

How to Be Free of Dukkha

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 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 volunteer and the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

Today we will begin talking about the matter of ‘What are we going to do so that we can live without suffering, without *dukkha*?’ If there is no suffering, no misery in your life then there is nothing for us to talk about. The Buddha taught only about *dukkha* (misery, suffering, pain) and the quenching of suffering. So anyone who does not have this difficulty of suffering then there is nothing to talk about but if in your life there is any suffering, any pain then we have something to talk about and so we will be speaking about *dukkha* both in the aspect of personal suffering and then in the aspect of general dissatisfactoriness, unsatisfactoriness, that is all around. This is what we’ll talk about today.

Something that we should know further is the question of ‘Who or what suffers?’ ‘Who is it or what is it that suffers?’ In Buddhism there is a very fundamental tenet that there is no such thing as a ‘soul,’ an ego, a ‘self’ or anything of that sort. There is just mind, consciousness, and this body complete with the nervous system, and together this mind and body can do all kinds of strange and wonderful things. It is only our ignorance that mistakes this, that sees an ego, a ‘self’ or a ‘soul’ in all of this activity – there is just the body and the mind. And it is this mind, no ‘self’ or ‘soul’ but just the mind, which suffers.

And then you must know further that because these two things work together it is really one single thing. We can talk about body-mind, mind-body,

but really it is just one thing. Without a body the mind cannot do anything and without mind the body is absolutely worthless. So it is only by the two working together that we've got anything worthwhile and so it is really just one thing. It is this one thing working that does everything but, through ignorance, we take part of it to be a self or soul although there is really no such thing.

The next thing we need to know is that the pure mind, the natural pure mind does not suffer – there is no misery or pain in the natural mind, in the pure mind. But when something new arises – a new concoction we call 'the defilements' (the *kilesa*). That is how suffering occurs. The original mind, the primal natural mind doesn't suffer, has no suffering, but only when these new things, the defilements come up only then does suffering occur. Ordinarily the defilements are coming up all the time, all over the place. So we study Dhamma in order to know how to not let the defilements occur and when there is no defilements coming up then there is no suffering, no *dukkha*, and that's all there is to know.

So then it is necessary to know and understand three things: know what the *citta* (the mind) is, know what mind is; and then know what these defilements are and how they arise; and then know what *dukkha* is and how *dukkha*, suffering, misery, occurs because of the defilements. This is what we need to understand – these three things. As far as 'self' or 'soul' that some people talk about, it is just a kind of ignorant thinking, it's just a kind of stupidity that mistakes thing to be a 'self' or a 'soul.' But all that's taking place and all you need to know is just this mind, and then how the defilements happen, and then how suffering grows or comes out of those defilements. It's these three things – the mind, the *kilesa*, defilements, and *dukkha*, suffering, misery.

The pure mind, the original natural mind is something that can be observed but we never bother to pay attention to it, we never bother to be aware of it. The defilements are things that we don't pay much attention to either. Instead we are satisfied by them, we take pleasure in them, we indulge in them rather than being satisfied with that pure natural mind. These are the two things that we need to observe and see the difference between them – the pure mind and then the defilements that arise. This pure mind is occurring and so you can learn about it although it does not happen so often. The defilements are coming up quite a bit and so you have to look between all those defilements to see the pure

mind but once you begin to notice and observe the natural original mind then we can learn how to maintain that state of mind, to preserve it, protect it. This is what the Dhamma is for – to help us to protect, to maintain the pure original state of mind that is free of the defilements.

So now let us examine the question of ‘How do the kilesa arise?’ ‘How do the defilements come up?’

To put it as briefly and simply as possible it works like this. Take the mind now that is void, that is free – the natural mind, and then there is this body with eyes, ears, nose, tongue – the physical sense and the tangible sense and the mind sense, this body with the six sense doors. And then these six senses are able to receive stimuli from outside, to receive external sense objects – sight, sound, smell, tastes, touches, and mental stimuli. So these external objects make contact with the internal senses. Let’s take the example of the eyes specifically to see what happens. So there is the eye sense and then a sight – an object to the eye. When the two come together there arises eye consciousness – eye consciousness of fundamental mental knowing of that interaction, that vision. When these three come together – eye, sight and eye consciousness – we call that *phassa* (contact), in this case eye contact. This is the crucial point. At this moment of contact, in terms of the basic sense experience, if there is mindfulness and wisdom present then no defilements arise. If it is mindful and wise no defilements arise, but if mindfulness and wisdom are lacking then defilements occur. Put briefly, this is the crux of the matter.

