

Dhamma Questions & Responses - Part II

by Ajahn Buddhādāsa

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

A Dhamma session offered at Suan Mokkh on 11 September 1991

In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhādāsa gave regular talks 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 Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

Why be so strict with vedanā? Isn't it possible to enjoy your positive feelings without being attached to them?

The *vedanā* are the cause of losing the mind's naturalness; the mind's naturalness is lost due to the *vedanās*. The *vedanās* either lead to their being too much or not enough, and in this way the mind's naturalness is lost. So, if one is to enjoy feelings, we must enjoy them in a way that does not lose the mind's naturalness, that does not disturb the natural balance of the mind. If the feelings are positive or negative, then that balance has already been disturbed. So, to not lose that naturalness, one has to be above the positive and negative, so that the positive and negative don't have any power to disturb the mind's naturalness.

In Dhamma or in the ways of investigating Dhamma, the absence of positive or negative feelings is still considered to be a feeling – the feeling that is neither positive nor negative. This is also a *vedanā*, and this *vedanā* is a way to help us get free of the positive or negative *vedanā*, and this then, is a kind of happiness or contentment which is more subtle and far more refined than the positive kind of happiness.

To live with the kind of *vedanā* which is neither positive nor negative is a far higher kind of happiness than with the positive kinds of feeling.

Is one man's wise want another man's foolish desire?

In general, this is not possible because wisdom and foolishness are not interchangeable like this. So when speaking of those who have natural or proper wisdom, then there is no way that this can be. However, if we're talking about people whose intelligence is abnormal such as immoral people or criminal people, then this could happen because their intelligence and understanding is already abnormal, and so, such twists and perversions are possible

I experience anicca, so I understand it. I experience dukkha, so I understand it. I do not experience anattā, how can I know it and understand it? How to experience anattā?

Regarding this subject, it's useful to consider that, before the Buddhist time, there were quite a few people who understood the subjects of *aniccam* or impermanence, and *dukkham* or dukkha-ness. For example, the Buddha spoke of a teacher named Araka, in a distant city, who explained and taught impermanence as well as the Buddha himself. Now, it doesn't say in the scriptures where exactly this distant city is, but we think it might be Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher who taught *panta rhei* or "All is flowing," "Everything flows," "All is in flux." Heraclitus lived at the same time as the Buddha and one of his central teachings was that of impermanence, so perhaps this is who the Buddha was referring to. Anyway, this is just one example that before the Buddha's teachings they were many people who knew about impermanence and *dukkha*, but that *anattā* or not-self was another matter, and it took the Buddha to make this known. And still, it's not so easy to understand. Impermanence and dukkha are relatively easy to understand but *anattā* is more difficult. So, what one needs to do is to examine life, examine these bodies and minds to see how they just happen naturally, that everything just happens naturally according to the law of nature, that the body is a collection of *saṅkhāras*, of conditioned, concocted things which arise and pass away, and that the mind is also nothing but a flow of *saṅkhāras*, of concocted things which are concocted through conditions – they arise, perform some function and then cease – that this is what's going on in life, this is just naturally what is taking place. And then, when we watch the natural flow of body and mind, we come to see how it is impossible to achieve desires. When we operate through the illusion of self, we think that it is possible to get what we want, but if we look more deeply, we see that it's not possible to get what we want, and this is the first level of understanding not-self – to see that, as these *saṅkhāras* of mind and body flow onward, they don't listen to anyone, they don't follow the orders or

commands of anyone, and so it's impossible for us to get what we want. To see this, is one level of understanding *anattā*.

Another way of understanding and experiencing not-self requires that you understand the law of *idappaccayatā* quite well. We have tried our best to help you and to encourage you to study and understand this law of *idappaccayatā* or the fact that everything happens dependent on conditions, on other things. When we see the facts of *idappaccayatā*, both within us and around us, when we see that everything just happens through causes and conditions, and when we see that things are *idappaccayatā* themselves and that they happen according to the law of *idappaccayatā*, then we see that things don't come according to our desires. Things happen according to the law of *idappaccayatā*, not according to our wants and desires. So the more we understand *idappaccayatā*, the more we will understand not-self. We just don't have the ability or power to control things so that they will happen the way we want them to happen, because they are under the control of *idappaccayatā*.

