

# ***Religion which is a Way of Life***

by Buddhadāsa 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 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](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 Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok ([suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com](mailto:suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com)).*

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In this third lecture today we'll consider the topic 'May you have religion that is a way of life.' We don't have to emphasize the word 'religion.' Let's just have what we can call 'a way of life.' All the different religions whether the lower ones or the higher ones; all of them can be a way of life. If it isn't; if some religion isn't a way of life then it isn't really genuine religion, it's not true religion, but if it's actually religion then we will be able to use it as a way of life. If we can't use it as a way of life then it has no benefit and no value for us.

Buddhism, of course, ought to be a way of life. If we have gotten interested in Buddhism; but for as long as we are unable to use it as a way of life then we don't really have or understand Buddhism. If it's just some kind of intellectual interest or something it hasn't become Buddhism yet and it doesn't have any real benefits or value for us. It's merely some ceremonies or rituals or trivia to stimulate ourselves emotionally and so we have to be able to take Buddhism and use it as a methodology for living our lives rather than merely rites and rituals and so this is what we'll spend the most time talking about: Buddhism as a method and way for living one's life.

So obviously this is a matter of life, a matter about life, about living our lives. Buddhism is a way to study and develop our lives as far as we can go. To take life all the way to the goal of life so let's make it very clear from the start that Buddhism, that religion, is a matter about life, most especially the way of living life.

Then we must come to the question: what then is the goal of life; what are we aiming for in life? We can answer this by saying that there are only two goals in life or there are only two aspects to the goal in life. The first is realizing a peaceful coolness or a blissful tranquility personally. So personal peacefulness and coolness is the first. The second goal is to have a life that is truly of benefit of others. So the second goal is to live one's life for others or we could say say for one's life to have value for everyone. These are the two goals of life: personal peace and the benefit of others.

So then two words will be enough for this. The first word is 'peaceful' and the second word is 'beneficial' and allow us to point out that if you want anything more than this then you're crazy.

Let's look at the individual sides first. There's nothing we want more in life than blissfulness. Excuse me, earlier I said 'peacefulness' – 'blissfulness.' The blissfulness we're talking about must also be peaceful. What is there higher in life that we could ask for than blissfulness? For the Christians the highest thing in life; the thing that we ask for from God through the grace of God; the highest grace of God is just the blissfulness of being with God and to ask or want more than: wouldn't that be crazy?

Then as regards others the important word is 'beneficial' – to live a life that is of benefit and value to others. Although we often say to be a life that is beneficial for both sides meaning for oneself as well as others. We say this because the two are interconnected, are interrelated. It is impossible to lead a life that is truly of benefit for others if it isn't of benefit for ourselves as well. So these two are intimately related. Therefore we can say that the only two goals in life are blissfulness for oneself and a life that is beneficial for others or for everyone. These are, this is a legitimate aim and goal of our lives.

Everyone of us should have easily observed a very basic fact about life which is that life can not remain still. Being alive it is necessary to move and to act. If we were to remain perfectly still then we would no longer be alive. The question becomes then if we must move and must act as just something inherent in life then how are we going to move and for what purpose are we going to act? And so first of all we act in order to achieve our own benefit which is the blissful peace and then also to benefit others. Even if we've lived our life in such a way that we have accomplished our own benefit, we have completely fulfilled our own need for peaceful bliss then of course there still remain the second goal of helping others. Having achieved true peace and bliss within ourselves then we can live our lives in order to help others to achieve the same

within their own life. So no matter what; as long as we live and act and move there is always something of importance for us to do.

So then there are only two matters for us to concern ourselves. The first is peaceful bliss for ourselves and then the second is blissful peace for others. If we wish we can join these two matters together and then the only thing worth discussing is blissful peacefulness for ourselves and others, for everyone, for all parties which is to say the only important issue is blissful peace for the world. Now for this: the world; if we talk about peace for the world it includes obviously both ourselves as well as every one else until it encompasses all sides, all peoples, all parties excluding no one. But for this blissful peace to be realized in the world it can't happen without the peacefulness of individual people. If individual people aren't at peace then there's no way the world can be at peace. This is the kind of thing we have to look into. Why is it like this?

