

# *Understanding Dhamma More Than Before*

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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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All of you who are interested in Dhamma, may I express my delight and joy that you have come here to this place in this way, namely in order to seek knowledge of the Dhamma which quenches *dukkha*, which quenches suffering. That we have chosen to speak at this time of the day has certain reasons behind it. It's a time that is appropriate, fitting. It's a time when the mind is ready to open, to blossom, just like many flowers will open up at this time of the day. This is the time when the mind, our minds, are not yet full, are not yet overflowing. The Buddha's awakening came at this time of the day and it's possible to think that the same was the case for the other great prophets.

The thing we'd like to develop some understanding with you about is the matter of Dhamma. This is something that we need to understand more deeply and more clearly than we have previously understood.

The more you understand that, which we call 'Dhamma,' the more you will understand Buddhism. You won't be able to understand Buddhism any more than you are able to understand Dhamma. So we should look into it more deeply, more extensively than you have in the past, in order to understand it more than you understand now.

When we talk about Buddhism this is almost certainly something that you don't understand at all. When you hear the word 'Buddhism,' you probably think in terms of all the other 'isms' such as materialism, socialism and include

Buddhism in with these other ‘isms.’ The problem with that is that none of these ‘isms’ are naturally true. They are not the truth of nature. Rather they are truths which human beings have made up and established for themselves out of their own thinking and opinions.

Buddhism is totally different. Buddhism is about the truth as it is in nature, as it exists naturally, regardless of whether human beings take an interest in it or not.

So when we talk about Buddhism, you should understand it to be the Dhamma, the way things are according to nature, as is understood or as is spoken of by Buddhas, so it’s the Dhamma of Buddhas, of those who are awake. If you still like to use the word ‘Buddhism,’ then please be careful to translate this suffix ‘ism’ correctly. If you use the word Buddhism, the ‘ism’ should mean the truth or law of nature, which Buddhists follow in order to quench, to end all *dukkha*, all spiritual suffering. In general the word ‘Dhamma’ or ‘Dharma’ means the way things are in nature or it refers to the law of nature, the natural law.

But here, we give it a more specific meaning, because we’re speaking in terms of human beings. In this case then, we mean by ‘Dhamma,’ we mean the system of practice, which is correct, according to the law of nature, which is correct regarding survival, both physically and mentally, and which is correct every stage and level of our evolution, which is correct, both for oneself and others.

Let me repeat this again. Here ‘Dhamma’ means the system of practice, which is in line with natural law and which is correct in terms of, correct regarding both physical and mental survival, for every step and level of evolution, for both oneself and for others together.

It’s quite marvelous that this rather long definition can be encapsulated in just one word, the word ‘duty.’ The word ‘Dhamma,’ which is a very ancient Indian word, has always had the meaning of duty. This has been the most ancient meaning of the word ‘Dhamma’ and we could add, just to make it a bit clearer, duty for the sake of salvation. We can say, for the sake of physical survival and spiritual salvation, so that everything we’ve said about Dhamma comes down to this duty.

It’s very likely that this word ‘Dhamma’ is much older than the word *sāsana* (religion). It’s almost certain that this is a much more ancient word, that

humanity has struggled and searched for its survival, that humanity from its beginnings has been aware that there are certain things that must be done. If we don't do them, we die. So these necessary things were called 'Dhamma' or 'duty.' The duty for the sake of survival. This understanding is very instinctual or it has come from the instincts and so the word 'Dhamma' goes back to this very early level in human development. But to the pressure and pushing of the instincts this thing needed for survival has pushed humanity forward.

There has been a process of evolution, were duty, our duty, that which is needed to survive, to be saved, has evolved successively on into higher levels. The struggle and search for survival is something we are able to do instinctually. This is an instinctual kind of knowledge and so the ancient roots in meaning of the word 'Dhamma' means this, this age-old struggle for survival.