The body is *idappaccayatā*, the mind is *idappaccayatā*, and even if there were some soul which would die, or experience the death of the body and then be reborn in some other body, then that, such a soul would not be a self (*attā*), it would merely be *idappaccayatā*. Such a belief in a soul that is reborn after death is a belief of other religions, it's not a belief in Buddhism. In Buddhism, there is just *idappaccayatā*, everything happens according to causes and conditions. There is no self or soul that goes and gets reborn. Buddhism teaches that everything, absolutely, is not-self. Body and mind are not-self. There is no self or soul that will be reborn after death.

Therefore, if we wish to have something which is the highest power, which is above everything else, and controls and directs everything, then that is *idappaccayatā*. This law of *idappaccayatā* is in control of everything. It's permanent and unchanging, similar to what in other religions is called 'God.'

So even if we have some ultimate power or law, such as *idappaccayatā*, we don't consider that to be *attā* or self. In other religions, this highest power or principle is considered to be the ultimate self or something like that, or to be some 'supreme *attā*' or Paramatman, but in Buddhism, it's all considered to be *anattā*, even *idappaccayatā*, even God. Even if you wish to speak in terms of 'God,' Buddhism will insist that God is not-self.

Even if we have some highest self – some traditions like to speak of the 'higher self' – but no matter how high this self may be, we still insist that it is *anattā* or not-self. Even the highest self is not-self because it's merely

idappaccayatā. No matter how high or sublime some self may seem, it's merely happened according to causes and conditions and is therefore not-self.

If we have *attā* (self), then the thing which necessarily follows is *attaniya* ('of-self'). Once there is self, there are all the things 'of-self' or that belong to self. And then, there are all these burdens. When there are things belonging to self, then there are all these things to burden and create problems for the self. So, to not have any *attā* or *attaniya*, any self or of-self, is to be free, to be released from all bondage from all burdens, this is much better.

If this mind has *attā* (self) & *attaniya* (of-self), then it carries a lot of burdens with it. This mind isn't free, it's not peaceful because of these burdens. This is because in this world there are all kinds of things which affect and disturb the *attā* and *attaniya*. All these disturbances will then create problems for the self and that which is of-self, and so the mind can never find any peace. But when the mind has no more *attā* or *attaniya*, then it is free, it's peaceful, there's nothing that can disturb it, limit it or harm it.

The mind which is free or void is the mind that perfectly knows or is enlightened to the fact that nothing is *attā* or *attaniya*. When the mind has thoroughly, completely, perfectly realized that all things are not-self, that there is nothing which belongs to self, then this is the mind which is void; and this same mind has tremendous power. This mind that is free is no longer limited, and so it can be said to be almighty*. The void mind is almighty or all powerful, and this is the mind which is emancipated. This is the meaning of salvation.

If Nibbāna is outside of the khandhas, how can we know it?

First, one needs to understand that there are two aspects of nature. There are all the things which are *saṅkhata* or conditioned, concocted things. All the things that can be affected, influenced, conditioned by things, are called 'saṅkhata.' And then, there is the *asaṅkhata*, the unconditioned, the unconcocted, that which cannot be touched, affected, influenced by anything. The five *khandhas*, this mind-body, are *saṅkhata*. Nibbāna is *asaṅkhata*. Nibbāna is that which cannot be conditioned, affected or influenced, it's beyond all that. So the problem is, how can the conditioned *khandhas* come to experience the unconditioned? The answer is that the *khandhas* – or the mind here we can say – must be no longer concocted or conditioned. When the mind is not conditioned or concocted by anything, then it is able to experience that state which is beyond conditioning. When the mind is conditioned, concocted by things, then it's oblivious to the reality that is beyond concocting and conditioning. But when we can make the mind unconditioned,

when we can free the mind from the conditioning and concocting of that we are all so used to, then it can experience Nibbāna or the unconditioned. To speak in terms of metaphor, we can say that Nibbāna is everywhere, always. So, Nibbāna is omnipresent, but because our mind is covered with ignorance, the mind has no ability to experience or make contact with Nibbāna. Therefore, one needs to free the mind of the defilements, free the mind of desire, free the mind of attachment, so that when the mind is thus emancipated from all concocting, then it will be able to experience the reality of that which is unconditioned, namely, Nibbāna.

