees Dhamma, and whoever sees Dhamma sees me. Therefore, the real Buddha who can help us is none other than this law of *paticcasamuppāda*, which we understand deeply enough that through the understanding we can end dukkha. This is the Dhamma, this is the Buddha that can really help us.

The Buddha's awakening was exactly about *paticcasamuppāda* asking from what does dukkha arise. And then seeing the source of dukkha, asking where does that come from. And from what does that come from, and from what does that come from, until coming to the primary original source which is *avijjā* (ignorance), not knowing.

On the night of the Great Awakening he reviewed backwards and forwards this principle of *paticcasamuppāda* throughout the night. After awakening, he sat there by himself for seven days reviewing this understanding of *paticcasamuppāda*. Having investigated it so thoroughly, he felt that it was incredibly profound, so deep that he suspected that nobody could understand it and thought it probably wasn't worth the trouble to teach. But on further thought, he thought there was a chance that some people might be able to understand and he decided to teach.

When the Buddha wanted to recite something, kind of like the chanting we do nowadays or the way ordinary people sing songs, the thing that the Buddha recited was dependent origination or *paticcasamuppāda*. Alone on his own in the forest, he kind of chanted or recited this to himself. You can find this in the Pāli if you wish.

One time the Buddha thought he was alone in the woods and so he recited the formula of *paticcasamuppāda* to himself, in all regarding the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. He went through the entire set. He thought he was alone but it turned out that there had been a monk hiding and listening. And when the Buddha noticed this monk he said, "Oh you're here, well here take this, take this and study it, investigate it, because this is the *ādibrahmacariya*. This is the starting point of the spiritual life."

So please respect and remember this principle, this law. In whatever meaning you want to give to the word 'heart,' this is the heart of Buddhism. Its essence is in the fact that all things arise and develop according to this law of *idappaccayatā paticcasamuppāda*.

This is the first fact that we need to understand. We need to investigate this continually, deeply, until we thoroughly realize this fact of how all things are governed and controlled by this Law of Nature, the law of *paticcasamuppāda*. Then there's the second fact which is if we practice incorrectly towards the law of *idappaccayatā* or *paticcasamuppāda*, then dukkha will happen.

If we lack mindfulness and are forgetful or careless whenever a form contacts the eyes or a sound stimulates the ears or an odor stimulates the nose – whenever any of the six senses are stimulated by their objects – if we are mindless or careless then the entire flow, the entire series of dependent origination will arise and this series of phenomena always leads to dukkha. This is called misbehaving regarding *idappaccayatā*.

To break the law, to go against moral norms, to go against customs, to break rules and regulations, and to suffer unpleasantness, pain, and hassle because of all of that, all of this is included in the words "misbehaving regarding the law of *paticcasamuppāda*."

You all know that all the kinds of bad actions – of evil nasty actions – occur because we lack mindfulness. When there is no mindfulness then all these forms of evil and bad actions can occur. So, we can say that hell occurs because we are unmindful of this Law of Nature.

Then there is the third natural fact, namely that by practicing correctly regarding the law of *paticcasamuppāda* then dukkha doesn't happen, there is no dukkha. So if we are mindful when the eyes are stimulated by forms, when the ears are stimulated by sounds, the nose by odors, the tongue by flavors, the body by tactile sensations, and the mind by thoughts – if we are mindful in

all these situations – then mindfulness brings in the right kind of understanding, the right wisdom, or *paññā*. And that wisdom then is applied to the specific situation, which is *sampajañña* or applied wisdom, applied understanding. When the right Dhamma, the right understanding, is applied in this way, then there is no opportunity for dukkha to occur. The series of events that we call '*paticcasamuppāda*' can't happen in the way that leads to dukkha.

Following laws, living according to moral principles, respecting and obeying the customs and the rules and regulations of the society and communities in which we live, giving *dāna*, practicing *sīla*, developing *samādhi*, developing wisdom (*paññā*) – all of these are examples, all of these fit into what we mean by acting correctly according to the law of *idappaccayatā paticcasamuppāda* so that no dukkha occurs.

The fourth natural fact refers to having constant mindfulness, to being mindful in every moment in every situation so that this stream of *paticcasamuppāda* doesn't arise and doesn't flow onwards. When we have true mindfulness, when we are always mindful, then no kind of dependent origination, no kind of *idappaccayatā* happens. The mind is not concocted by anything, the mind is void of all concocting. Through this kind of mindfulness so that all concocting is quenched in the mind, then there is nibbanā fully, perfectly.

Please study and investigate these four aspects of the Law of Nature, these four principles of the Law of Nature. It's not necessary to study shelves and cases full of books or all the tons of books that have been printed. It's not necessary to go to China, India, Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, or anywhere else to study this Law of Nature. Just investigate this in the arising and passing away of things that's happening right here and right now. Just investigate these four aspects of the natural law right here. We don't have to go anywhere else.

