

# *The Relationship between Dhamma and Life*

by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

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*In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhādāsa gave regular lectures during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. Audio recordings are now available from [www.suanmokkh.org](http://www.suanmokkh.org) and [www.bia.or.th](http://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 volunteer and the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok ([suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com](mailto:suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com)).*

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Today in our first talk we'll speak about the association or relationship between Dhamma and our life.

World peace is impossible without peace within the lives of individuals.

So let's look at the peacefulness or happiness in the lives of individuals first. Especially in our own life, before we go talking about world peace.

At the start we should observe and see that there are two levels or two kinds of happiness or of joy. The first kind of happiness is the kind that is peaceful or that has *santi* (peacefulness). And the second kind of happiness is empty of – or lacks – peacefulness. Lacks tranquility. We should be able to see this different to our own experience.

The kind of happiness which is peaceful does not bite its owner whereas the happiness which is peace-less – without peace – that kind of happiness bites its owner. Listen carefully and try to understand what we mean by biting its owner or not biting its owner.

In your life you've already had both kinds of happiness. We've experienced a lot of the happiness that bites its owner. But because we've never studied it we've never looked closely into this matter; we haven't carefully observed; we haven't realized what's going on. And so we tend to love this kind of happiness that bites its owner far more than the peaceful kind of happiness. This happiness that bites its owner; we like it, but it never allows us to be relaxed and calm.

And still we love it more than the peaceful kind of happiness. This is because of our own foolishness because we haven't really paid attention; we haven't learned from the lessons of life.

The fact that we love this kind of happiness that bites its owner; that bites us, and that we don't even know about – we haven't even paid attention to – the kind of happiness that doesn't bite – that is peaceful. This is an example or this is our own other ignorance, foolishness and stupidity that we don't know anything about this matter.

This kind of happiness that bites its owner comes from our being slaves to the senses. We put ourselves into slavery to the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind sense. We are . . . Our foolishness, our defilements are enslaved to the senses. And so all we get is the kind of happiness that bites its owner.

Therefor we ought to be the master instead of the slave. Master means no longer being a slave, means being out from under the power of the senses and being in control of the senses. We ought to be master of the senses instead of their slave in order to be free and experience another kind of happiness.

Now we're infatuated with, enamored with the kind of happiness that comes from slavery to the senses. The happiness that bites its owner. We're really infatuated with this and so we don't even like the genuine happiness of the kind that is peaceful, that is *santi*, that is tranquil and calm. We need to understand this point and begin to accept it, accept the truth of it, before we go any further.

There's something hidden within this issue; something buried very deep; a very profound secret, and this thing hidden within this happiness we're talking about is the thing we call selfishness. When we hear this word selfishness, at first it sounds like it ought to be something good. Selfishness should be something good; I mean it should be on our side for our benefit. Something that brings our own happiness and well-being. You would think selfishness would be to our benefit, but this thing is that this 'self,' this idea of 'self' from which selfishness comes, is a figment of our imaginations. It's a product of our own ignorance. To see things as selves, to see ourselves as selves comes from our own confusion and lack of understanding, and then for this reason the selfishness that develops from that isn't something good and it causes us lots of problems. We don't understand things the way they are and so our selfishness goes looking for a kind of happiness that responds to selfishness and that supports and develops further selfishness. In this way selfishness becomes something low and ugly because it's not based on understanding. Rather, it's just following a kind of instinctual feeling we have that 'I exist,' 'I am,' 'I have a

self or a soul or something. From this kind of instinctual belief we get trapped by this and selfishness arises and so we're trapped in misunderstanding and ignorance and so we go chasing after a selfish kind of happiness that bites its owner.

If you can understand this point we've just made then you'll see that our biggest enemy, our biggest foe is this thing we call the self. This self we think we have. This is our most dangerous enemy. If you can understand this point it's very good. If you are unable to understand this point then it will be very difficult to understand Dhamma.

This thing we call the self can be very, very difficult to understand; or this matter we're talking about. Because first of all the self doesn't really exist. You can't really find anything that we can call a self, but because of our instincts or because of our ignorance we think up the concept of self and we have a kind of feeling that this thing must exist and then we believe in it and we invest in it. So we put a lot into this idea and belief of self although it doesn't really exist. There's no such a thing; this idea is just an illusion and a part of our imagination. So we believe it and we love it and we put so much time and effort into it. And in this way selfishness arises although there's no real self at the bottom of it all.