It's like a window or door. As long as the window is closed, the sunlight cannot come in. All you have to do is open the window, and the sunlight will enter. You don't have to pull the sunlight in. Just open the window or open the door, and it will enter by itself, once we remove that which prevents it from entering.

[Is atammayatā Nibbāna?]

Atammayatā is the state of mind which makes it possible for the mind to experience Nibbāna. When the mind is covered and enclosed by concoctions, then it cannot experience Nibbāna, but when there is *atammayatā*, that is the state of mind which is unconcocted, unaffected, uninfluenced by anything, and this state of mind then is the one in which Nibbāna can make contact. Nibbāna can make contact with the mind which is not covered or enclosed. So therefore, we do not say that *atammayatā* is Nibbāna, but *atammayatā* is the state of mind that makes it possible to experience Nibbāna.

To put it more briefly, *atammayatā* is the state of mind which is not concocted, bound or covered by anything. *Atammayatā* is the state of mind which is most free, which is completely free, and so, through *atammayatā*, the mind can make contact with Nibbāna.

Another way to put it, rather metaphorically, is that *atammayatā* is personal freedom and that Nibbāna is universal freedom. Nibbāna is the universal state of freedom that can be discovered by everyone. Just make the mind *atammayatā* and you will discover that universal Nibbāna.

What is 'worldly right view'?

To explain 'worldly right view' or *lokiya-sammā-ditṭhi*, it's easier to explain both the worldly and the transcendent levels together.

To put it more simply, 'worldly right view' is the view or understanding where there is still self. There is still self but this understanding knows how to

deal with the self in the best possible way for Nibbāna. So, in worldly right understanding there still is some self but it can be dealt with in the best possible way for making progress towards Nibbāna. This is the kind of right view that is called *sāsava*, which means ‘still mixed up with the *āsavas*.’ The *āsavas* are the irruptions of defilements, the outflows of defilements. As long as these still exist, there will be attachment and defilement. So this is the worldly right view, it’s still mixed up with the *āsavas*.

Transcendent right view or *lokuttara-sammā-diṭṭhi* – the right understanding which is above and beyond the world – in this, there is the thorough, complete, total understanding that everything is not-self, that there is no person, no individual, no heaven, no hell. This is the mind that is above all the worldly kinds of values and meanings. No worldly value or meaning has any influence or power over this mind. So it’s described as *anāsava*, ‘without *āsavas*,’ this is the right view that is without *āsavas*, that has nothing to do with the *āsavas*. So there’re these two kinds of right view. To study them together is much easier and you’ll make better progress, so we mentioned them both together: worldly right understanding that is mixed up with the *āsavas*, where there’s still self; and then the transcendent right understanding that is without *āsavas*, where everything is understood to be not-self. To put it practically, worldly right understanding is for the sake of living in the world in the best possible way, without any problems, and transcendent right understanding is for being above the world. Worldly right understanding lets you live in the world without problems and transcendent right understanding frees one totally from the world, one is beyond the world in all respects.

To make it even more simple, we can talk about the kind of peacefulness* which is not ultimate, the peace which is not yet ultimate, which is still relative to this world, so relative peacefulness. And then there is the peacefulness* which is ultimate, which is beyond the world, which isn’t relative or related to anything, it’s totally free, totally peaceful. Worldly right understanding allows us to live peacefully in the world, with relative peacefulness, and transcendent right understanding allows us to experience, to discover ultimate peacefulness or the non-relative peacefulness.

