

The Buddha Farangs don't Know About

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

A Dhamma lecture given at Suan Mokkh on 3 March 1990

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

First of all we'd like to express our delight that you have come here in search of knowledge about Dhamma so that you can use it in your activities, your duties, and the work of your life, so that you will develop and progress continually.

You've come here for basically two things. First of all to study about Buddhism. And then second to learn how to put that understanding into practice. Both of these need to be done together. We have to understand what it's all about. And then we have to know how to put it into action, so that we can actually benefit from it in our lives.

There's something important that we ought to know about before we begin. However, hardly anybody knows about this thing. The reasons for this are hard to describe but it's a fact that we don't really know much about the first thing that we ought to know. This is what we'll be talking about.

The Buddha himself called this the *ādibrahmacariya* which means the starting point of spiritual practice.

Something strange and wonderful is that this point then becomes a Buddha – another Buddha that we need to study and understand thoroughly.

Excuse us for speaking straightforward and maybe even a little bit rudely but we must say that this is the Buddha that the *farang[s]* (the Europeans) don't know yet.

The Buddha that you have read about or studied about is merely a person in history. The only Buddha that you know about is this historical person who was born in India, lived for 80 years, and then passed away. This is the only Buddha that the foreigners know about.

This Buddha that we're talking about is not within history. We could say this Buddha is *outside* of history. When we say he's outside of history we mean that this Buddha can't be contained in history or if you look through all the history books, you'll never find this particular Buddha.

To understand this point, it helps to pay attention to one thing the Buddha said. At one point he said that "Whoever sees the Dhamma sees me; whoever sees me sees the Dhamma." And then he said later that "Whoever sees *paṭiccasamuppāda* sees the Dhamma; whoever sees the Dhamma sees me."

So what is this *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination) which when seen is the same as seeing the real Buddha? This dependent origination is the natural law of how *dukkha* arises and then how it can be quenched. This law about the arising and then the quenching of *dukkha* – this is called *paṭiccasamuppāda* or 'dependent origination.'

In addition to knowing that there is such a law, we also must see its conditions or the way it manifests. We need to see the conditions or manifestations of the arising of *dukkha* and then the quenching of *dukkha*.

At our center across the highway where you have gone for training we have a basic principle that we teach dependent origination first, before practicing mindfulness with breathing meditation. It's important to understand dependent origination. Then we'll be able to practice mindfulness with breathing in order to practice correctly according to the law of dependent origination. So we begin with studying this law of *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

So I ask all of you to be very interested in this and to try your best to understand this thing which is the starting point of spiritual practice.

This is the reason why we call this 'the first thing that we must know,' the first thing that one must know.

So we go and say that this is the Buddha that you still don't know. This is the Buddha that you all don't know yet.

This way of speaking may sound metaphorical but this Buddha is not a metaphor. It's real. This is the real Buddha. The Buddha that you already know about, that isn't the real Buddha. The historical Buddha isn't the real one. The real Buddha is outside of history. The real Buddha is eternal.

One Buddha is the historical Buddha – an individual, a person. The other Buddha is outside of history and is neither an individual nor a person. Which of these – the personal Buddha or the impersonal Buddha – is more important? You'll find out for yourself if you study these matters. You'll see that the Buddha that is outside of history – the eternal Buddha – is the one that really matters. But then the historical Buddha, the individual Buddha, can tell us, can point to the real Buddha that is outside of history, that is impersonal, this law that is outside of history.

Or to put it more briefly, the historical Buddha will teach us about the Buddha outside of history, the eternal Buddha.

I'd like to borrow some words or a principle from the Mahāyāna Buddhists to tell you so that you'll understand this matter easily.

In Mahāyāna they speak of an Adi-buddha. This is the original, the primal Buddha. And then from the Adi-buddha there arises the Jhani-buddha, the Buddha that comes from deep concentration or from the absorption of the Adi-buddha. And then from this Jhani-buddha there comes the Manusi-buddha, the Buddha that is a human being in history. The Adi-buddha is the Dhamma, the natural law which is eternal. From that, through deep concentration, through *jhāna*, it is known that this is how dukkha occurs, this is how dukkha quenches. This basic law of the universe is understood as Jhani-buddha and then the Manusi-buddha helps to point this out and to explain it.

Let me clarify it just a little bit by going backwards. The Manusi-buddha is the human Buddha who teaches about the fundamental law of nature. This fundamental law is the Jhani-buddha which comes from the Adi-Buddha which is the source of this law. The Adi-buddha is the source from which arises the Jhani-buddha – the law of how dukkha arises and is quenched.

