

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu on

Conserving the Inner Ecology

Back in the early years of Thailand's constitutional monarchy, Ajarn Buddhadasa explored the relationship between Democracy and Buddhism. In the 1970s when Communism was a hot issue, he introduced his ideas of Dhammic Socialism. He also tackled Freud, psychoanalysis, and modern psychology, and for decades was Thailand's leading advocate of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. He has criticized the development ideology since it first hit Thailand after World War II, has discussed the need to conserve the forests, and has inspired many monks and lay Buddhists to do so long before it was a movement in the West.

Through all of these discussions, common elements can be discerned: 1) He tackled the main social and intellectual issues of his day. 2) He argued convincingly that Buddhism has something important to say on these issues and had no reason to feel backwards regarding Western-style progress. 3) He felt that much of the discourse on these issues was tainted by a materialist bias and so tried to correct this error by pointing to a more fundamental reality — Dhamma. 4) By being one of the few Thai monks able and willing to discuss these things, as well as usually the most prominent and incisive, he lent his prestige in support of these causes.

In the following article, Ajarn Buddhadasa applies his Dhammic approach to ecological conservation. It should be noted that the original talks were given within the forest monastery that had been his home for 50 years. While the forests outside were being cleared to plant rubber, he preserved this oasis of forest.

INEB members and friends who are interested in ecology:

We are most delighted to have this chance to meet you here, for the sake of discussing and working for ecology.² It is especially appropriate to meet in the pre-dawn morning. There are certain reasons for this that I would like you to understand. The pre-dawn is an especially suitable time for thinking, discussing, and investigating things clearly because the mind is very clear and open at this time. By late morning, however, the teacup begins to fill up. Then, we go and mix some alcohol in with the tea and it really starts to boil. It overflows, making everything chaotic and confused. When our teacups overflow, we argue so loudly that it can be heard from a kilometer away. Now, our teacups have not yet filled to overflowing, the mind is still subtle and clear. When our teacups are not yet brimming, we are able to discuss, examine, and investigate things in a subtle and deep way because our minds are still calm and quiet. A passage in the Suttas states that "the mind which is gentle, flexible, and ready to work is easily led into vipassana." In the pre-dawn morning, the mind naturally has these qualities of gentleness, flexibility, and readiness. So this is a good time to discuss matters which are fundamental and systematic.

In terms of being open to new things, our minds are like fresh sheets of paper on which nothing has been written. The Lord Buddha was fully awakened at about this time of the day, just before dawn, and it would be a fair guess to assume that the great prophets of all the religions also awakened at this time of day, because this is the time when the mind is most easily in a state of calm and quiet. This is an appropriate time not only for receiving but also for giving to others, for sharing. This is the time of day when most flowers will bloom in order to display their beauty. In the same way, our minds can both open and blossom in the early morning. This is a time when the mind is most able to express itself in a proper way, with calmness, clarity, and precision.

So we should give due importance to this time; we should be willing to sacrifice our sleep in order to meet like this. It is unfortunate that nowhere in the world do conferences or meetings start at this time of day. A great opportunity is lost because this is the time of day when the tea has not begun to fill up the cup yet, and there are no alcoholic odors and vapors floating around.

Dhammadhatu: The Natural Essence Of Dhamma

Now we come to the topic on which I have been invited to speak: "Buddhists and Nature Conservation." Only genuine Buddhists can conserve nature on the deepest level, the mental level. When the mental nature has been conserved, the external physical nature can conserve itself. I will elaborate this is the essential point in this paper.

When we talk about this inner mental nature, we ought to use a different word, the word "dhammadhatu," the natural essence of Dhamma. When we talk about this inner nature, we mean a fundamental essence or element of Dhamma. When this can be preserved within, the external nature can certainly preserve itself. When this inner nature or dhammadhatu is conserved, there is nothing that will cause selfishness or egoism. It knows that nothing is worth clinging to as being "self," is free of notions like "me" and "mine," and is therefore unselfish. When there is no selfishness, there is nothing that will go out and destroy the external nature. When nothing is trying to destroy this physical nature, it is quite able to protect itself. To emphasize preserving merely the physical nature isn't quite up to the honor of being a Buddhist; it's rather much child's play. Instead, may all Buddhists be able to conserve this inner nature or dhammadhatu. That is truly appropriate and honorable for followers of the Lord Buddha. And the many problems will end, so that things go smoothly.