If that *phassa*, that contact, lacks mindfulness and wisdom then it is foolish contact or stupid contact. If the contact is foolish then there arises foolish feeling. Contact always gives birth to feeling but if that contact is foolish, stupid, then everything that comes from it will also be foolish and so the feelings that arise through foolish contact are stupid feelings. There is no mindfulness and wisdom regarding these feelings. And then if this happens those feelings give birth to the defilements. If it’s a nice feeling, a lovely feeling, then this gives birth to loving that feeling, wanting it, liking it, desiring it. If the feeling is unpleasant, unattractive, then this gives rise to dislike, to hatred and anger. If the feeling is neither pleasant nor unpleasant then the mind gets confused, it does not know how to react to it, it wonders, it’s uncertain. And this is a third kind of defilement. This is what we need to observe, how if

the original contact is stupid there arises stupid feeling which gives birth to the defilements. It works just like this. This is something that is of great importance for us to observe and understand so that we can deal with this situation properly.

If the feeling is foolish then it gives rise to defilements, what we call *taṇhā* (craving). If there is this foolish feeling then there arises this foolish desire that we call *taṇhā*, craving. This craving can take various forms. If the feeling is pleasant or attractive then this can give rise to craving in the form of greed (*lobha*) and lust (*rāga*). If the feeling is unpleasant, it can give rise to defilements and craving in the form of *dosa* (hatred) and *kodha* (anger). If the feeling is neither attractive or repulsive, pleasant or unpleasant, or if it is kind of all mixed up – we cannot sort out whether it is pleasant or unpleasant or there is both mingled together – then the mind gets confused. This leads to the defilements of *moha* (delusion, infatuation, getting lost in the thing). So there are these three kinds of defilements arising through the different kinds of feeling that come from ignorant contact. If it is a pleasant feeling there arises a positive reaction which is this greed or lust that pulls in, that's a pulling in of things. And then if it is an unpleasant feeling that leads to a negative kind of defilements which is a pushing away or a knocking away that is like hatred and anger. But if there is this mixed up kind of feeling – not sure whether it is positive or negative, cannot really make it out – then the mind is confused in it, it runs in deluded circles, infatuated with that experience but not knowing what to do. These are the three kinds of defilements, three aspects of craving which occur if there is no mindfulness and wisdom.

It is because of ignorant contact which has gotten to the point where these different kinds of defiled reactions arise and then it goes even further. If there arises this feeling of love, of greed, of lust, this reaction is going on in the mind, then there arises a further illusion – the illusion of something that loves, that is greedy. So if there is greed arising in the mind then the mind takes this, assumes that there must be a greedy one, something which is the owner of that greed or the one who is greedy – the lustful one. If it's the negative kind of reaction of anger, of hatred, of wanting to destroy, to get rid of, to kill, then there arises the illusion. This is a feeling in the mind but it's pure illusion, it has no basis in reality and this illusion takes it there to be someone who is angry – the angry one or the hating one, the owner, the possessor of this anger and hatred. If the reaction is one of confusion, of uncertainty, of infatuation, of delusion, then the

mind regards that there must be the one who is confused, the ‘Igo’ that is confused, that is deluded. So from these three kinds of the positive, negative, and confused reactions of the mind there arises what we call *upādāna*. *Upādāna* (the sense of an ‘I’, the sense of ‘mine’ involved in these reactions). That here must be someone who is greedy or angry or confused. This leads to what we call *upādāna*, clinging.

So there are three basic kinds of defilements. There is the greedy, lustful kind which is a pulling in or sucking in of experiences. The second kind is the anger, hatred kind which is a pushing away or trying to destroy and kill – a negative kind of defilements. And then the third kind is of confusion and delusion, it is like the mind running in circles around the object of experience. There’s these three kinds of defilements. When these arise in the mind then the mind that was once peaceful, still, pure natural, now is taken over by these kinds of defilements. When the mind was once free, now it is forced to react in these three kinds of ways – sometimes pulling, sometimes pushing away, and sometimes running around in confused circles. This is what suffering is about, this is *dukkha*. The mind that was once free and light is now forced to do this heavy burden – this work of pulling in, pushing away, and running in circles is very heavy work; it is a real burden on the mind. So this is how *dukkha* arises from having the mind that has become trapped into these reactions, having to do the heavy work of pulling in, pushing away, and running in circles. The heaviness of it, the burdensomeness of it – this is *dukkha*, misery.