Later we became more and more conscious of this duty, this inherent duty in live. And as our understanding of it developed, we began to call it *sāsana*, religion. But even though this religious understanding has developed, it still is basically coming from the instinct for survival, this need to struggle and fight, search in order to survive. And then that understanding has developed further. Don't be surprised, when you hear this Pāli word 'Dhamma' can be used even regarding animals. Even in terms of ordinary animals, we can speak of their Dhamma. The Dhamma of cats, the Dhamma of dogs, the Dhamma of whatever kind of animal. We could even say the Dhamma of mosquitoes. Because all animals have their duty, which they must do, in order to survive. They all have their way of surviving, of struggling in order to preserve live. So this Dhamma, duty is something that all animals must have. Not just human beings.

It sounds even more strange when we say that even plants have Dhamma, have their Dhamma. But within all plants there is that which struggles and works, fights for survival. So that aspect or part of the plant must be called its Dhamma. This is the meaning of the word 'Dhamma' when we look at it deeply. But because most people study this word only superficially, they barely understand it at all. And so they are quite shocked or surprised when we speak of the Dhamma of plants. But the meaning of Dhamma is the struggle. This system of searching and struggling in order to survive, this is what Dhamma means. So it applies to plants and animals. We shouldn't understand it superficially in a narrow religious way or traditional way

You can see by now that the word 'Dhamma' applies to many levels. There is the physical level of our bodies, the mental level of our minds – our ordinary

thinking, emotions, memories and experiences – and then there is the spiritual level, the spiritual aspect of the mind, that is concerned with mindfulness and wisdom, with understanding things as they truly are. In coming here you're already seeking Dhamma on the highest level, the spiritual survival level of Dhamma. But even so, we must, if we're really to understand Dhamma, we can't overlook the other levels of its meaning. It's important to see this word in all aspects, so that you can get the most benefit from it, so that you can study it most profoundly.

Don't be surprised, when we speak of Dhamma having all these levels. Especially when we say that Dhamma applies even on the lowest level. When we speak of plants, we must talk about the Dhamma or duty of plants. This duty, that they must do. If plants don't do it, then they'll all die. Then on the level of animals, while animals have their Dhamma, their duty, without this, the animals will die. There is no other way.

And then human beings, more complex but nonetheless, human beings have their Dhamma and duty, that which must be done in order to survive. If human beings don't perform this Dhamma, this duty, then they'll die. When we speak of human beings, we must look at this deeply. Because of we talk about survival or the duty in order to survive, we shouldn't just look at it on the physical level. There is also a mental or spiritual level. Human beings are not just bodies, we of course need to survive physically, but we should also survive spiritually.

To die physically is not a very profound matter. It's very ordinary and common. But to die spiritually is very profound. Although our bodies may be alive, we may be spiritually dead. This means that there is no freshness, no real life in the mind. There is no peace. There is no genuine happiness. This is what we mean by spiritual death. For human beings it's not enough to survive physically, our Dhamma, our duty means very much to survive spiritually, to be fresh, alive, at peace, and truly happy through wisdom, through awareness and understanding. In short, the search, struggle, and fight for survival is what we mean by Dhamma. This search and struggle on whatever level is Dhamma. All these different levels are equally necessary. And all together they are called 'Dhamma,' 'duty.' The words 'search' and 'struggle' should be understood carefully. They have various levels or stages of meaning.

At first, this search and struggle is to study Dhamma in order to understand it correctly, to investigate it, so that we understand Dhamma properly.

The second stage is to practice correctly according to that understanding. Once we know what to do, we must do it, and do it correctly according to the principles we have learned.

And then the third stage is to receive the benefits, the fruits of that practice. For our search and struggle to be whole and complete, we must include all three of these stages: to study the Dhamma, to practice it correctly, and to receive its genuine benefits.