The Buddhist strives to penetrate deeply into this inner nature, this mental or spiritual nature that is within each of us, the nature which is the law of nature, the source of everything. Specifically, the Buddhist tries to realize the dhammadhatu that is inherent within all of us, within all of nature. Another name for this is "the law of idappaccayata," the fact that everything depends upon and is inter-connected with other things. If we realize this nature, selfishness is impossible. If the law of idappaccayata is clear in the mind there is no way that it can produce selfishness, there is no chance of feeling "self" and "selfish." When we have preserved this inner nature, we can easily preserve the outer nature.

We need to understand these two kinds of nature: the nature within, which is the mind; and the external nature, the various phenomena arising in the world around us. The law of idappaccayata is inherent within both. Further, observe which aspect of nature has power over and can control the other. If we understand this properly, then we can manage things so that all of nature is taken care of properly.

The Buddha referred to this inner nature as "dhammadhatu," the dhatu (element or essence) of Dhamma (nature). Sometimes he simply called it "dhatu." This dhatu is the source and basis for Dhamma, for all of nature. He proclaimed that "Whether a Tathagata has appeared yet or not, the dhammadhatu exists absolutely and naturally."

The Lord Buddha further specified that this dhammadhatu is idappaccayata. Idappaccayata is the fundamental fact that all things happen because of and through causes and conditions. This universal conditionality is called "idappaccayata."

In other words, nothing occurs, exists, changes, or dies by itself. Nothing happens except through various causes and conditions. All change takes place through causes and conditions. Even death and destruction require causes and conditions, either the presence of ones that kill and destroy, or the absence of those that support. Further, the causes and conditions of one thing are caused and conditioned by others. These interactions of conditionality extend through the universe – mental and physical – connecting everything in a vast web of inter-dependence, inter-relationship, inter-connectedness, inter-wovenness. So supreme is this natural fact that we can call it "the law of nature" or "God." Nothing is more powerful or awesome than this most fundamental and ever-present Truth.

Four Aspects Of Nature

Let us consider more carefully what we mean by the word "nature." Although this English term does not quite fit our Buddhist term (dhammajati), it will serve once we have explained sufficiently. Nature (dhammajati) is all things that are born naturally, ordinarily, out of the natural order of things, that is, from Dhamma. Everything arising out of Dhamma, everything born from Dhamma, is what we mean by "nature." This is what is absolute and has the highest power in itself. Nature has at least four fundamental aspects. If we don't understand them, it is useless to speak of "preserving nature." So please examine these four fundamental aspects of nature:

nature itself;
the law of nature;
the duty that human beings must carry out towards nature;

and the result that comes with performing this duty according to the law of nature.

Ajarn Buddhadasa was always careful about terminology and felt that sloppy use of words was an important obstacle to the understanding of Dhamma. He put great effort into explaining key Pali terms, none of them more important than "Dhamma." Here he gives his standard explanation of Dhamma's most important dimensions. Although not quite identical with the four noble truths, it is worth comparing.

To start with, let's consider ourselves. Each human being includes the body of nature, as expressed and found in our own bodies. In us there is the basic dhammic law of nature that regulates everything. Everything in these bodies consequently carries on according to the law of nature. When we have our natural duty, we practice that duty in order to maintain the correctness of nature. Depending on how we perform that duty, we experience its results or fruits: happiness, dukkha, satisfaction, dissatisfaction. Within ourselves, within just these physical bodies, we have all four meanings of nature.

In one human being, we can find all four aspects of nature. Throughout the entire world, we can find all four meanings of nature. And in the universe, including all the worlds together, we can see the body of nature, the law of nature, the duty of nature, and the result of nature. Please give great attention to these four dimensions of nature. If we don't understand nature thoroughly, if we don't understand all four of its aspects, we will be wasting our time talking about preserving nature. It's impossible; we won't know what we are talking about

If we understand all aspects of nature and conserve the law of nature within ourselves, it will then be impossible for selfishness and egoism to arise. When there is no ego or selfishness, there is nothing that will destroy nature, nothing that will exploit and abuse nature. Then the external, physical aspect of nature will be able to conserve itself automatically. Therefore, please be very interested in this inner nature. When there is no selfishness, we can preserve the purity and beauty of nature. Without selfishness, this world will be naturally pure and beautiful.