So first we must know the human Buddha who tells us about the law, the Jhani-buddha. And then we must know this law of how dukkha arises and is quenched. Then beyond that, if we wish, we can go even deeper to know the source of that law, the Adi-buddha. But that's not completely necessary. That might be too deep or too much for most of us. But it's absolutely necessary that

we all know this law. So we must know the historical Buddha who teaches of the law – the Jhani-buddha which is outside of history.

Here we can end Mahāyāna and Theravāda. We can be finished with such distinctions and just deal with nature and the reality of nature. And then very simply there is the human Buddha who teaches about the law. There is the law itself which is outside of history and there is the source of that natural law.

The question arises, ‘how is this law a Buddha?’ In the Pāli scriptures it’s recorded that the historical Buddha said the words “Whoever sees the Dhamma sees me and whoever sees *paṭiccasamuppāda* sees the Dhamma.” Buddha said that if you see my physical body – even if you touch it – you haven’t yet seen the real Buddha. To see the real Buddha one has to see the Dhamma, that is, to see this law of dependent origination. So this is why we say that this law is the true Buddha. That means there are three Buddhas, or three aspects or levels of Buddha: the human Buddha who has realized this law, the human Buddha who has realized it thoroughly and is then able to teach about it; and then there is this law of nature which is the real Buddha; and then beyond that is the first Buddha, the original source or cause from which this law has come, the Adi-buddha.

Now we can dispense with this business of Mahāyāna and Theravāda, and just deal with nature and the reality – the law of nature. Just deal with the Buddha-Dhamma straight and simple.

We’ve read loads of books about Buddhism now. There’re all these tons of books that have been written about Buddhism and in all of them they only talk about this historical Buddha. Very very few of these books even mention the law of nature. All the books are about this historical human Buddha and only a few talk about the real Buddha which the human Buddha taught about. But even these books that speak about this law of nature, they never say that this is in fact the real Buddha. So in all these books about Buddhism, all of them only talk about this one Buddha, the human historical Buddha and they’ve totally ignored or forgotten about the real Buddha. So forgive us for taking this opportunity to talk about this Buddha which nobody seems to know about – the Buddha that is outside of history.

There are two more words that we can borrow from Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Amitāyu-buddha and the Amitābha-buddha. The Amitāyu-buddha means the Buddha of infinite age and Amitābha-buddha means the Buddha of infinite light. The meaning of these two words are very profound and useful. There is

this thing which gives infinite age – age that we cannot measure – and there is this thing which gives infinite light.

You ought to reflect on this yourself. Ask yourself, what is there or what is it that has infinite age and infinite light? What in this universe can be described in such terms? If we go into this deeply we'll see that there's nothing other than the law of *idappaccayatā* (the law of conditionality, of interconnectedness), the law of *paṭiccasamuppāda* – of how things arise, dependent upon each other. This law of nature can be seen to have infinite age. There's no way you could count or measure its age and it shines throughout the entire universe. Its light shines everywhere. There's absolutely no limitation on this law of *idappaccayatā*, of dependent origination.

But now we don't have to be religious about this. Instead we can be scientific. We can follow the spirit and methods of true science to investigate this. So we can ask the scientist to help us find – what is this thing of unlimited age? What is this thing of unlimited light? What can the scientists tell us about this?

We suggest that this is the law – the thing we call 'law' – especially what we call the law of conditionality, the law of *idappaccayatā*. This we suggest is the Buddha of infinite age and the Buddha of infinite light.

When we say 'unlimited age' and 'unlimited light,' we must also include 'unlimited space.' This Buddha is not limited by space. It can be anywhere, everywhere, in everything.

These words will help you understand the most important Buddha – the Buddha about which the historical Buddha said "He who sees the Dhamma sees me; he who sees *paṭiccasamuppāda* sees the Dhamma." We're talking about the Buddha of Dhamma, the Dhammic Buddha – not the personal, historical individual Buddha that everybody's familiar with.

Then if you ask, 'well where can we see this Buddha?' We can answer, 'every place.' You can see it everywhere. Look anywhere and if you know how to look, you can see this Buddha, you can see this law of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. You can see it in the leaves, you can see it in the rocks, the sand, in the animals, in human beings. We can see it anywhere, everywhere that we look – this most important Buddha.