You have all come here. This is a fact, that you have all come here in order to study Dhamma, practice Dhamma, and receive the benefits of Dhamma. However it's impossible that you will be able to do so completely in ten days. Ten days are just not enough for you to understand everything you need to know and then to put it all into practice, in order to get everything that you ought to get from this practice. Ten days will not be enough. Nonetheless you can study the basics so that you have a good enough understanding to continue studying. And you can begin to practice what you're learning here. And so you'll begin to receive some of the benefits of this practice. But in ten days you won't be finished. It's necessary to continue to study, the practice, and the receiving of the benefits of practice.

You should commit yourself, set your mind firmly on studying as best as you can, so that in these ten days you'll develop as deep and comprehensive and understanding as you are able. And then really commit yourself to practicing according to that correct understanding, which you are developing. This is something to be committed to, not just for ten days, but for long after we leave here. Even for the rest of our lives.

You may return again sometime, according to the circumstances of your life, according to your opportunities and your needs. But the important thing is to commit ourselves to this wholeheartedly, to the best of our ability, to the fullest capacity of our wisdom, of our energy, of our ability to learn.

We study exclusively for the sake of quenching dukkha. Our practice is just to quench dukkha. And the benefits we're looking for are simply the quenching of dukkha. All aspects of what we are doing here are centered on quenching dukkha, on ending, cooling down, and eliminating the spiritual pain that all of us carry, of dropping the burden of dissatisfaction, of emptiness, of unfulfillment, of stress, of conflict in our lives. This quenching of *dukkha* (spiritual pain, unhappiness, unsatisfactoriness, dissatisfaction), this is what we

are here to do. But in this world, for the most part, it seldom happens this way. Look at your own path, all the things that you have studied, all the things that you have learned. How much of it is for the sake of overcoming dukkha? How much of it, has been for the purpose of letting go of problems, of dissatisfaction, of inner pains? For the most part, what we have learned and studied throughout our lives, has increased our suffering, our *dukkha*. It has made more problems, complications, and conflict in our lives.

And what about our practice? Have we really been practicing in order to quench dukkha? Or have we been practicing, have we been living our lives primarily to find pleasure, to get pleasures of the senses or intellectual pleasures or whatever? Have we ever really practiced merely in order to overcome our *dukkha*, our inner problems and conflicts? And then what has been the results of our lives, of our way of living and practicing? Have we actually been freed? Have we actually quenched dukkha? Or do we find that the problems continue? The stress, tension, conflict and dissatisfaction in life goes on and on? Dhamma, the study, the practice, and the benefits of Dhamma are all centered on quenching dukkha, on living a life that's totally free of dukkha. So we should bring this emphasis to bear on what we are doing.

Otherwise we just go along with the ways of the world, along with our old habits. Studying all kinds of things which really don't do us much good. Practicing all kinds of stuff, merely for the sake of pleasure, fun, and enjoyment. And then getting out of life not the highest benefit but more and more *dukkha*, more and more pain, despair and dissatisfaction. Our education in the modern world is huge, almost monstrous. There are so many things we learn. There is so much information. It's almost infinite. It's incredible all the things we cram into our minds, about technology, about outer space, about places we have never been, and never will have the opportunity to go, about computers and all kinds of fancy gadgets. Our education is full of all these things. But in spite of this, in spite of all this wonderful and incredible education, all this knowledge that we human beings have, we still don't have any peace in this world. We have been struggling for how many thousands of years? And the wars get worse and worse. The famines, the poverty is never solved. We have all this knowledge, all these universities that we are so proud of and yet we still can't find any peace in the world. This is because of all our learning, all of our educations, our education systems, all of them respond merely to our desires.

It's all fueled and pushed by our desire for pleasures. The whole thing is just

to get different things that we desire. So it all becomes a matter of desire, of hunger, and of defilement. Education is just a mad cycle of desire and defilement. And so the result of it is never peace. It's all kinds of other things. But it is never leading to peace. The reason for this is because our learning, our education is not connected with Dhamma. What we are learning doesn't have anything to do with Dhamma. It only has to do with our desires. And so we don't get the peace and that happiness that we seek from life.