If somebody were to tell you that you ought to have a self of the kind that isn't a self; you ought to have a self which isn't a self; someone told you that you would probably think they were crazy; that they were lunatic; but this is exactly what Buddhism is saying to you. You ought to have a self which isn't a self.

What this means is that this self that we've all got (or think we've got) is just an illusion, just a dream and that it doesn't really exist.

And so when this self that isn't really a self confuses us; if we believe that we've got a self but we really don't then we do things based in this self (or for the sake of this self) for its good, or for whatever, then something is really wrong. This is the problem with selfishness. Selfishness is doing things for the sake of something that doesn't really exist. The self is just an illusion and doing things based in this illusion is utter foolishness. This is our big problem.

What we're saying now conflicts with your ordinary kind of feeling. What we're saying doesn't quite fit with your usual way of looking at yourself, at life; but it is absolutely necessary that there must be some conflict with our past understanding in way of looking at things. Otherwise there is no way we'll ever

learn anything new or develop any further. So we actually should be patient with this conflict between what we're hearing now and our common ordinary previous way of looking at things in order that we can come to terms with and understand this thing we call a self and see it for what it really is and then be able to get free of this selfishness that it spawns.

What we do is we attach; we cling to; we grab onto this self that doesn't really exist. This illusion of self, we grab onto it, we attach to it very firmly. If we don't see this fact and see the problems that it causes then we'll be unable to have the right kind of understanding; the kind of feeling or attitude towards life that would allow us to experience the happiness; to live with the kind of happiness that doesn't bite its owner.

Be very careful about this word happiness. This word happiness is really tricky and deceitful. Remember earlier we said that there are two kinds of happiness. There's the kind of happiness that comes from selfishness. The kind that bites its owner. We're not interested in that kind of happiness any more. Then there's the kind of happiness that the more selfless we are, the more unselfish, the more self-less we are the more happier we are of this second kind of happiness. This is much better. The more selfless, the more better (if we'd like) the kind of happiness it is. We hope you can understand the difference and see the importance of these later kind of happiness. Don't be deceived by this word happiness into getting tricked over and over again by the selfish kind of happiness.

Put it more simply we can say there are the two kinds of happiness: selfish happiness and self-less happiness. That makes the distinction very, very clear and when earlier we spoke about individual happiness, individual peace, in order to have a happy peaceful world we meant only the selfless, the unselfish happiness which is what we'll talk about now.

Happiness is something everybody's interested in, everybody's paying attention to, chasing after, but nobody discriminates between the two kinds of happiness. So everybody ends up chasing after the kind of happiness that comes instinctually. This is the lower kind of selfish happiness and so nobody knows about the selfless happiness. Please start to study this matter; investigate it until we start to understand and learn about the difference between the two kinds of happiness. You'll see how low and crude the one kind of happiness is and start to see that there's a higher, more peaceful kind of happiness. That instinctual happiness isn't very correct. It doesn't work very well so we need to start to look for a higher, a more appropriate, a more human kind of happiness.

Now it's certain that children know only about the one kind of happiness: the selfish kind of happiness. Think back to when we were children and think of all the kinds of happiness we experienced and they're all just selfish kinds of happiness: getting what we want. And we actually hated the kind of selfless happiness; we had no interest in it. That's how it is for children. Children don't know any better and we couldn't expect things to be any different. But what about now? We're no longer children; we're grownups; we're supposedly mature, and that kind of living that might have been okay for children is no longer appropriate for an adult. Someone who is truly adult and mature ought to explore this matter and see that there's another kind of happiness, much higher; a selfless kind of happiness; to develop one's understanding in knowledge; to see more clearly this selfless happiness and then to develop one's life accordingly; to start to be truly mature as an adult and get free of the kind of selfish happiness of a child. In doing so we'll have to confront the fact that we're very foolish in many ways; that there are many things we don't know, in that our ignorance is very fundamental. But if we can confront this and then start to work on it then we can develop our awareness more and more towards selfless happiness until our happiness becomes more and more purely selfless. Until absolutely, completely selfless, and then one is what sometimes is called a holy person or in Buddhism called an Arahant – an enlightened being. When one's happiness has no more selfishness and is completely selfless.

An easy clear way to discriminate between these two kinds of happiness is that the first kind of happiness depends on attachment, depends on attaching to things. The more we attach to things the more there is selfishness and the more there is this first kind of happiness. So the more we're clinging and grasping and taking things personally the more there is this kind of attachment and there's a lot of it; then there will be a lot of that kind of happiness. The other kind of happiness is completely different; it's an opposite kind of happiness where the less attached we are the happier we are. For the second kind of happiness the more unattached, the more happy. And as unattachment becomes more and more pure then happiness grows. So the one kind of happiness is the more attached, the more happy. And the other is the more unattached, the more happy. If you can understand this distinction then things will be much easier for you. Especially to understand what is meant by attachment. And then you'll have the key to this matter.