The Buddha’s first words on enlightenment were “Aneka jāti samsāraṃ sandha viṣṣam anibhissam.” We chant these words everyday. How then can one deny some kind of rebirth, whatever intellectual difficulties we face with the concept of anattā?

It seems that you do not have understood the meaning of the word ‘rebirth.’ Don’t always insist or assume that rebirth means ‘to be reborn in the womb of a mother in some place.’ Many people speak only of physical or material rebirth, this is not what the Buddha was talking about. The Buddhist teachings are spiritual not materialistic, so one must understand the word ‘rebirth’ in a spiritual way rather than a materialistic way. Therefore, you should understand that the meaning of what the Buddha was saying was that,

“Before my enlightenment, a lot of attā got born in me. Attā kept being born over and over again, before the enlightenment. But now that there is full enlightenment regarding life, regarding the Four Noble Truths, there’s no more of this attā being born in me. I’ve torn down and destroyed all the causes and conditions by which attā can be reborn.”

So this is the kind of rebirth that the Buddha was talking about, the rebirth of self, of ego, of attā, through ignorance, desire and attachment. We would never deny that there is such a rebirth, and this understanding of ‘rebirth’ is not at all in conflict with *anattā*.

I somewhat understand anattā and therefore the impossibility for a self, soul, being to be reincarnated, but I feel it doesn’t have to be a self that goes to a new life. It can be a momentum towards self established in ignorance. This tendency towards the self concept may continue in universal mind and therefore create a new physical body. Do you think this could be so?

It is possible, it’s very possible that, through all the many many times that *attā*, that the ‘self’ concept, has been born in our minds, that this will develop a momentum, that this momentum will be within what are called the *anusaya* – the latent tendencies – which are kind of stored in the substratum of the mind. Through the constant birth of the ‘self’ concept of *attā*, this tendency towards *attā*, towards self, develops and grows stronger and then has a certain momentum. So this is possible, however it is all merely a matter of *idappaccayatā*. The tendencies, the birth of the ‘self’ concept and so on, are merely due to causes and conditions. They happen because of the law of *idappaccayatā* and therefore, it is all *anattā* or not-self.

So, these tendencies build up in the subconscious or the substratum of the mind and develop a momentum, but both this tendency towards *attā* and this momentum, these are not-self, they should never be taken to be self, because they’re just natures, just natural things happening according to the law of nature,

the law of conditionality; and so it would be totally incorrect to consider them or to call them ‘selves’. They’re just anattā or not-self.

As for this ‘universal mind’ that you mentioned, in Buddhism there is no such thing as ‘universal mind.’ In certain other religions however, they have ‘universal self’ or ‘universal soul,’ but that is something that doesn’t exist in Buddhism; in Buddhism there is just eternal voidness. Other religions, such as the Hindus, have their universal self or their eternal self, eternal soul, but in Buddhism, there is only eternal voidness – the eternal voidness that is absolutely void of self. And so, perhaps the questioner has confused this idea of universal self, or eternal self and come up with the idea of ‘universal mind;’ however this is not a concept in Buddhism, Buddhism only speaks about universal or eternal voidness.

To speak of ‘universal mind,’ this is probably a transformation of the ‘universal self’ of other religions – when we transform this ‘universal self’ into ‘universal mind.’ But there is no such thing in Buddhism because this universal mind will probably revert back to the universal self.

So in Buddhism, we have both ‘universal’ and ‘eternal,’ but it’s the universal void, the eternal void rather than self.

[SK So earlier he said, I forgot to translate, that,]

So, you seem to have understood half of the matter, and that’s very very good. Keep trying, keep working on it because there remains half of the matter which you have not yet understood.

If someone assaults us physically or mentally such as in physical assault or rape, under the law of impermanence, we know it will not last, but how can we stop ourselves from feeling anger, hatred and bitterness – and pity for the people who hurt us?