Next we come to our actual practice, to our commitments. None of us are committed to quenching dukkha. All of us are committed merely to responding to all the new, strange, creative desires that are stirred up by this world. We have all these different desires. We live in a world that is inventing new things all the time which in fact is merely inventing new desires. Wanting to have, to have that. And our whole live is committed to just satisfying all these strange and new desires.

We don't have any understanding of dukkha. We don't understand what the cause of dukkha is. Instead we just chase after all these new things, which our so-called 'development' and 'progress' keeps coming up with. All this creativity that we are so proud of just gives us more new and strange things to pursue. So we never quench dukkha. We don't understand what we are doing, where our life is merely committed to the pursuit of new and strange things.

In our modern world we have a great deal of international organizations. We have many organizations which have been created supposedly for the sake of peace. But they don't ever succeed in bringing about peace. None of these organizations have much to do with Dhamma. They are not connected with Dhamma, based in Dhamma and understanding of Dhamma isn't included in their charters or in their way of operating. For the most part these international organizations just have to do with all this business of new things to seek and desire. These international organizations are usually a place to argue and fight over how we are going to cut up the pie. They're places for competition and even oppression. The big countries taking advantage of the little ones. The little ones are trying to group together in order to fight against other groups of little countries, occasionally even to stand up to the big ones. It's an arena for competition, not an arena for Dhamma. And so none of these organizations think about what dukkha is. They don't understand the cause of dukkha. And so the result of these organizations is never peace.

What we would suggest is that, instead of the United Nations as it now

exists, we create something better. We might call it ‘the United Religions,’ an organization dedicated specifically to peace. And it goes about this in a way that is connected with Dhamma. To work for peace not through competition and material struggle, but to work through peace, through Dhamma. Understanding what dukkha is and what causes it. To do so would give us some hope. But if we just continue in the way we’ve been going, then all of our problems will continue. We’ll never really solve any of them. Now if we are going to study Dhamma, we must study nature. Because nature is Dhamma. ‘Dhamma is nature,’ as we’ve said earlier. Therefore to understand Dhamma fully, completely, we must understand nature fully.

This means understanding nature, Dhamma, in all of its aspects. There are four primary aspects of nature. All of them should be understood.

The first is nature itself. This whole universe that makes up what we call ‘nature.’

Then there is the law of all this nature. The natural law.

Then there is the duty. According to the natural law there is the duty that must be done.

And then there is the fruits of doing that duty. When the duty is done correctly according to natural law then a certain fruit appears.

These are the four meanings or aspects of nature, which must be understood and investigated thoroughly if we’re going to understand Dhamma completely.

So there is the universe or the cosmos. All the things in this universe without any exception makes up what we call the body of nature. Nature in its entirety. And then within this nature, within all aspects of nature, there is a law. There is a fundamental natural law. With this law, all living things have a duty. For living things there is always a duty to be done. When the duty is done correctly, there is survival and salvation, when the duty is not done properly, then there is death. Once this duty is done, there arises the fourth thing, which is the fruits or the proper result of that duty. When the duty has been done correctly, then the result is, we get what we’ve been searching for all along. If we don’t do the duty correctly, then we don’t get what we’ve been looking for. If the duty is done right, the fruit is ultimately satisfying.

These are the four meanings of ‘Dhamma.’



The body of nature itself.

The law inherent within all nature.

The duty to be done in response to that law.

And the fruit, the great satisfaction that comes from doing that duty correctly.

We need to study all four meanings and aspects of this word ‘Dhamma,’ if we are to understand things correctly. Let us stress once more these four meanings of Dhamma. Please don’t forget them.

There is nature itself. The natural law. There is the duty in line with that law. And there is the result or the salvation that comes with doing that duty.

There is nature, the natural law, the duty according to natural law and the fruit of salvation. These are the four meanings of Dhamma.