The first kind of happiness is from attachment and this attachment is when we're carrying things around with us. We pick things up and then we carry them around. We burden ourselves with these things until they become heavy burdens

of life and that kind of happiness becomes a burden. With non-attachment, though, we don't carry things around; we let go; we release things; we just let go of this and let go of that, and so none of them (none of these things) and this kind of happiness doesn't become a heavy burden; doesn't become a weight; burdening our lives. So the kind of happiness depends on whether there is this carrying things around with us all the time or a letting go of things. One way is heavy and one way is light. This is our problem, that we don't always understand this; or we seldom understand this and we're constantly lugging things around, carrying things around, weighing down our lives, making it heavy. This causes us all kinds of problems although we are often unaware of this problem; we're so used to it; it's so familiar we think this problem is normal and so we carry this heavy burden and don't even realize that we've got such a tremendous problem.

Another way of explaining this or comparing the two kinds of happiness in a way that should be quite easy for all of you to understand is the difference between the household life and the homeless life. The household life is full of attachments: full of attachments to the house, property, car, rent, mortgage, wife, children, possessions, and all kinds of things that the household life is full. Of all kinds of attachments and possessions and burdens and duties and all that. And then the homeless life where there are no attachments or at least very few. This is a good example of the difference between the two kinds of happiness. The happiness of the household life: full of attachments and burdens; and the happiness of the homeless life that is free of attachments and burdens. But be careful here. Don't go and think we are saying that everyone has to run off and run away from home and become a monk or a nun or something. Don't take such a superficial view of the matter. You can be at home and still be homeless. You can have a house and family and still be homeless. It's a matter of how we live our life, not where we live it. It's a matter of attitude and understanding. So the difference between a household life full of attachments and a homeless life free of attachments will help us to understand the two kinds of happiness.

This thing of attachment comes from our belief in the idea of self because we think we've got a self and we go around grabbing onto things, attaching to them, carrying them around. Whenever there is this attaching to things, out of the self, out of selfishness, then that is immediately the household life. And whenever there is no attaching, no grabbing onto things, then that is immediately the homeless life. You can do this at home. It just depends on whether there is attachment or not; whether it's the household life or the homeless life. In Thai we can express this very easily because for the word 'I' in

Thai there are many different words. Some are very refined used for the king and others are very crude and low. And the crudest is the word *goo*. *Goo* is like the ugliest most despicable level of ego that we've all got so to put it very clearly in Thai is don't cling to *goo*. Don't cling to this slimy, ugly, disgusting ego and then everything will be okay; there won't be any *dukkha* (any misery). As soon as we cling to *goo*, to this ugly little ego, then there is suffering in our lives. Become the household life. Again: this is something to be explored anywhere. Even at home.

Those of you who are Christians are to understand this matter quite easily because in Christianity you've got this symbol of the cross. The upright is like the 'I,' the ego, the self and then there's the cutting of the 'I.' Christianity has given us this wonderful symbol of the cutting for the 'I' from level to level; higher and higher levels of selflessness; cutting and cutting away at the self, at the ego, at the 'I-go,' until we are united with God. This is what Christianity teaches. So what we are saying should be easy for any true Christian who understands. Just keep cutting away at the self, at the ego, and going higher and higher in selflessness, in nonattachment; getting free of selfishness, and then one going higher into the homeless life and then going even beyond the homeless life.

We've heard that the cross is a ladder to God or a stairway to God. This cross is a way of climbing up to God, step by step, by cutting away the self, by cutting off the self, and drawing closer and closer to God, or we would say closer and closer to selflessness. This is in Christianity. So anyone who is a good Christian will at the same time be a good Buddhist because Buddhism is exclusively teaching this cutting away of the self and becoming completely selfless.

So we've been talking about individual happiness and by now it's obvious that we mean perhaps the kind of happiness that is selfless and when individuals have this selfless kind of happiness they are peaceful and from that comes world happiness and world peace. If individuals in the world don't have this selfless kind of happiness then there is no possibility for world peace. It all begins with individuals. So all of you here, even though we are just ordinary people; nobody's special; we don't have all kinds of power or money or anything; still, take a broad perspective on things and don't be just concerned with your own selfish happiness but think of the world, think of others, and then help to build world happiness and peace by finding for your own self this selfless happiness; the selfless kind of happiness that goes forth building world happiness and world peace. This is the only way we can go about it; it's to start with ourselves

and finding true happiness in our own lives, and then we can use that to build happiness and peace for the world. We hope that you can understand and accept this fact as this is a basis for further development.