Selfishness Has Been Making a Mess for Many Years

Selfishness has already appeared in the world and it has been wreaking havoc for a long time. Humanity has been exploiting and destroying nature for ages. Even in the ancient Pali texts we can find passages like the one that tells of a man who came across a tree full of ripe fruit but wasn't able to climb the tree and pick the fruit. So he got an ax to chop down the entire tree. He then carried away as much fruit as he could, but left most of it behind to rot. This kind of selfishness is nothing new. It even happens here.

Over fifty years ago, while I was looking for a place to relocate Suan Mokkh, I came across a sadaw tree not too far behind where we are now.³ This sadaw tree had been cut down. When I inquired, I learned that somebody had killed it just to take away one load of its large, long pods. This is how bad things had become, and it's far worse nowadays.

In recent decades such selfishness aided by modern technology has destroyed whole forests merely to extract certain marketable kinds of wood, while leaving much of the vegetation to rot or be burned. The folly of this has become only too apparent in the fires devastating huge swathes of Indonesia and polluting the air of much of Southeast Asia even as we meet here. Not only forests are destroyed. The communities and cultures of both indigenous peoples and politically marginalized peasants who once lived in harmony with the forests have also been destroyed. Not least of all, the soul of society has been destroyed making of us superhumanly powerful inhumans.

Please understand that if we protect the inner nature, the outer nature will be taken care of by itself. If there is mental and spiritual correctness, physical things will naturally be correct by themselves. The outer correctness in return has a beneficial effect on the mind. However, if the external nature is incorrect, this will have a negative effect, a very negative influence, on the inner nature. If both are in error, if both are going wrong, it will lead to extremely dangerous consequences. There will be death and destruction all around, a death worse than death.

This is the reason that Buddhists work to conserve the inner nature, this dhammadhatu. When the source is preserved, it automatically takes care of the rest. The Buddhist does not blindly try to change results. The Buddhist knows that we must deal with the causes and sources of things.

This point contains Ajarn Buddhadasa's critique of much activism. When we focus on results (what has already happened) and changing them, we often fail to look more deeply into their causes, especially moral and spiritual causes. Even worse, unmindful activism can become an escape from facing the deeper moral, cultural, and spiritual issues. The opposite failing takes place in narrow academism, when academics divorce their knowledge from moral and spiritual responsibility by hiding in illusions of objectivity, non-partiality, and so on.

The Meaning & Motivation of Conservation

Before going further, we should consider the word *anurak* (conserve, preserve, protect). There are two kinds of preservation or conservation. One is like sleep-walking, is without mindfulness and intelligence, and consists mainly of getting all excited, or angry, and jumping on band-wagons. This kind of conservation isn't correct and does not bring lasting and profound benefits.

It is important that our conservation efforts be beneficial, correct, and genuine. This raises the question of what kind of power or authority is to be used for the sake of conservation. The power which directly forces people to do our will is one kind of authority. Yet there is also the power of creating a proper understanding of reality such that we see our duty clearly and carry it out willingly. There are these two kinds of power.

Which sort of power will we use? This question is important for practicing Buddhists, especially engaged buddhists, who seldom have much, if any, worldly power. We cannot depend on coercive state and market forces to bring about conservation. Rather, we must cultivate a moral and spiritual authority from within our own integrity and unselfish example, as Ajarn Buddhadasa further explains.

In one of King Asoka's pillar edicts, we can read a decree that commanded everyone to plant various kinds of trees, specifying which trees were to be planted in which villages and the amount to be planted. Some were to be planted for their fruit and others for their beauty. Mangoes were also mentioned. When I went to India thirty years ago, I was surprised to see mango trees everywhere and I wondered why there were more of them than any other kind of tree. I suppose they were the result of King Asoka's edict that commanded everyone to plant mango trees.