Now, there is a secret to studying all of these meanings of Dhamma. The secret is that you must study all of them within yourselves. These bodies and minds of ours are Dhamma, are nature. All of these, all of what we call ‘our lives’ are different aspects of nature. Within every particle or molecule of our bodies, within every thought and mental thing there is the natural law. Within all of the aspects of life, the natural law is inherent. And then all aspects of life, our arms, our legs, our livers, kidneys, everything has its duty. All the things have their duty that needs to be done in order to survive. And there are the results of that duty. When things do their duty properly, the result is satisfying. When the duty isn’t done properly, the result is *dukkha*, is pain, stress, distress, disease. So all four meanings of Dhamma are to be found within these bodies of ours, within these five of six feet of our lives. We can find nature, the natural law, the duty according to natural law and the results of that duty. Then you can probably see that out of these four meanings, the one that’s most important to us is the third, because this is the one that we must do. That one that we have to practice is the third meaning. That is Dhamma. All our lives there is always the duty that needs to be done. Physically our bodies have their duties. Mentally there are our duties. And then spiritually in terms of mindfulness and wisdom there is our necessary duties. To do all of these correctly is the most important aspect of Dhamma, the most important of all these four aspects.

When we do this duty correctly, then there are no problems in life. Everything works smoothly and there is no *dukkha*. So these four meanings, the

one to be most careful about, the one that we all must do, is the third meaning. ‘Duty is Dhamma, Dhamma is duty.’ Throughout the truth about Dhamma the third one, the duty is most crucial for us.

All of this can be summarized in one sentence. ‘*Practice duty correctly according to the natural law so that no problems arise or remain.*’ Please listen carefully. ‘Practice duty correctly in line with the natural law so that there are no problems coming up or remaining.’ This one single sentence expresses the essence of Dhamma. To practice duty correctly according to the law of nature so that no problems arise or remain.’ Just this one sentence is what Dhamma is all about.

When this duty is not carried out properly, when we don’t practice our duty as the law of nature specifies, then the result will be problems. There will be problems arising and problems remaining in life when we don’t do this duty properly. So we ought to do this duty correctly so that we can say, so we experience ‘the life that doesn’t bite its owner.’ This phrase may be a little strange to you but you should get very interested in the life that doesn’t bite its owner. When the duty isn’t done, when life doesn’t do its duty, then it bites itself. Life bites its owner when the duty is not performed correctly in line with the actual law. That means, when we don’t practice Dhamma, life will bite its owner. But when Dhamma is practiced correctly, life doesn’t bite its owner. This kind of life is something to be most interested in. We can make an easy comparison. This dog is ours and this life is ours. But the dog hardly ever bites us. The dog never bites us. But life, our own lives are biting us all the time. Sometimes love bites us, sometime hate bites us, sometime anger bites us, sometimes fear bites us, sometimes worry bites us. Over and over again we’re getting bit by life because there isn’t any Dhamma. When there isn’t Dhamma, life doesn’t do its duty. And so our own lives bite us. These lives of ours are worse than the dogs. The dogs, they never bite us. These lives are even worse because there isn’t Dhamma. We’ll mention these one by one for the sake of our investigation.

Sometimes love bites us, and then anger bites us, and hatred bites us, and fear bites us, then excitement bites us, then worry about the future bites us, then longing after the past bites us, then jealousy and envy bites us, then possessiveness bites us, sexual jealousy or possessiveness bites us.

There is a whole lot more. This is just a beginning of the things that bite us. But even just these few are more than we can endure. These [...] of the things

that bite life, of life that bites its owner.