When the mind is pulling or pushing or running in circles it is hot – the mind is heated up by these reactions. So when there is the pulling in kind of reaction – the greedy, lustful reaction – that is a fire, we call it the fire of lust; or in the negative kind of pushing away – that is another kind of fire, we call it the fire of hatred; and then that running around in circles – that is another kind of fire, we call it the fire of delusion. These are the three kinds of fire that burn the mind.

The first, the fire that comes from *rāga* (lust) we say that this is ‘the wet fire,’ ‘the soaking fire.’ When lust arises it burns the mind but it is a kind of burning that we enjoy, we like it. It pulls us in and entices us, we get infatuated with it – we indulge this loving and lusting. And all the time that it’s burning

the mind we consider it enjoyable and good fun. This is what we call ‘the wet fire,’ the soaking wet fire of lust.

Try to know this as well as you can, try to notice this as well as you can every time that this feeling takes over the mind.

The second kind, the negative pushing away of anger and hatred, we call this the dry fire or the parched fire. With this anger and hatred, at first there is something tasty about it, when anger first arises there is something seductive and delicious about it. At first, it is sweet but then the flame start to shoot up, it starts to squash and boil and then that sweetness very quickly becomes bitterness, very disgusting bitterness. So we call this second fire ‘the dry fire,’ the fire that burns and boils and roasts the mind – the fire of hatred. You need to try and understand it, observe it, become familiar with it every time it takes over the mind.

The third fire is the fire of delusion; we call this ‘the fire of darkness,’ ‘the dark fire.’ With this fire, there arises this delusion, this confusion – not knowing what to do. It becomes fear, worry, anxiety, envy, all kinds of foolishness and stupidity, and then all these kinds of delusion lead us to make many mistakes, and all these mistakes get us further and further into trouble. And this delusion also leads to the other kinds of fires – the soaking wet fire of lust and the dry fire of hatred. So get to know this fire, this dark fire whenever it takes over the mind

Whether we call them the wet fire or the dry fire or the dark fire, all of them scorch the mind they are all burning hot. Look for yourself, whenever love and lust come up in the mind; how does that burn and scorch? When anger and hatred come up in the mind; how does that burn and scorch? You can feel this for yourself, know it for yourself. And when the dark fire of delusion comes into the mind; how does that burn and scorch and incinerate? When the stupidity takes over the mind, when you want to do something and you cannot do it; how does that burn and simmer and bake? All these kinds of fires – the wet, the dry, and the dark fires – all of them are burning. You can understand this by experiencing, by observing your own experiences of these fires.

The pure natural mind does not suffer at all but when there is ignorance, no mindfulness and wisdom at contact, then these defilements arise. These defilements come in and burn the mind. This burning of the mind that arises because of ignorance, this is *dukkha*, this is suffering. Suffering does not occur due to any other cause; it happens because of the mind's own ignorance. Originally the mind was cool, free and at peace but because of its wrong understanding, its foolishness, and its stupidity, it gives birth to foolish feelings and crazy defilements and it burns and tortures the mind. This is how *dukkha*, suffering, misery arises within us. It does not happen because of God, God does not make us suffer. So you cannot go and blame God for your suffering or you cannot pawn off your sins on God. It is happening through our own ignorance; and so rather than blaming it on God why not look inside and see what is really responsible for this and then set about try to straighten the situation out.

God does not cause these defilements, God does not cause this burning. These defilements come out of our own stupidity, the burning happens because of our own foolishness. When there is foolish sense contact and then stupid feelings – these defilements, this fire occur. They happen because of our own stupidity. So you cannot go and blame it on God; we bring this burning upon ourselves so then why go ask God to help us. If it is not God's fault, if God is not causing the problem then what good does it do to go and ask God for a help. If the problem is happening within because of our own stupidity at contact, with our own foolishness regarding the feelings, then should not we come and try to solve the problem within ourselves rather than asking for someone else to help us. If the problem, if the ignorance is inside then we've got to straighten it out in here to understand how this works so that when there is contact instead of there being ignorance and foolishness we can replace that ignorance with wisdom. So this is why we study Dhamma – not to ask someone else to help us, but through our own study and experience to develop the wisdom of Dhamma so that then none of these problems, none of these fires will flare up and burn the mind and make it suffer. This is why we study Dhamma, to help ourselves.