The way is to not have any self to be assaulted or raped. When there is no self to be victimized or attacked, then we will not have any of these problems. Of course, it’s fine to feel pity for the fools who do such violent and stupid actions. To feel pity for them is one thing, but there’s no need to have some ‘me’ who was victimized, or experienced these things. So when one sees that there is just body and mind, but it’s not-self, then these problems won’t arise – to see that the body is just some external covering and it’s ordinary that all kinds of things will happen to the body, and then that the mind can be raised up above all such worldly things. Seeing in this way, there is no one to be assaulted, raped or victimized.

Do you have any comments on the quite recent killing of Thai monks in America?

We don't really know what the facts of the case are, but as far as we know, it's all just *idappaccayatā* and it has no more meaning than that for us, merely *idappaccayatā*.

A new-born knows nothing and yet a baby may laugh at a toy rattle and cry if it is taken away. Buddhism would call this 'attachment,' the 'self,' but I regard it as nature, like a dog with a bone. Please explain.

Whether talking about a dog and its bone or a baby and its rattle, they're both a matter of attachment. That the dog clings to its bone or the baby to its rattle, this is a matter of attachment. But it's only attachment or *upādāna* on a very basic level. But still, once there is attachment, then when one gets what one wants, one is glad, and when one loses it, one is sad. And so, because of this attachment, both the baby and the dog must experience gladness and sadness.

Can you explain more about walking without a walker? Has it the same meaning as a self that is not-self?

Listen and figure out for yourselves whether the two are the same. When there is *walking with a walker*, when there is the one who walks, then there is the desire to walk and there is the desire to arrive, and then there is the gladness and sadness of arriving or of meeting obstacles while walking. When there is *walking without a walker*, there is just body and mind walking naturally without any concept or even a feeling of some 'me' who is walking. Instead of the 'me' or the walker, there is just mindfulness, correct understanding and *sampajañña* – the immediate application of that understanding. So there is just walking, everything is Dhamma, the mind, the body, everything is just Dhamma because of this *sati* – mindfulness – and this *paññā* – wisdom; so there is no walker. So these are totally different, *walking with a walker* and *walking without a walker* are totally different: one is walking with desire and attachment; the other is walking with mindfulness and wisdom. With one, the mind is still disturbed by positive and negative events, in the other, the mind is totally peaceful. In walking without a walker, there is just no way that there can be any *dukkha*, the mind is free.

Now, regarding the *self which is not-self*, that is one meaning. But this *walking without a walker* has the meaning of 'just the mind,' there's just the mind with wisdom, which is not-self. One is the self which is not-self, but now we are talking about the mind which is not-self. This is a way of practice, this is a lesson

for understanding *anattā*, this is the direct investigation of *anattā*, this is a lesson which makes it easy for us to understand *anattā*. And so, there is a difference between the self which is not-self and walking without any self at all.

Please extend the meaning of this until it becomes *doing without a doer*, doing all the things we must do in life, each day. Doing everything without any doer, acting without an actor. Extend the meaning of this until it includes everything in life so that everything it's just the five *khandhas* doing things, but there is no doer, no actor, just the five *khandhas* operating naturally according to the law of *idappaccayatā*. But it's all *anattā* or not-self. Please extend this meaning until one thoroughly understands *anattā*.

If you're going to shoot your rifle at a target, if you're in a marksmanship or a shooting context, every time you shoot the gun, shoot without a shooter and you will win the prize every time. Every time we aim the gun and pull the trigger, there's no aimer, no puller, no shooter, then we will always win the prize. There is just the mind's intention to shoot the gun correctly, but there is no thought of the 'me' who is shooting, the 'me' who will shoot well or shoot poorly, no thoughts of winning or losing: there is just the intention to shoot the gun correctly, and then the mind controls the body in order to do so. If you can shoot the gun in this way, then you will always take the first prize.