In the ancient tales of India and Egypt, it's talked about how if we understand life, we know what life is about, then life is no problem. But when we fail to understand life, when we don't know the purpose of life, then life itself turns into a monster. This monster haunts us. In India it is common to tell the children that outside the village there is a pond. And in the pond there is a monster. And whenever we pass the pond the monster will come out and ask us a question. If we answer the question the monster will let us go. But if we can't answer the question then the monster eats us. The question that it always asks is 'Why were you born?' or 'For what were you born?' If we can answer this, we live. We can't answer it, the monster eats us. In Egypt there is the story of the Sphinx on the road leading out from the city. The Sphinx was sitting at a crossroads. And then every traveler that came by would be asked by the Sphinx. 'Where are you coming from?' 'Where are you going?' and 'How will you get there?' Which is pretty much the same as the question of 'What's the purpose of your life?', 'Why were you born?' If the traveler can answer the question, then the Sphinx kills itself. But when the traveler can't answer the question 'Why were you born?' the Sphinx will eat the traveler. If we can answer this question, then everything goes fine. But if we can't answer it, then this Sphinx devours us. In one case the Sphinx kills itself, in the other... In one case life conquers the Sphinx, in the other it's like committing suicide. The ancients, whether in India, Egypt, or elsewhere, thought a great deal about the problems of life. They expressed this in these tales and myths. For them the question of 'why we were born' was very important. Something that is worth observing is that the Sphinx has a face and head like a human being. And then one was wondering how did the human being become a monster? The body of the Sphinx is that of a lion. Something very powerful, fierce, and dangerous. And then the Sphinx has wings. Which means we can never escape from it. The Sphinx fly wherever we might run. So how is it that the human being became a monster so powerful and dangerous and able to follow us everywhere? This question, that the Sphinx asks us, this fundamental problem of life, how did this become a monster? What's amusing is, that if we know the Dhamma, if we understand Dhamma then the monster dies. If we don't understand Dhamma, we are the ones who die. What this means is that, if we understand Dhamma, there is no problem. The problem disappears. But when we don't understand Dhamma then the problem appears and there are problems all around us.

Next, we should look at the highest Dhamma. We should take the time to do so because it will be well worth the effort. We can study nature, the law of nature and our duty according to the law of nature all together by examining the highest Dhamma. In this respect then, the first thing to look at is the fact of *aniccatā* (the state of impermanence). This means that all things depend on causes and conditions. All things are related to various conditions. So all things are constantly changing. All the things in this universe are a flow of change. The causes and conditions are changing, regrouping, breaking up. And so things themselves are constantly changing. It's this flow of ceaseless change. Whether we speak of things outside of ourselves or within ourselves, it's all just one great flow, one great stream of change. This was known in Greece and so some philosophers emphasized this fact and in India it was an essential tenet in all the religious groups, all the religious sects.

The effect of impermanence, this constant flow of change, which is a basic reality of everything in the universe. It's inevitable that we must live with these constantly changing things. Our lives depend upon, are made up of, these impermanent things. This means that we must endure them. This quality of having to endure impermanent things, these always-changing things, is the what we call the 'nature of dukkha' which is called *dukkhatā*. This world has the nature of dukkha.

This quality of dukkha is inherent in all these impermanent things. We call this *dukkhatā*. We don't have the power, the authority or whatever to control all these changing things. We have to endure them. We can't change them or control them according to our desires. This inability of ours to hold and control things is called *anattā* or *anattatā* (the nature of being not-self, the reality of being not-self). All these things are not-self, not-I, not-mine. When we truly see these three facts. When we experience them directly, then we realize that, 'Oh, that's just the way things are.' That's the ordinary natural way of things which is called *dhammatthitatā* (the natural way of all these things).

If we continue looking deeply into things, then we start to wonder, 'Hey, why is it that things are like this? Why do things happen this way?' And then we see, 'Hmm, there is this law of nature controlling it all. There is a law of nature controlling all these things.' This realization, that there is a law of nature controlling it all is called *dhamma-niyāmatā* (the natural order or law of everything).

Looking further one sees that this fundamental law is, that everything

depends on causes and conditions. That things are interrelated, interdependent because of the conditionality of everything. This basic law of conditionality, that everything depends on other things, on conditions is called *idappaccayatā*. This fact is very important. This is the essence of natural law. You must examine it very carefully because this is the starting point for the quenching of all dukkha.