We suffer because of our own stupidity bringing up the defilements. If there wasn't any stupidity the defilements wouldn't arise and we wouldn't suffer. So if we can put out this stupidity then there won't be any of the defilements and we won't suffer, we won't experience *dukkha*, misery. So anything that helps us to put out that ignorance, to extinguish that ignorance, that will help to free us

from suffering. If God can help us to put out the ignorance and put out the fires of defilements then that will help us to quench suffering. But if the real cause is in our own ignorance, why not deal with that ignorance directly? Learn to eliminate that ignorance so that the defilements don't cause any more pain and suffering? 'Dhamma' is what we call the thing that will eliminate, that will help us get rid of that ignorance. When we come to Suan Mokkh we come solely to study the Dhamma, to study it and learn how to put it into practice so that the Dhamma will help us eliminate and quench all stupidity and ignorance, so that the defilements no longer burn and torture the mind. You can ask God or someone else for help if you want but why not just deal with our own ignorance which is the real cause of all our suffering – and Dhamma is the thing which will help us to do that.

Because of the mistakes we make, because of our own stupidity this is what causes us sin. Sin is the product of the mistakes that we make because of our foolishness. All sins, all defilements just come from our own mistakes because we do not understand correctly. So to get rid of sin all we have to do is to get rid of this ignorance which is the cause of all sin. There is no need to go and pester God or bother God to come and help us. We can just deal with this problem on our own without making any trouble for God. So learn to get rid of this ignorance which is the cause of defilements and all the mistakes we make and then all sin. Then there will not be any suffering.

Satan, the worse and most enormous Satan that exists is our own ignorance. Our own foolishness is the real meaning of 'Satan.' If we can eliminate and destroy this foolishness, this ignorance, then that is the same as 'killing Satan' and then there are no more problems.

If we can kill Satan then every time that there is sense contact – any time that there is seeing, hearing, smelling, and so on, then there is no ignorance and so the defilements don't arise and there is no suffering. So just kill this Satan and that will end all the problems.

This matter of contact and feeling, it works the same way for all the senses. The way that we have just described, how it works for the eyes, for the ears, nose, tongue, body sense, and mind sense, it works in just the same way. The way that contact and feeling operate, and whether there is mindfulness and

wisdom or ignorance at that moment of contact and while feeling, it works exactly the same way, although we've only described that in terms of the eye sense you can understand how it works for all the other senses. The essence is that if we are stupid at contact then there will be stupid feelings, defilements, and suffering. So don't be stupid at contact – learn to be mindful and aware, learn to bring wisdom to that contact. That's what we need to know.

The fact that at *phassa*, at contact, the mind isn't stupid and doesn't let any defilement arise, this fact we call *atammayatā*. *Atammayatā*, this is a word that has not been discussed very much in Buddhism but it is a very special and powerful word, so even if you have never heard it before or even if you do not understand it yet please try and remember it so that you will learn its meaning eventually. *Atammayatā* is the fact that at contact the defilements aren't allowed to arise. *Atammayatā* means the fact that nothing can make the mind stupid; the fact that nothing can make the mind hot; nothing can defile the mind – this fact we call *atammayatā*. The mind that has *atammayatā* nothing can mess it up; nothing can heat it up; nothing can defile it, we call this *atammayatā*, it's the highest word there is in Buddhism – *atammayatā*.

This *atammayatā* has the value and the meaning of God. This *atammayatā* that doesn't let any defilements arise when we are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or experiencing through the mind, this not letting any defilement come up is *atammayatā* and this has the same meaning as God. This *atammayatā* can watch over and protect us just like any God would be able to do. This is the highest thing there is in Buddhism. Having *atammayatā* is like having God always watching over and protecting us. If you practice *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness with breathing) correctly and successfully then you'll have efficient *atammayatā* to watch over you, to protect you. This *atammayatā* will keep the defilements from ever happening, they will keep any ignorance from cooking up the defilements and this will be like having God there all the time. So try and practice *ānāpānasati* so that you will have this *atammayatā* to protect you.

Atammayatā means not being stupid when there is contact, while there is feeling so that we don't let the contact and feelings, we don't let craving arise, we don't let *upādāna* (grasping and clinging) arise and so there is no *dukkha* –

this is atammayatā. Have it at *phassa*, contact, and then everything is fine and we are safe.

Further, atammayatā will not allow the feelings to become positive or negative. If the feelings aren't positive or negative then no defilements come up.

Then having atammayatā is the same as having mindfulness and wisdom and clear comprehension and everything we need to control the defilements, to prevent the defilements. So whether we talk about mindfulness or wisdom – right understanding or clear comprehension or concentration – all of these things can be developed and acquired through correctly practicing mindfulness with breathing and then you will have all of these things – mindfulness, wisdom, clear comprehension, and concentration – have them all in the form of atammayatā, meaning that the defilements can't arise

In the time that remains we'll talk about an outline or bird's eye view of mindfulness with breathing – talking about the body, the feelings, the mind, and Dhamma

The first stage of the practice is called *kāyānupassanā* (the contemplation of body) and the essence of the contemplation of body is breathing correctly so that the body is calm – calming the body, making the body very peaceful through correct breathing. This is the essence of *kāyānupassanā*.