Coincidentally there is an American Jew who has painted some Dhamma pictures which we have in the spiritual theater just over here and there is one of them which he painted which is called ‘the real Buddha is behind your own curtain of ignorance.’ If you want to find the real Buddha, it’s right here – behind your own ignorance, your own stupidity.

We ought to be very interested in this thing which obstructs or blocks our view of the real Buddha. This thing that obstructs is a curtain – the curtain is something that blocks our view or doesn’t let us see. This thing which is the curtain is our own ignorance, our own foolishness and behind this ignorance is the real Buddha, the law of dependent origination. The only reason we don’t see it is because of our own stupidity. So we need to pay attention to our own ignorance in order to see beyond this blindness of ours.

At our center where you’re training, we teach about dependent origination because this law is the thing that can destroy this curtain of ignorance. By understanding dependent origination, by seeing this for ourselves, this will rip apart the curtain of ignorance. So this is why we talk about it. We follow the historical Buddha who has taught about this real Buddha so that we can see through our own veils of ignorance and blindness.

So if you do this, if you study this, then you will meet the Buddha who the *farang[s]* (the white foreigners) don’t yet know. But we must be honest and say that the Thais, the Burmese, and the Sri Lankans don’t know this Buddha either. The traditional Buddhists haven’t paid any attention to this sentence that “He who sees the Dhamma sees me; he who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma.” In these Buddhist countries they don’t pay any attention to this and so they never think that the law of dependent origination is a Buddha, is the real Buddha. But if we go into this properly, we’ll meet the real Buddha. The real Buddha is the Buddha who can actually help us. This is why we should find this Buddha.

Now we’ll discuss the benefits, the advantages of knowing this Buddha or seeing this Buddha, and then knowing this Buddha, and then having this Buddha. We must both see, know, and have this Buddha if we’re to benefit fully.

The highest benefit is that we will discover a new life, we’ll come across a new life. Whether this is a Christian term or something doesn’t really matter.

What matters is that this life is totally quenched – it's thoroughly quenched. This is the highest benefit of knowing and having this Buddha.

This quenched life is what is also known as 'Nibbāna' – Nibbāna in Pāli, *nippan* in Thai, Nirvāṇa in Sanskrit. This is something that is pretty much misunderstood all over the place. The word itself is very well known but it is generally misunderstood and so we need to make a correct proper understanding of what it means.

Some teachers or experts have got it so wrong that they've given Nibbāna the opposite meaning. It's come to the point that many people say that Nibbāna means death. These so-called teachers have got it totally upside down. Nibbāna has nothing to do with death. The quenched life knows no death. It's as it's the fullness of life and has nothing whatsoever to do with death.

It's possible that in India long ago there was a certain sect or school which taught this very high teaching about Nibbāna – that Nibbāna is eternal death. You should know that before the Buddha's time there were many different schools in India that were teaching about Nibbāna. Each would teach Nibbāna or Nirvāṇa in its own particular way, explaining it differently. And it's possible that one of these taught that Nibbāna is eternal death and in saying so there might be some profound religious understanding.

And we should know that this kind of teaching came to Thailand before Buddhism and so it's been very easy for this idea that Nibbāna is eternal death to insinuate itself into Buddhism. But we need to recognize that this is not the proper teaching of Buddha-Dhamma. It's something outside of Buddhism which has been snuck in or dragged in or something like that.

Ordinary peasants, farmers, and city dwellers – ordinary people – have the understanding that Nibbāna means eternal death. It's only when they come to actually study Buddhism, when they really study what the Buddha taught, then they find out that Nibbāna doesn't mean that at all. Nibbāna means the opposite, Nibbāna is eternal life.

We should be very interested in the meaning of the word 'quench' or 'quenched.' We're talking about a life where all the undesirable and unworthy things are quenched, where these things are quenched from outside of our life, especially that which we call *dukkha*. A life is quenched truly when all *dukkha* is quenched from it.

We must find this quenching in things that are not yet quenched. Anything that is hot and busy and all stirred up – in all of that un-quenched-ness, we must find quenching.

So there's an important question for each of you to ask yourself – is my life quenched or not? Is this life of mine quenched or not? We must ask ourselves this – are we free of all boiling and all turmoil or not? If there is any turmoil, any heat, any busyness, then we must look right in the middle of that to find its quenching, its cooling.

We have a short saying that says “we must find the point of quenching within the red hot iron oven.” We have to find the point of quenching in the middle of the red hot iron oven.

More simply, we have to find that which is quenched in the thing that is not yet quenched.