It doesn't matter how many sects or sub-sects or schools of Buddhism there are, if they don't teach these four principles, then it's not really Buddhism. We ought to tell our friends in foreign countries, wherever they may be, about these four principles of natural law. We ought to tell them about these facts about *idappaccayatā* so that they will be able to understand Buddhism clearly and correctly, and be able to make an end of dukkha.

Let us reaffirm that this is a natural law. This is the Law of Nature. If we want to personify it in anthropomorphic terms then we could speak of God. But if we want to speak in simple natural scientific terms, then we only need to talk about the Law of Nature. These four meanings, these four aspects that we have been discussing are this Law of Nature which is fully universal and completely absolute. This is the law that governs everything, so it is universal and absolute. Nothing can escape its power.

When we say that this law is universal, we mean that it governs all lives. The lives of the devas, the lives of human beings, the lives of animals, even the lives of trees and plants are governed by this law of *idappaccayatā*. When it governs all lives, then it governs all races whether Caucasian, Mongoloid, Australoid, Negroid, or whatever. This law of *idappaccayatā* governs and controls all the races.

Therefore, you don't need to talk about what race you are, what ethnic background you are, what country you come from, what language you speak, or what religion you follow, or any of these things. Because no matter where you come from and what language you speak, the law of *idappaccayatā* is already governing your life. You're already totally within the power of the Law of Nature. So all these old facts of the past don't really matter. What only matters is that right now we are living thoroughly under the power of *idappaccayatā*.

So whatever race we belong to really doesn't matter. Wherever we come from, whatever our ethnic background, doesn't really matter because the dukkha, the occurrence of dukkha in our lives as well as the absence of dukkha in our lives, is solely under the power of this law of *idappaccayatā* and that applies to everyone no matter what race we belong to. So please don't talk about things like race or what religion you follow or any of these unnecessary distinctions. Because no matter what religion you follow, the only way to end dukkha is to understand and live according to this law of *idappaccayatā*.

We can use an easy example that even children can understand: All human beings, no matter what their race is, have the right to get sick with any kind of disease they want. All the diseases of the world can affect anyone no matter what their race, and then the various medicines and cures for these diseases can be used by, once again, by anyone. Their race doesn't matter. For example, AIDS. Anybody can get AIDS – white people, green people, yellow people, brown people, black people – they can all get AIDS. And if there were a cure for AIDS, then it can be used by everyone, once again regardless of race. This is the kind of example we need to understand for the Dhamma, the Law of Nature that can free all of us from dukkha. No matter what our race, we experience dukkha. No matter what our race, we have to live according to the same principle in order to be free of dukkha.

Not just the human beings, we can even talk of the various devas, whether the *kāmāvacara* devas or the *rūpāvacara* or the *arūpāvacara* – whether those on the sensual levels, the form levels, or the formless levels of the various celestial existences – all of them suffer from this same disease, the disease of dukkha. And the only way they can get free of this disease is by living correctly according to the law of *idappaccayatā*.

Even on a lower level, that of the animals – whether we're talking about cows or dogs or cats or whatever, whether they're dogs and cats from Europe or Africa or Asia or America – they all suffer from the same disease, the disease of dukkha. And all the pain and dukkha they experience comes from the same source, and to get free of that can only happen in one way. So, all forms of life, whether the devas or the animals and most of all, most especially, human beings, have this one thing in common, dukkha, and it arises in one way and it can be finished off in another way. This is common to us all. We should help to inform our fellow human beings of this fact so that they can begin to investigate it and free themselves from dukkha.

So please investigate these four meanings – four aspects – of the Law of Nature. And please, most of all, study them within life directly. Study them in life itself, investigate them within life as we directly experience it. If you read any books, do so not for their own sake but in order to better be able to study this Law of Nature in life. This is directly in life itself. It's the only place we can come to understand this natural law and put an end to dukkha. So please study this – all

four aspects of the Law of Nature within life itself – right here in life. Especially when the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind are active, when these six things are functioning, that's exactly where we must investigate this Law of Nature.

The most important tool or instrument for studying this is *sati* (mindfulness), which we'll talk about at another time. But the essence of being mindful is these four different meanings or aspects of the natural law – the fact that all things arise and happen according to causes and conditions according to the law of idappaccayatā. And that dukkha occurs when we act incorrectly regarding this law. When we practice correctly towards this law, then there is no dukkha. And when we have conquered the Law of Nature then nibbanā is there fully. This is the essence of our study, of our practice.

Allow me to repeat again that the Buddha said whoever sees *paticcasamuppāda* sees the Dhamma, and then he said whoever sees the Dhamma sees me. Please investigate these four aspects of the natural law until you see it for yourself. When you really see this, then you'll see the Buddha and you'll have the Buddha with you always, forever. And when that happens there is no more dukkha.

So I'd like to end now because I'm out of strength. There is no more wind, no more breath for speaking, so let's finish our conversation here.

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Transcribed by Bill Weir (arizonahandbook@yahoo.com) in October, 2024

Audio files: 5225341228010.mp3

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