The more we see things in this way, the more we realize these facts, this reality of things, then we start to see that none of it can be taken as ‘me’ or ‘mine.’ That it’s impossible to regard or classify anything as being ‘me’ or ‘mine.’ You can’t take anything. You can’t grab anything and hold to it as being ‘me’ or ‘mine’ or in cruder terms as being ego or as something to get egoistic about. This profound understanding is called *suññatā* (voidness). Voidness doesn’t mean that things are empty or vacant or nothing. This reality of *suññatā*, voidness, means that all these things are naturally void of ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ You can’t find any ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ any ego or egoism in them. If we see more deeply, more subtly than that, we see that all of these things are void of positive & negative or positiveness & negativeness. That in things as they really are there is nothing that can be taken as being positive or negative. There is nothing to regard or classify as positive or negative. Things as they are are neither positive nor negative. Seeing this then, there is nothing to get angry about. There is nothing to fall in love with. There is nothing to be afraid of. There is nothing to get confused about. Because things are void of positive & negative. This is the final benefit of realizing *suññatā*. That things are void of positive & negative. *Suññata* doesn’t mean nothingness or nihilism. It doesn’t mean that there is nothing, that nothing exists. Things exist, things are. But they are void of anything that can be taken and held on to as ‘me’ or as ‘mine,’ as ego, as self, as egoism, all the things belonging to some. *Suññata* is this voidness of ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ It has nothing to do with nothingness. Seeing this, realizing this voidness, it’s impossible for love, anger, hatred, fear, worry, excitement, boredom, and all these other painful states of mind to arise.

Life won’t bite its owner anymore. Life won’t be able to bite its owner ever again, due to seeing this highest result and benefit of *suññatā*.

When this is thoroughly realized, when *suññatā* is realized deeply in all its aspects, then this can be summarized by the word *tathatā* which we can translate as ‘thusness’ or ‘suchness.’ Things are merely thus. Things are just like this. They are not like that or like that. They are just thus. This suchness of things called *tathatā*. When the mind isn’t getting caught in this or in that. When

the mind isn't shaking or moving because of these things. When we say *tathatā*, thusness, it may sound like we are joking, that we are just kidding or speaking irresponsibly. But his word has the most profound meaning, its meaning is most important. If you think we are just joking or kidding then you won't pay any attention to *tathatā*. And then you won't get any benefit from it. You won't really understand life unless you take *tathatā* seriously and really understand what it means. When penetration by insight has led to this deepest knowledge, then one comes to a stillness or unshakableness of mind. Where the mind is unshakable in correctness or we can say in the correctness, the rightness of peace. This mind that is perfectly still, unmovable, unshakable in correctness is called *atammayatā*. It's the mind that can't be stirred up can't be moved shaken or concocted). So we call it 'unconcoctability,' *atammayatā* – the mind that can't be stirred up, that can't be moved, shaken or concocted. So we call it 'unconcoctability,' *atammayatā*. This is the result of seeing things through this most profound knowledge. The result of that is this unshakable mind of *atammayatā*.

Realizing the *tathatā* of all these things then the mind becomes unshakable, perfectly still in the correctness of peace. What this means then is that the mind sees that there is nothing which is *attā* ('self'). There is nothing that is 'self,' soul, *ātman*, spirit, or any of these whatever you want to call it. There is nothing that can be taken as 'I.' There is nothing which is 'I' or 'mine.' So when we see, when there is seeing, it's just the eye sees or the ear hears, the nose smells. There is no '*I* smell,' '*I* hear.' There is no 'I' to hear. It's just the ear hears, the nose smells, the tongue tastes, the body feels sensations, the mind thinks, the mind remembers. There is no *attā*, 'self,' or 'I' behind all of it. It's just the nervous system which experiences. It's the natural function or duty of the nervous system. None of it involves some ego, 'self' or 'I.'