If something is very hot, then it must have great coolness within it. If we take a burning red hot oven, this is something that's a material heat – very intense material heat. If we remove all of that hotness, then all that is left is coolness.

The quenching of dukkha is in dukkha itself. To look for the end of dukkha in someplace else is just a waste of time. We don't have to waste our energy talking about it. The ending, the cooling, the quenching of dukkha can only be found in dukkha itself. So we need to discover dukkha and know this dukkha if we're going to find the quenching of it.

Here we have certain physical aids to understanding the Dhamma. Just about 200 meters this way there is a pond. It's called the Nalike Pond. The pond is called the Sea of Wax, the Ocean of Wax. This pond is symbolic of the ocean of wax. We use wax because wax can be solid, it can be liquid, it can be hard, it can be soft, it can be hot, it can be cool. Wax is changing very easily. This is a symbol of *samsāra* – the world of arising and decay – this always-changing world where there's happiness, there's sorrow, there's happiness/sorrow, there's happiness/dukkha, happiness/dukkha, over and over again, back and forth. The pond is a symbol of the sea of wax, the sea of *samsāra*, where things are just spinning around, happiness/dukkha, happiness/dukkha.

But if you look, right in the middle of the pond there's a single coconut tree. And the coconut tree isn't like the rest of it, it's not caught in the dualities. The

coconut tree just stands there. This is a symbol of Nibbāna. So if you have some time, go take a look at it. It's not too far away and if you understand the meaning of this, if you really understand it, then that will be wonderful because you'll understand Nibbāna.

That coconut tree – the rain doesn't touch it, the thunder doesn't shake it, the lightening can't strike it. That coconut tree is the symbol of the quenched life.

You can go sit on the banks of that pond, calm the mind and concentrate it, and then meditate on the meaning of that tree, meditate on the meaning of the quenched life.

Let's look some more at this quenched life. There's something we've said about this quenched life which your friends who've come before you have really appreciated. We said that the quenched life is the life that doesn't bite its owner. To the degree that life is not quenched, life itself will bite its owner. Whenever life is not yet quenched, it will turn on its owner and bite it, but when life is quenched, then life doesn't bite its owner.

Right now you've got a life that is biting its owner, don't you?

One moment love is biting, another moment anger bites, and then hatred bites, or then fear bites. Isn't this how it is?

You like to get excited, don't you? You like to be stimulated and excited to see things and experience things that excite us. This is something we get into. You ought to know that all kinds of excitement – watching boxing, going to football games, watching videos, all these crazy and lunatic things people are doing – all of this excitement bites its owner.

Foolish hopes about the future and longing the past, missing things from the past – both of these also bite their owner.

Another one is envy – not loving others, not being happy when their fortune is good. This envy also bites its owner. It doesn't bite the object of the envy, it just bites the owner of the envy.

Possessiveness, stinginess, jealousy about one's husband or wife – all of these also bite their owners.

So how are we going to quench all these things – greed, anger, hatred, fear, worry, excitement, hoping after the future, longing after the past, envy,

jealousy, possessiveness? All of these are hot. All of these are biting their owners over and over again. What are we going to do about all this biting? Do we like being bit over and over again by life?

If we have the true Buddha who we were talking about earlier, then life won't bite its owner because there won't be an owner. If we've got the real Buddha, then we realize that there is no self or owner of life, and then there's nobody to be bit and life can't bite its owner any more.

The highest *dhamma* – the dhamma that makes it so life can't bite its owner – is called *atammayatā*. This may be a strange word that you've never heard before. But it's the highest dhamma. If you study dependent origination thoroughly and really see it, then you will have *atammayatā*, and when you have *atammayatā* there's nothing that can bite its owner. With *atammayatā*, the mind is beyond all that.

One translation of *atammayatā* which everybody ought to be able to understand is 'spiritual equilibrium.' This spiritual equilibrium is the meaning of *atammayatā*.

When the mind is in a state where nothing can concoct it, nothing can condition it, nothing can cook it, that is called *atammayatā*. The mind in that state has spiritual equilibrium. So when the mind is unshakeable, invulnerable – this is the meaning of *atammayatā*.

A translation of *atammayatā* ought to be in the dictionary. Right now nobody in the world knows *atammayatā*. This word isn't in the dictionary and so people don't know about it. So we need to put this word in the dictionary because it's got a most important meaning. The meaning of *atammayatā* is the same as Nibbāna. It's the same as being in the Kingdom of God. The meaning is the same. The mind is invulnerable, unshakeable. It's beyond being conditioned or concocted or messed up by anything. So let's put this word in the dictionary.