In the Pali scriptures, we also find references to various kinds of forested parks. It seems that nature parks were everywhere in ancient India. Most of the aristocracy and many of the wealthy merchants had their private or family parks and preserves. This is eminently reasonable, for it induced correct thinking. Rather than using coercive power, correct thinking leads people to conserve nature. The result was many parks. The early Sangha made use of these parks. The royals and rich merchants bought them from each other in order to offer them to the Sangha. In fact, the Buddha passed into parinibbana in a park owned by some of the local aristocracy.

What was the motivation behind these parks? If one reflects on this carefully enough, the answer becomes apparent. The correct understanding that comes from preserving the inner nature, from maintaining the right kind of feeling in the heart, prevented selfishness. All these parks were born out of unselfishness. Nobody destroyed them because they conserved the inner nature. These parks sprouted everywhere in ancient India because there was not enough selfishness to prevent or destroy them. Conservation of the dhammadhatu was the motivation for these parks.

When Buddhists remember that the Buddha was born under and among trees, awakened while sitting under a tree, taught in the outdoors sitting among trees and, in the end, passed away into parinibbana beneath some trees, it is impossible not to love trees and not to want to conserve them. This too comes from maintaining a correct inner nature, and so it is natural to preserve the outer nature. In this way it isn't very difficult to conserve the external physical nature.

Dhammic Ecology

In other words, Dhamma is the ecology of the mind. This is how nature has arranged things, and it has always been like this, in a most natural way. The mind with Dhamma has a natural spiritual ecology because it is fresh, beautiful, quiet, and joyful.⁴ This is most natural. That the mind is fresh means it isn't dried up or parched. Its beauty is Dhammic, not sensual or from painting colors. It is calm and peaceful because nothing disturbs it. It contains a deep spiritual solitude, so that nothing can disturb or trouble it. Its joy is cool. The only joy that lives up to its name must

be cool, not the hot happiness that is so popular in the world, but a cool joyfulness. If none of the defilements like greed, anger, fear, worry, and delusion arise, there is this perfect natural ecology of the Dhammic mind. But as soon as the defilements occur, the mind's natural ecology is destroyed instantly. These defilements are like evil spirits or demons that destroy the mind's natural state.

Our physical bodies have a similar condition when nothing disturbs them; they have a natural material ecology. When no "evil spirits" or "demons" disturb the natural state of peace, the result is most satisfying. But now something is bothering it. Who? Human beings, of course! Unaware that we are disturbing nature. As the defilements possess us, we destroy the nature which was doing fine without us. Once I heard the words, "God creates and human beings destroy." This is how it has always been. God said it was good but humanity has continually destroyed that creation. In other words, nature managed fine until we came along to destroy everything with our selfishness. As soon as the defilements appear, they destroy. That is their nature.

Craving

In this context, we can specify the defilement called "craving," the craving that destroys the inner ecology of the mind and then expresses itself outward in destroying the physical ecology. This thing called "craving" must be understood well. Craving always means the foolish desire that arises out of ignorance (avijja), out of not understanding things as they actually are. Unfortunately, whenever Buddhists speak of saṅsara, most of them teach that every kind of desire is craving.

This is incorrect. Only that which desires stupidly is properly called "craving." If it wants intelligently, it is called "sankappa," (aspiration or aim), which we can call "wise want." There is an important distinction here that should never be confused. Craving is always ignorant, no matter how we translate it into English. If, however, the desire is wise, it should be called "aspiration" or "wise aim."

Craving destroys both the inner-mental and outer-physical ecologies. Here it may be useful to distinguish three kinds of ecology: the physical, the mental, and the spiritual. Craving destroys all three. Even the first level, the material ecology is now being decimated by humanity's craving, by this foolish, blind desire. To the degree that there is craving, to that degree the ecology is destroyed. When craving reaches the level of "industry," it destroys the ecology industriously, as we see in the world today. The first level is the physical or material. Our bodies are material and are connected with material things, making up the "physical system." Craving creates many difficulties for it.

The second level is the "mental system," the natural level of mind that doesn't deal with the higher spiritual realities, with the realm of wisdom. It is the non-physical part of us that remains primarily concerned with physical things like the needs and instincts of our bodies. When no craving disturbs or possesses the mind, it is naturally beautiful and performs its duty of creating new things. The basic meaning of the word "citta" or "mind" is the thinking that creates new things. Another aspect of its meaning is "exquisite." The natural activity of the mind, when craving doesn't interfere, is exquisite and beautiful. When dirty craving doesn't come into play, the mind functions correctly and exquisitely.