In the word *ānāpānasati*, the words *ana* and *pana* come from the word *pana* which mean the breath or in Sanskrit – the *prāṇa*. *Prāṇa* is an ancient Indian word that goes back way before Buddhism. *Prāṇa* then often just meant 'life' and the thing that the ancient Indians wanted most of all is to breathe in *prāṇa*, breathe in life, breathe in the life from outside so that one has plenty of life inside. So by breathing in correctly one brings in lots of *prāṇa* and then life is fresh and cool and peaceful by correct breathing. This is the way it was talked about in the old Indian terms. If you don't believe that way of looking at things it does not matter, you can just think of it in terms of oxygen, if you bring in oxygen in the right amount and the right way the physical life will be just right. This is what the first stage of mindfulness with breathing is about.

To understand this word *prāṇa* we would like to remind you of a story in the Bible when God took a bunch of dust and soil and formed it into the shape of a man and then God breathed *prāṇa* into that lump of soil and it became Adam and then Eve. There was this breath of life from God that animated the lump of clay or dust. So in life, if we want to have bodies that are healthy, that are capable of doing the work of life, bodies that are efficient, bodies that have the ability to do whatever we need to do then this matter of the *prāṇa* is very, very important. Knowing how to breathe correctly will make our body fit and able to do many different things. So there is a lot of importance in understanding this business of the *prāṇa* and the first aspect of practicing mindfulness with breathing.

In the second stage or area of *ānāpānasati* we contemplate the feelings (the *vedanā*). We take the best feelings that can occur, the cream of all feelings and we study them. The cream of the feelings are what we call *pīti* ([rapture], satisfaction, a very excited kind of satisfaction) and then *sukha* which is happiness. This is the top of the feeling; the cream of the feeling. Normally they deceive us and trick us in all kinds of ways but if we are able through *ānāpānasati* to understand them so that these feelings, these best of feelings can no longer trick us, then we'll never again have any problem with any of the feelings. We don't have to go and worry about all possible kinds of feelings, just get these best feelings, these most attractive, most powerful, seductive feelings under control and then none of the feelings will have any power over us.

Then we know the nature of the feelings as well as possible so that they will never again be able to deceive us in positive or in negative ways ever again.

The third stage of *ānāpānasati* is contemplation of mind (*cittānupassanā*). In this we study all possible kinds of mind; we study all the different kinds of mind and then learn to be able to regulate the mind, to maintain it in whatever shape or condition we need it to be in. Through this third area of mindfulness of breathing we can regulate the mind in any condition that we wish.

The last stage or area is *dhammānupassanā* (contemplation of Dhamma, of truth, of natural truth, the truth of all nature). We study the truth of all nature, of all things until we see that all things in every aspect, every level, every nook

and cranny of natural truth. We look and see that all this, everything in nature is impermanent – constantly changing – that that constant change is unsatisfying and oppressive and that in all that there is nothing that can be called a ‘self.’ We see it is all just a process of conditionality, just a flow of actions and reactions. Studying this until seeing *atammayatā* where none of it can lead to any defilement; so that none of it can bring up any clinging, any grasping in the mind especially grasping at anything as ‘I,’ as ‘mine,’ as ‘self.’ Understanding all this is the meaning of the last stage of *ānāpānasati*, understanding the truth of things until nothing has the power to stir up any attachment and so that we know there is nothing worth attaching to ever again.

So there are these four stages or areas of practice in mindfulness with breathing. Each of these stages is made up of four steps, so altogether there are sixteen steps. That’s all there are, these sixteen steps. If you do your best in your best way to practice *ānāpānasati* on all levels then you’ll end up with the best possible thing you could ever find which is *atammayatā* so that there is no more foolishness at contact. So there is no more defilement coming up and there is no more burning and tormenting of the mind. With this through *ānāpānasati* you can get this *atammayatā* and then there will be no more misery, no more *dukkha* for the mind. So practice this as best as you can, do your best and then with time you’ll end up with this best possible thing.

So may you all be successful in your practice of *ānāpānasati* and may you all have enough *atammayatā* to kill Satan and, if everyone in the world can kill Satan, then there is no more Satan in the world. May we end today’s lecture at this time.

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Transcribed by S. Kongpermwong (*s.kongpermwong@gmail.com*) in March-June 2015
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