Let's go back to something we said a little earlier: the fact that this self is our worst enemy. If it's a little self, well, then it's a little enemy, and if it's a bigger self then it becomes a bigger enemy, and if it's a great big monster self then it's a huge and monstrous enemy. The little self bites a little bit and the bigger self bites even more and then that big huge self, that big ego, bites us tremendously, bites worst of all. So this is why we say that this self is our worst enemy. But then we go and we love this self. We love it so much we do all kinds of things just for the sake of this self and so this self is our biggest enemy, and then the fact that we love this self the most is the most ignorant thing, the most foolish and stupid thing that we do. So here we have the biggest self, the biggest enemy, the biggest pain and the biggest stupidity all wrapped up in one thing.

Please compare in a very refined, delicate and sensitive way the difference between the mind when it's completely free of any concept or sense of self. What's the mind like when there is no concept, idea or feeling of self, of 'I,' of ego? Compare that mind with the mind that has a sense of 'I.' There's a sort of concept of 'I' in the mind. What is that mind like? Very carefully, very subtly compare the two and see what they are like. If you do this you'll have a very profound understanding of your own, from your own experience and you won't have to depend or believe in anyone else. It doesn't matter what anyone tells us if we will make this comparison for our self. Look carefully and see the difference between the mind that is empty of self and the mind that is full of self. If you make this comparison then you will be able to understand what Buddhism is talking about. Make it very easy. We can say further that Buddhism has as an important principle that selflessness, that 'self-a-less'ness is the most genuine and highest happiness. Selflessness is the most true and supreme happiness. This is what Buddhism teaches and to understand that we need to compare the mind that is full of ego and the mind that is empty of ego.

We would like to take this opportunity then to challenge you, to dare you to look inside and look carefully and ask yourself the times in life when we're most at ease, most at peace, most pure, when everything feels most right, most okay. We dare you to look and see that at that moment the mind will be empty, void of 'I'; the mind will be completely void of any sense or experience of self. We dare you to look into this matter and then look as soon as the mind has this sense of self, the thought or experience or feeling of self, then that sense of self



will bite the mind. The positive self, a kind of positive good self will bite the mind one way. A negative self will bite the mind in another way but either way the mind is getting bit and flawed and chewed up. We dare you to look at this and see that when the mind is most at ease, most at peace, most cool, when every thing seem most all right there wont be any of this self, there wont be any biting. That mind will be free of both gladness and sadness. You may not be interested in this but when the mind is completely free of both gladness and sadness, that is genuine happiness. When it's free of all kinds of positive and negative things, that's when the mind is most happy. We dare you to look into this. To look within your own heart. It's not a matter that we have we can read about in books or something we can learn. Some taught like this. You can only discover this by looking into your own heart. And so we challenge you to do so and find out this truth for yourself.

There is something that may be a secret for you but we're willing to share it with you anyway and that is that when we are most happy; when we're most truly happy then the mind is completely empty of any thought of happiness. When there is[n't] any influence of the word happiness or any meaning to this word happiness within the mind then the mind is truly happy. You may not understand this. You may not have ever heard it before but if you can understand this then that will be to your great benefit. If you are unable to understand this secret well that's just the way it goes. But see if you can understand what is meant.

Nowadays we are always clinging and attaching to this thing happiness and so we are unwilling to let go of it. We're unwilling to give up some happiness to go any further in life. So because we are so trapped by the influence and meanings of happiness we don't let go in order to experience genuine happiness. We stay trapped in our petty little understanding of happiness and don't go higher, go further. As long as we're attaching to happiness we'll be trapped in this selfish kind of happiness but if we have the courage and daring to let go of happiness, to let go of it, to release happiness, then the mind can go beyond happiness and then there will be found true genuine happiness. We can only find this genuine happiness by letting go of this happiness that we're so fearfully clinging to.

Last of all we'd like to say one more thing and that is in Thai there is a saying that when someone speaks and the listeners don't understand the idiom in Thai is "playing a flute for turtles." "Playing a flute for turtles" is when the speaker is saying things that the listeners don't understand and so now we're wondering who we're playing the flute for?

So in case you haven't understood so far we'll speak about these things more on another day. So we'll end things now. We'll end today's talk now.

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