The third level is the "spiritual system," the mindfulness-wisdom faculty which is the higher aspect of mind. This spiritual level is that of awareness and understanding; it encompasses views, perspectives, beliefs, theories, and ideals. If this system is correct, it is miraculous. On the highest level, it reaches right understanding (samma-ditthi) and is able to eliminate craving in all its forms. Now, however, craving disturbs, distorts, and destroys it. Even this highest spiritual level is disturbed by craving.

Craving has many dimensions. In addition to the three levels on which it operates, we can further distinguish how it disturbs the mind in three basic directions or ways. There is the desire to get, have, possess, and enjoy material things. There is the desire to be this, to be that, to become somebody or something. And there is the desire to not be, to no longer exist, to be annihilated, to become nothing. Thus craving has many ways to disturb the mind and destroy its natural ecology.

Some ecological examples of the three classic kinds of craving are 1) craving for the beauty of rare plants, the tastes of exotic fish, and the sexiness of fur coats; 2) craving to be in positions of power and control over natural resources, to harness the power of rivers with dams; and to be a stockholder in gold mines, paper mills, and bio-tech companies;

and 3) craving to get rid of "weeds" from agricultural plots and golf courses, to slap mosquitoes, to redirect the natural courses of streams and rivers, and to avoid all responsibility for ecological disasters.

Physical Destruction

Craving destroys the first system, the physical, through its foolish and excessive desire. It goes too far, beyond what is appropriate, and becomes dangerous. Now homes are cluttered with things that nobody needs. Behind our homes the junk of unnecessary desires has piled up. This is both a problem and a burden. Further, it leads to competition over material goods and results in conflict and destruction. It destroys material peace and the physical ecology. Why not survey your homes to see how many totally unnecessary things there are? And how many genuinely necessary things are there? Some homes are absolutely cluttered with unnecessary luxuries and junk.

I heard on the radio recently that a foreign couple spent \$1000 to buy a pair of dove cages, one for the wife and one for the husband. They bought the best quality cages made in the South. When asked why they spent so much money on dove cages, they replied that they would put light bulbs inside to make some fancy lampshades. Just more unnecessary stuff to clutter their house? This is the way people do things nowadays. How long will we go on destroying what is correct and sufficient on its own?

Every newspaper is full of advertisements for all kinds of consumer goods. I have studied these newspapers very carefully and searched diligently till I got dizzy looking for something worth buying. Still, after all these years, I have never seen anything advertised in the newspaper that I actually need to buy. They advertise until people think they must buy. The industrial mentality produces all these things, and so they must be advertised everywhere. In our industrial world, the newspapers stir up all kinds of desires. Thus, the industrial mentality and system destroy the balance, sufficiency, and correctness of the ecologies of our homes. It has invaded our very homes.

Mental Destruction

Craving also disturbs the second system, the purely mental aspect of life. It becomes what we call "nivarana," the hindrances that disturb and pester the mind. These hindrances don't kill us or anything quite so nasty, but they keep us constantly off balance and annoyed. They are like gnats that buzz around in our face and eyes. While they cannot kill us, they can annoy us beyond measure. When we can endure it no more, the mental system is disrupted.

The first kind of hindrance is any craving that has taken a sensual or sexual form. It's a sexy mood that keeps circulating around sensual pleasures. Just the feeling of sensuousness itself, without any action based on it, disturbs the mind beyond its strength. Going in the opposite direction is another kind of craving, the hindrance of aversion, ill will, resentment. It is connected with anger and hatred, although not yet developed on their scale. Next is the hindrance of mental dullness, sluggishness, indolence, sloth. Here the mind is depressed, flat, dull, and sluggish. On the flip-side is mental excitement, agitation, dispersion, when the mind bubbles and bounces with excessive energy that it cannot control. Finally, there is doubt, uncertainty, or hesitation about what is going on in one's life. It can doubt anything. These moods of sensual desire, aversion, dullness, distraction, and uncertainty regularly destroy the mind's ecology. These hindrances arise all the time, but most people don't recognize or pay any attention to them. Yet they harm the mental ecology throughout each day.