So we must examine the question of peacefulness within the world. World peace; there is no world peace without individual peace. This is a fundamental fact that we must observe from the start otherwise we'll get everything backwards. So in order to bring about world peace we must learn how to find individual peace. If you are a follower of a theistic religion then you will have various ways and means of praying to or asking God – or the gods or whatever – to give us peace. We have various ways of praying to God in order to achieve peace. If however one is a follower of an atheistic or non-theistic religion such as Buddhism then we take an opposite approach that is in praying to God we just turn around and come to terms with this thing called the 'self.' We come and we deal with this self in a correct and proper way and once the self is then taken care of properly then there will be peace within that individual and it is unnecessary to beg or plead or pray to any god. These are the basic two approaches for achieving individual peace.

If one is a Christian – forgive us by the way for using Christians as representatives of the many theistic religions but it is easier for us to use the example of Christians – but if one is a Christian one prays for the grace of God to save us. But if one is a Buddhist one destroys that one who desires the very grace of God. Take a look at these. Which one of them is good and which one is crazy or mad; compare the two: one is to pray for the grace of God and the other is to destroy the one who prays and desires that grace. Which of these is reasonable or are they crazy?

First of all it's important for us to be aware of this difference in these two approaches or methodologies. If we don't see the difference we might confuse

them and mix ourselves up and not be able to use either of them properly. So first of all we should look at the difference between the approach that asks or begs or prays for the grace of God and then the approach of Buddhism which turns around and destroys that individual: that sense of personhood that begs; that one, that grace of God. Here we come to study the approach used in Buddhism. The approach of getting rid of or destroying the self and so one has to be clear about the difference between this approach and the other approach. If you can't see the difference then how would you be able to use either approach properly. Here we're using *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness with breathing) in order to destroy the self so that life is free of I and mine, free of selfishness, emancipated from the self, from the ego. This is the approach of Buddhism. Can you see how it differs from the other approach? In the the earlier talk we just talked about getting free of self; the importance and the problem of self and getting free of it and now we'll talk about the benefits of this but we must see how it differs from other approaches in order to appreciate it.

When we have no need or desire or grace then we are God, aren't we? God is the one who doesn't need any grace. God has no need for grace and so when one is free of this need; when there is no desire for grace then one becomes God, doesn't one? Please listen carefully and please don't think that we're trying to put down other religions or other points of view. All we're trying to do is study this subject and look at it carefully. If we destroy the self, the individual who desires, who wants grace; normally we're always wanting grace from something but if we destroy the self that desires then that's like being God, isn't it? Please approach this question very carefully.

We'd like to stress that we're not implying any criticism or we're not looking down on other religions in any way but we do feel it's necessary to discriminate and observe the differences in the method of the different religions but this does not imply any value judgment of any kind.

Now, if we've received the highest, the fullest grace; if all possible grace has befallen us then there still remains the self that receives, that gets and that has this grace. Isn't that how it is? Even in receiving the fullest grace there remains the self who receives and has the grace and that being so, would this be the end of *dukkha*? Would this be the utter cessation of suffering? We should [?? 19.34] there's still the self remaining to get the grace. What kind of situation is that?

What kind of self doesn't become a burden? What kind of self is there that doesn't need to be carried around and endured constantly? If you've got a

diamond, even the best most wonderful diamond; the most desirable diamond in the world; where can you put it where you don't have to carry it around? Are you going to hang it from your ear or around your neck or stick it in your nose? Whatever you do with it as long as you have it then you have to carry it and it's a burden. What kind of self is there that we don't have to carry around; that we don't have to put up with and endure? So then if we wish to escape that burden; having to carry something around all the time; if there's only the self because of that attachment there is always the activity of carrying it around so if we wish to be free of it we need to get rid of the self, get free of the self.