A single word like 'unconcoctability' or 'unconditionability' – we should remember this word and reflect on it deeply until we understand it thoroughly. One word, 'unconcoctability,' meaning the state of mind where nothing can concoct it. We should remember this and go into it deeply.

Why then is the mind unconcoctable? There is unconcoctability because it is above the influence of all positiveness & negativeness. When no positiveness or negativeness can affect the mind, then it is unconcoctable.

When positiveness or some positive influence concocts the mind, then there is a positive self. When negativity or some negative influence concocts the mind, there's a negative self – one moment positive, one moment negative, positive/negative, positive/negative – all these selves. These are the symptoms of dukkha. This is when life bites its owner.

When life is like this – positive/negative, positive/negative, positive/negative, over and over again, back and forth – how is life going to be quenched?

This state of life – of positive/negative, positive/negative, going back and forth like that – this is a dog biting its master. This is what it really means when a dog turns on its master.

Now there might be the problem that some of you thinking 'Oh, this is too high, this is too profound, this is so far out, it's abnormal' or something like this. If you're thinking like that, there's not much we can do for you because this is just the way it is. This is the natural result of seeing, of thoroughly understanding the law of dependent origination. When we see this law, then this is how things are. There is this unconcoctability of the mind where it is free of all this positive/negative, positive/negative, biting and messing up.

In Buddhism we have an important word which you should be interested in. It's the word 'above the world,' to be above the world.

In some religions they may go only so far as 'a better world' or 'the best world,' some heaven or paradise but in Buddhism, we're not interested in any world. We want to be above the world, beyond it, beyond all worlds.

'Above the world' means above positive & negative, above the influence and power of all positiveness & negativeness. The world is full up with positive & negative. The world is just all this positiveness & negativeness. To be above it – all this positive & negative – is to be above the world. This is where nothing bites its owner.

In China at the same time as the Buddha there was a man named Lao Tzu who taught about being above and beyond the influence of *yin* & *yang* – to be free of the power of *yin* & *yang* – which is the same thing as we're talking about. So people have been interested in this, have tried to understand it and tried to practice it for thousands of years, not just in India.

Even in the Bible, although only in the Old Testament, you can find this. At the very beginning God tells man, “Don’t eat the fruit that will make you know good and evil.” What this means is – if we know good & evil, then our minds will be trapped by this knowledge and we’ll be under the influence of goodness & evilness. So what this shows is that the Jews, many thousands of years ago, understood this same basic fact.

It’s a shame that the Christians didn’t take this to be the heart of Christianity. It’s unfortunate that they didn’t take this ‘being beyond the knowledge of good and evil’ as being the heart of Christianity. If they had, then that would be exactly the same thing that we’re discussing here.

All the time that life is under the influence of positive & negative it won’t be able to quench. There won’t be any quenching of life so long as it’s trapped within all this positive & negative. Dependent origination will teach us how to be free of this power of positive & negative. So we hope that you’ll try your best to understand dependent origination so that you can be free of all this biting of positive & negative.

So at the center please be very interested in this. Please try your best to understand the meaning of *paṭiccasamuppāda* in the most profound way that you can. Your instructors will explain it to you. Please pay careful attention and do what you must to understand it. This is very important. If you’re going to meditate, it is very important that you first have a deep and good understanding of dependent origination.

The real Buddha – the Buddha of dependent origination – will teach us the illusoriness of all positive & negative. And then we’ll be able to go beyond it and be free.

You can study this in a scientific way. You can study it in a Buddhist way. What matters is seeing the illusoriness of positive & negative, seeing that positive & negative are just illusions – they’re not actually true or real. Seeing this then life will be quenched, it won’t bite its owner any more.

In particular if you study Einstein’s teaching about the relativity of time and space – if you study these things then you’ll see that positive & negative are just illusions. And so this will bring us to the quenching which Buddhism aims for and in fact Buddhism is a science in the same way.

Please study dependent origination and then the relativity of time and space won't be able to deceive you or trick you anymore, and then things will be quenched.

Finally we'd like to thank you all for listening for almost two hours. Thank you for listening and we hope that you will try very hard to understand dependent origination.

So today's meeting is closed.

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Transcribed by Arthur Brown in 2015

Audio files: 5125330303010.mp3 & 1990-03A (1) The Buddhism Farang don't know about.mp3

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