The mind that acts through voidness, the mind that acts in voidness, and the mind that acts full of attachment, full of ego, are totally different. One should study this difference between the mind that is totally free and void of self, and void of things belonging to self, and then the mind that is full of desire, attachment and ego. The mind that acts through voidness will always do a much better job, will always be much more confident and efficient and successful than the mind that acts through self, through attachment.

So now please don't worry about who will get the benefits of these actions. The results of the action will accrue, will fall to the one who did them, this is just the way things happen, the way they work. Whether acting with [true] voidness or acting through attachment, the fruits and results of the actions will accrue to the one who did the action. But the results will be much different when one acts with attachment. When one acts through voidness, then there is no complications, no busyness, no confusion; the mind is peaceful, and so the action is most efficient and successful. But when acting through attachment, things get complicated, confused, busy, stressful and things aren't at all peaceful. So the results will always happen to whoever does the action, but the kind of results will differ according to how one acts. It's always wisest and best to act through voidness, to act without an actor.

This way of acting is what we call Buddhist art*. The art of Buddhism is not the paintings and statues and all those things. The real art of Buddhism is the art of acting without self, of acting without attachment, the art of voidness.

Do you believe that mindfulness is the only means by which we can liberate the mind, that is, are enlightened Buddhists the only truly wise and happy people in the world?

Mindfulness or *sati* is not the one that brings about liberation. The agent that brings about liberation is not *sati* but is *paññā* – that is correct understanding or wisdom. *Sati* is what goes and brings the wisdom to the situation, *sati* is aware of the situation and then retrieves *paññā* or wisdom, and then wisdom is the agent for liberation. *Sati* alone will never bring about liberation, and the same is true about wisdom. All the knowledge and understanding in the world is useless, is wasted without mindfulness. All the things we learn in university, for example, are wasted without mindfulness, so don't separate the two. Do not separate mindfulness from wisdom. Mindfulness alone cannot free us from *dukkha*; wisdom alone cannot free us from *dukkha*. For example, the person who is drunk, intoxicated, is an example of someone without mindfulness, and they do all kinds of stupid, careless, clumsy things. No matter how wise or intelligent one is, without mindfulness one cannot solve the problem of *dukkha*. So do not separate them, both are needed together for liberation. And even when we're not talking about Dhamma, when we just talk about ordinary worldly existence, we need both mindfulness and understanding. To do anything in this life we need to both pay attention and then apply our knowledge and understanding. One is without the other is never enough, so we cannot separate the two. But when speaking of Dhamma, don't speak of mindfulness as bringing about liberation, but its' mindfulness that retrieves the wisdom, and then the wisdom or *paññā*, is what bring about – or makes – liberation.

Now, you spoke of the enlightened Buddhists. Actually the word 'Buddhist' is redundant. But when we speak of enlightened beings, the term for this is the '*arahants*.' The arahants are those who have perfected mindfulness and wisdom, so that this perfected mindfulness and wisdom has ended all problems. The arahant has no more burdens, no more problems, no more *dukkha*, and is free. And so the arahants' attention can then be turned to the difficulties and problems of others. The arahant can live for the sake of others because the arahant has no more self, is no longer obsessed, concerned with 'me,' the *arahant* can live for the sake and benefit of others. So the arahant's life is the most useful kind of life

because the arahant has accomplished the highest personal benefit and purpose, and then is also able to dedicate her or his life for the sake of others.

So in short, sati or mindfulness, is the servant of wisdom, and then when mindfulness serves wisdom, then wisdom can function in order to solve our problems.

The implied understanding of this question is that mindfulness and wisdom are only available in Buddhism. Is this understanding correct?