If you take all your diamonds and get them locked up in a safe at the bank then those diamonds, although they're very safely locked up away at the bank, have become a burden for us. They still squeeze and pressure the mind and so if we've got a self, no matter where we put it, no matter who we give it to; it still squeezes, it still oppresses the mind. This activity of carrying around the self as long as we've got one will always be heavy, it's always burdensome, it always is something difficult to endure, something that's a hassle. So what are we going to do with this self so that's it no longer a burden, no longer a hassle, something difficult to put up with in our lives?

As long as there is any attachment then there is a self and this self; this burden of self is the exact same thing as suffering. This self we carry around is *dukkha*, is misery for us which is the exact opposite of this grace which we so strongly desire. As long as there is any self then we have to carry this all around and it's heavy and difficult. As long as there is a self then there are problems. Even if God gives us all the grace that we could receive; if we had all the grace we wanted; if there was still a self then there would still be problems in spite of all that grace. Then isn't it better to destroy the self that's the source and the basis of all our problems? Why not just go and get rid of the self so that all the problems disappear and we don't have to put up with any more of this suffering.

Let me repeat once again something I've been repeating over and over again for years. Let me repeat it and insist that what I've been saying to my Christian comrades all along is absolutely correct. It was correct many years ago and it remains correct today. I insist on this because it's absolutely true and correct. I have very many Christian friends and I say to them all that the true meaning of Christianity, that in the symbol of the cross the heart of Christianity is displayed. Even if you've never heard this before in church or wherever, allow me to insist on the correctness of what I'm saying: that the cross is the essence of Buddhism, the cutting of the 'I', the destruction of the 'self.' This is true for every Christian and so I've been saying this all along and I continue to

say it and insist upon it: that this is what Christianity is really about, is this cutting, this destroying of the I, of the ego, the self and when there's no self then we have no more need for either grace or disgrace and when one has nothing to do with grace or disgrace anymore then one is God. This is what Christianity is about. I insist that this is correct and true.

Let us request that you examine the truth of this symbol of the cross even though some people have complained that it only works in English. The truth, even if it doesn't fit for German or some other languages; the truth of this symbol is the same that the cross stands for the cutting of the 'I' or if you'd like the cross stands for the cutting of number one and we all know who number one is. It's the destroying of this self that we cling to. To this truth even if it's clearest in English (the cutting of the 'I', the destroying of the self) it's nonetheless true. This is the profound meaning behind the symbol of the cross that no one should overlook and then when one is free of the 'I' then it is possible to understand God, what God is. As long as there is 'I' or self we can only guess at what the meaning of God is. To explain what God is in our language is very difficult to do but there's one thing we can say with absolute certainty that God, even God is not-self. The true God, the real God is not-self. We can't find any self in God. Although in our ordinary way of speaking we sometimes might say that god is the utmost self, the highest self or whatever. In reality in truth God is not-self. To realize this the only way is to cut the 'I', destroy the sense of self in order to realize that even God is not-self. This is the heart of Buddhism; the symbol of the cross explains exactly what Buddhism is teaching and in this cutting of the 'I' and realization that everything, even God is not-self, this is the completion of Buddhism. With this understanding Buddhism is finished.

Now there might arise the question for those of you who consider yourself to be children of God. If we're children of God then what are we to do? The answer is that we must follow God, we must walk according to God's way and keep walking along this God's path until coming to voidness of self. When we are void of self, when we are without self, completely emancipated from self then we are with God, we're the same as God, we are united with God because God is also completely void of self. God is this voidness. According to the principle of Buddhism this is what the children of God must do: walk according to God until united with God in voidness; completely free of 'self,' of 'I' and of 'mine.'