The positively directed hindrance of sensuous desire and the negatively aimed hindrance of aversion don't bother the mind nearly as much as the hindrances of delusion and foolishness. The foolishness of positiveness and negativity disturbs the mind much more. Of all of these, the worst is hesitancy and doubt. Because the mind begins to wonder, it doubts and hesitates. It is always hesitating, never sure of itself, bothered by uncertainty about what is safe, about what to do, about what is correct, about the purpose of life and how we should live. This hesitancy and uncertainty is extremely dangerous for the mind's ecology, but it has been going on for so long and people are so familiar with it, that they don't even recognize it. They accept it as normal and natural, so most people have no clue how disturbed their minds are by this hesitancy, uncertainty, and doubt. And so the ordinary peace of the mind is hassled away.

You ought to observe how the mind's ecology is rotted away by these mental hindrances. Conscious uncertainty and doubt aren't so bad because they can be cut off and cleared aside fairly easily. However, there is a subconscious hesitancy and doubt of which most people are not even aware. It's there almost all of the time and disturbs them

unawares. There are times when we feel something is wrong, when we aren't comfortable and at peace with ourselves, and wonder why we don't feel so good, why something is not quite right. The semiconscious or subconscious doubt pesters the mind obscenely. It lies in the pits of the mind and rankles. To be totally free of such doubt is to be Arahant, the perfected human life that is beyond all self-centered emotions. You should know of this highest potential in our lives: the Arahant who has ended all doubt and uncertainty.

When an ordinary person deposits money in the bank, they usually cannot help but worry about what will happen to it. What if the bank goes bankrupt? What must we do to be safe? How to protect our investment? What if this? What if that? Can you imagine all the worries, doubts, and uncertainties fermenting subconsciously or semiconsciously? Yet again, the mental ecology is destroyed.

These doubts, uncertainties, and hesitancies bring fear. Whenever fear appears, it wipes out the mind's natural peace and happiness. The more the world progresses materially, the more causes of fear there are. It becomes a world of fear. Nobody can find any peace of mind. This fear destroys the mind's ecology much more than anything else, more than bodily or physical causes.

Spiritual Destruction

Now we come to the third or "spiritual system." This is the domain of mindfulness and wisdom, which requires samma-ditthi, that is, knowledge, understanding, beliefs, and views that are correctly in line with reality. Craving also corrupts this system. Without samma-ditthi or spiritual correctness, other dimensions of correctness are corrupted. Society, however, is not yet able to solve this problem. Let me be specific here: education as it exists in the world today is not enough to create samma-ditthi. So this third level of happiness is lost also, and the spiritual ecology has no chance of being healthy or genuinely spiritual. It's disturbed and twisted by desire, which in turn makes it impossible for the other levels of ecology to be healthy and natural.

In short, the physical ecology isn't correct, the mental ecology isn't correct, and the spiritual ecology isn't correct. None of the three levels are correct. In that case, what is left? What hope is there for ecology when not one of the three levels is correct?

The western scientific tradition has produced a phrase that is most special, profound, and timeless, namely, "survival of the fittest." This phrase expresses the Dhamma truth that whatever is truly fit and appropriate will survive, while anything that is unfit or unsuitable will not survive. In saying this, we must be very careful to understand what is meant by "fit," "unsuitable," or "appropriate." Here, it means to be correct. Correct in what sense or in terms of what? Correct in terms of the law of idappaccayata, if it is to be truly fitting and appropriate. "Survival of the fittest" means that only those natures which are correct according to the natural law of conditionality, of interdependence and inter-relatedness, will be able to survive. In other words, "the fittest" means the middle way of Buddhism. The middle way or the noble eightfold path makes Buddhism the pinnacle of science, the most fitting way to live in order to survive on all levels.

Beyond Positive & Negative

The fittest, as we understand it here, is neither positive nor negative. Nowadays, the entire world has gone crazy over the positive. Everyone is so entranced and intoxicated with the positive that there is no fitness suitable for survival. Don't indulge in the positive, don't indulge in the negative, or you will never discover the middle way. Today we depend on industry to cater to this positive insanity of ours, and this industry is destroying our world. If we insist on indulging in the positive, in this material progress, it will only lead to destruction. Our attachment to the positive just makes things worse. It is neither fit nor correct nor balanced. This needs to be considered quite carefully so that people recover their spiritual fitness and are no more deluded by the positive or the industry that creates so much bait for defilement.