No, it's not correct. Outside of Buddhism, in other traditions and schools, there is mindfulness and there is understanding. But there, the mindfulness and understanding according to the other traditions – and whether it's correct or not, we cannot say, it's not for us to judge whether the mindfulness and understanding of other traditions is correct or not – all we can say is that there is both *sammā-sati* and *micchā-sati*, both right mindfulness and wrong mindfulness; there is *sammā-ditṭhi* and *micchā-ditṭhi*, both 'right view' and 'wrong view', and there is not only right wisdom but there is wrong understanding. And further there is the degree of mindfulness and wisdom, there can be a little bit of mindfulness or a lot, a little bit of wisdom or a lot. These things are not just a matter of Buddhism. In fact, just to live in this world, everyone needs mindfulness and wisdom. So even if we satisfy religious and spiritual matters, one needs mindfulness and wisdom just to live. If you totally lacked mindfulness and understanding you would have been dead long ago. But this ordinary mindfulness and wisdom – the kind all of us are born with, or that we learned from our parents or school – this isn't enough to solve our spiritual problems. It's good enough for physical survival but it's not enough to make an end of dukkha. And so this ordinary mindfulness and wisdom must be trained until it has the ability to end all dukkha.

And is it correct to think that genuine true wisdom and happiness can only be found in Buddhism?

In response to this, one needs to understand that the understanding of what *dukkha* is, and the understanding of the way to end dukkha, will depend on the different inclinations, experiences and understanding of people. In short, different people will have different understandings of what dukkha is, and about the way to make an end to dukkha. And so they will find ways to discover the end to dukkha according to their particular understanding of what dukkha is. So, depending on what certain people or each person or group considers to be the problem, the solution to the problem will be according to that, and will be within the context of their understanding of the problem. Now, in Buddhism, when we try to look at things from the most dhammic perspective possible... In Buddhism,

the way we look at it is that dukkha comes from attachment – that because of attachment to self, to ‘me,’ there is dukkha. And so then, that the way to end dukkha is to remove attachment, to eliminate attachment, so this is how we see the problem and its solution. So if we look at it from the most neutral dhammic perspective – if we really have a Dhamma perspective, it’s neutral, it’s unbiased, it’s natural – then we must ask, ‘What dukkha is there which is higher or more basic than the dukkha of attachment? What dukkha is there more significant than the dukkha of attachment?’, and then ‘What quenching or ending of dukkha is more complete and more total than the removal and quenching of attachment?’

Now please don’t use this in order to compare different schools, sects and religions. This is not at all our purpose. We’re not trying to compare because that would just lead to *attā* and *attaniya*. If we compare, then there will be just, well ‘I am like this, and my way is like this’ and this would just create more dukkha. Our goal is not to make any comparisons, our goal is simply to eliminate all dukkha, and therefore to eliminate, to quench all attachments, and from our understanding, the best way to do that is through the understanding of not self.

Now if they don’t have the wisdom or intelligence to understand this way of quenching dukkha, well then they won’t be able to apply it, they won’t be able to use it. If their understanding is that dukkha comes from heavenly beings, from angels or whatever, or that dukkha comes from God, well then they must solve their dukkha by praying or bribing or whatever, these heavenly beings or God to take away the dukkha. If that’s their understanding, then they must use the approach appropriate to that understanding, or even on a more crude level, if they think that dukkha comes from spirits and things, well then they must give offerings and bribes to the spirits so that the spirits will not create any dukkha for them. So one shouldn’t be asking which way is better, because that can’t be answered absolutely or unequivocally. One should just say which way is appropriate for whom, which way of quenching dukkha is appropriate for each person, which way of understanding is appropriate for our level of intelligence, for the degree that our mindfulness and wisdom has been developed.

Finally, we have used up two hours in responding to a number of questions and discussing quite difficult issues. So you have endured two hours of a number of difficult Dhamma points. But one thing we’d like to mention, that it is apparent from the questions that you have asked that your understanding of Dhamma is pretty good, that these questions show that you have understood a number of Dhamma points, that you have a pretty good understanding so far, and that if you keep studying, keep practicing then your understanding will develop and grow

even further. So we hope that you will carry on with what you have begun, your understanding is already quite good, and we hope that you will continue developing it until you are successful in solving all the problems in your life, until you can eliminate all dukkha from life.

And as you travel home, may you *travel without a traveler*.

So, that's the end of this talk

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Transcribed by François at Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage in March 2014

Audio file: 5125340911040.mp3

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