In India they have been teaching about the self or the soul or the *atman* for thousands of years and they carry this teaching on up to the point of talking

about the universal self. Buddhism arose in India after this and so there was no need for Buddhism to continue saying the same old thing. Instead Buddhism went further, took the truth further and deeper and taught that there is ultimately no self, that everything is void of self and that there is universal voidness. This is what Buddhism has taught. If we're going to understand Buddhism at all we must recognize this central teaching. Buddhism didn't merely carry on with the same old Indian teaching but went deeper and has proclaimed the universal voidness that everything is without self. When there is no self; when this is realized then there's nothing that is a basis or foundation for any problem, for any difficulties or pain in our lives so this then is the legitimate, ultimate goal of our life. Something that would really be the final goal of our life would have to be something that is completely free of problems; if any problems remain how could we say that we have achieved the highest thing or the final goal? The final goal must be completely free of any problems, of difficulties, of any trouble and the only way to be completely free of trouble is to destroy the self which is the source and basis of all trouble. So this then is the final goal of this thing we call 'life.'

This is something that God commanded just after setting up the world, way back in the beginning of the world. God commanded the first husband and wife to not attach to good and to evil, way back in the beginning God laid down this commandment. This is very important to see this. When there is attachment to good or attachment to evil then all kinds of problems and troubles arise but if there is no attachment to good and evil then there is no self to attach to these things, there is no self that is trapped within duality and so then we are beyond all good and evil, beyond all duality and are completely free and so completely free of all troubles. This is the pinnacle, the highest peak of Buddhism: by being completely free, being without self, not having any basis on which to evaluate and discriminate things as good and evil and not discriminating these things, not attaching to them and not attaching to them having no self or egos to experience problems. This is the highest teaching of Buddhism and it's also the early teaching of God way back when the world was first created.

In *ānāpānasati* the first group of steps, the first tetrad of the practice allows us to understand and calm the body and then gather together the mental power and to focus our attention sufficiently for us to study and investigate this matter of not-self. So this is how we use the first tetrad, the first steps of *ānāpānasati*, those related specifically to the breathing and the body.

Then in the second tetrad, the one about the *vedanā* we learn how to keep these *vedanā* from deceiving us, we get these *vedanā* under control so that they

don't trick us into thinking that this is positive and that is negative and when we no longer are deluded by the *vedanā* into thinking that things are positive or negative then the mind is even more free and clear.

The third tetrad is called *cittānupassanā*, the contemplation of *citta* (mind). In this one we learn how to control the mind, how to develop it, train it and control it so that it can keep itself in a state of correctness so the mind is always proper, appropriate and correct and when the mind is controlled like this it then it can stay in a state where the self does not arise. This is the importance of the third tetrad, controlling the mind to prevent self from arising.

Then we come to the fourth and final tetrad of *ānāpānasati* which is called *dhammānupassanā*, the contemplation of Dhamma, of natural truth. In this one we then contemplate the truths of impermanence, oppressiveness and not-selfhood. We observe all things, both those which are conditioned, caused, concocted and the things which are unconditioned, the thing which has no cause, which has no end. We study all things both the concocted and the unconcocted until seeing the truth of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness or oppressiveness, and not-selfhood. Seeing that things are not-self we see the things merely proceed, go along according to the law of conditionality. If things happen depending on conditions; that they don't happen depending on some self or on selves; but just causes and conditions; seeing that everything just happens according to the law of conditionality then we see that everything is void of self. In seeing the voidness of everything, everything, then the mind is free. Seeing this voidness the mind is completely liberated from all self. Then there's nothing left to control, because there is no possibility that self will arise again if voidness has been truly penetrated. So this is what occurs in the last step of *ānāpānasati*.

Finally we would like to make a request or we could say we'd like to plead with you to please use *ānāpānasati* correctly as we have described. Use it successfully in order to be freed of this self. Please use *ānāpānasati* to realize voidness and be liberated from this self and then all problems, all troubles will disappear instantaneously and you will have realized and achieved the final goal of life. You will have accomplished that which you must accomplish. So we hope that you will do so and be completely successful. And now we ask to close this final lesson.



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Transcribed by Win Wessels (*win.wessels@gmail.com*) in April 2015  
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