When *tathatā* is realized fully then all of life is seen as being void of 'self,' of *attā*. Then when the mind is totally unshakable, totally free of self, there is no selfishness arises. There is no more egoism. There is nothing egotistical or selfish about life. And then all the problems disappear. The cause of all our problems is ego and selfishness. Remove this 'I,' this 'self' in our seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking and then there is no basis for ego, for egoism. And then all of our problems disappear. When there is no more belief in 'self,' when the illusion of 'self' disappears, then selfishness has no basis. The ideas of things belonging to 'self' is dependent on the belief in 'self.'

When the mind is free of all this ‘self’ belief, this ‘self’ conceptions, this egoistic consciousness, then there is nothing that belongs to ‘self.’ Whether our husband or wife, they no longer belong to ‘me.’ The home, cars, wealth, possessions, food, family, clothing, none of these are ‘mine’ anymore. They are seen as they really are. They are not seen as being ‘mine,’ and so there is no problem with them. They can’t cause problems because they are not clung to or regarded as being ‘mine.’

But that doesn’t mean that we can’t take care of them. If you have a wife or a husband, just because he or she isn’t ‘yours,’ doesn’t mean you can’t take care of him or her. You can be responsible for your home, cars, clothing, food, children, wealth, whatever. Without needing to attach to it as ‘mine.’ In fact we can be totally responsible only when there is no clinging to things as ‘mine.’

As soon as you take it to be ‘mine’ you’ll get selfish about it. When it’s ‘my’ husband, ‘my’ wife, one gets selfish and possessive about one’s husband and wife and then it’s no longer possible to really care, be responsible or even love. So when we see that there is not really any ‘self,’ the mind can get free of all the selfishness, which is the basis of suffering. When we remove all these problems, then life no longer bites its owner. When there is no ‘me’ or ‘mine,’ life isn’t able to bite its owner.

If you are interested in art, if you value arts you should take notice that this is the highest art. This is the most artistic activity there is. To be able to use anything, to deal with everything in such a way that there is no dukkha, so that whether it’s a matter of status, fame, beauty, wealth, influence, love, friendship, all these things, we can take, we can benefit from them, we can make use of them, without turning any of them into problems. Without letting any of them bite their owners.

Last of all let’s look once again at the meaning of the word ‘Dhamma.’ Literally Dhamma comes from the word to ‘maintain.’ Dhamma means that which can maintain itself. That which can sustain itself. Anything whether living or non-living organic or inorganic is everything that can sustain itself in one way or another is called Dhamma. Second meaning is that not only can it maintain and protect itself. It can maintain and protect the one that has Dhamma. The one that has Dhamma is sustained, maintained, protected by Dhamma. Dhamma protects the one who has Dhamma. The third meaning is that it is the highest thing. It’s the highest most sublime thing in the universe. Beyond the universe, if there is such a thing, this is still the highest thing. It’s

that which everyone must believe in. Not believe in the ideas about it. Believe in its reality, because it's that on which everything depends. This is the one thing that the Buddha worshiped. Of all the things the Buddha only worshiped Dhamma. The highest thing.

The last item and the most strange of all is the fact that Dhamma cannot be translated. You can't translate the word 'Dhamma.' Please don't even try. If you go and try to translate it into other languages, you'll just get the meaning wrong. You'll cut it up into little pieces and confuse things. The word 'Dhamma' cannot be translated. We heard that in England there was a meeting or a conference in order to translate the word 'Dhamma.' And they came up with at least thirty-eight different meanings and there was still others coming. And so they gave up. They realized that it is just impossible to translate this word 'Dhamma' properly. We can look at it in different ways. We can talk about its different aspects, but in the end we can never translate the word 'Dhamma.'

So all of these are the things about Dhamma which you need to know more than you knew before. Excuse us for saying so, but you really haven't known much about Dhamma. You know far too little about Dhamma, so we've taken the opportunity today to discuss the things about Dhamma which you need to know more than you ever knew before.

Thank you all for being very patient listeners and you listened very attentively. We hope that the time has been worth the effort.

Thank you very much.

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