The Dhamma has arranged everything quite well already, in its natural ecology, but we don't appreciate this wonderful fact at all. Instead, we disparage nature, we look down on it, we have no respect for it. We have tried to re-do everything in our own way, according to our own ignorance, craving, and selfishness, thus ruining the natural ecology. In this we find neither the correctness nor the fitness needed to conserve the natural order of nature.

Allow me to take a little time to tell you a story which illustrates this point. In Chumporn, the neighboring province to the north, one of my cousins used to raise a kind of monkey which is ideal for collecting coconuts from the palm trees. They are black with red faces and rumps, short tails, and a white patch on the throat. My cousin trained them to sleep on little platforms attached to the palm trees. These platforms, however, had no roofs, exposing the monkeys to the elements. So I asked him, "why are you so cruel to the monkeys, just giving them these platforms to sleep on without roofs to protect them from the rain and wind?" My cousin laughing at me for not knowing any better and replied, "I once made roofs for them, but they just climbed up and slept on those roofs whether it was raining or not." This story expresses the fitness of nature. We needn't interfere by dragging in our positive feelings and attachments, messing up the natural correctness. Learn to observe the natural ways of things.

We find more stories of this kind in our Buddhist Jataka tales. In one story, the Bodhisatva, who represents everyone on the path of Buddhahood, was a tree spirit. A monkey and a bird lived in this particular tree. One day the bird laughed at the monkey for not having a house, saying "why don't you build a nest like I do? We birds have such nice, comfortable nests to live in." The monkey replied, "you're crazy, we monkeys don't need such ridiculous things." The bird laughed at the monkey who got angry and ripped the bird's nest to bits. So the bird lost its nest because of its foolish tongue. It tried to teach technology to the monkey, but the monkey would have none of it. The Bodhisatva as tree spirit had a good laugh at this episode of the sassy bird teaching technology to a monkey. A wiser being would consider what is correct for the monkey and what is appropriate in this situation. Finally, we may be able to discover what is correct for human beings. For example, is it right that we have filled the world with concrete and steel buildings?

The point is not that we are monkeys and should live like them. Human beings have more developed nervous systems and minds that distinguish us from all other animals. Tragically, we have used these minds to lose track of our origins and what truly sustains us. Does the ideology of material progress sustain us? Do our massive constructions really protect us? Might it be that they alienate us from the spiritual nature that truly sustains and nourishes us?

I have heard that Mahatma Gandhi said we ought to live in villages rather than in cities, let alone modern megacities. If we lived in villages, there wouldn't be many ecological problems. But we have gone far beyond the village stage. Who is willing to go back to the village way of life? The system of towns, cities, and metropolises has taken over. Can we actually go back to village life these days? Now we face the immense ecological dilemmas created by city life. We abandoned village life long ago and so must be willing to confront the urban ecological disasters of our own making. I believe that no matter what happens we can never abandon nature's own system. It's time to turn around and rediscover the system of nature that in itself is correct, sufficient, and in line with the law of conditionality. We can take the example of the monkey and the bird as a metaphor to help us find the natural ecology within urban systems. There ought to be a way to harmonize our cities with natural law.

Cooperation & External Conservation

Another big question concerns where we will get the power and authority to make people cooperate in arranging ecological systems correctly. In these democratic times, where will we find the power to return the ecology to a proper, correct, and healthy state? Some power is necessary. Ordinary, worldly people are full of desires and selfishness. If they aren't forced into it they won't bother. It's silly, but they must be forced even to help themselves! How pitiful that they won't even help themselves. Thus, the question of authority or power is crucial. When we don't have the power of weapons, when we don't have armies to force people to do what is right, we must depend on the power of understanding. We must get together as you are doing here at this conference and discuss matters until there is harmony among us. We must search for the power of mutual understanding, which can then be used to do what is needed. So please accept my blessings and support for your efforts to develop mutual understanding and to carry it out.

In the second talk, Ajarn Buddhadasa gave some examples of benevolent use of authority on behalf of ecology from the reign of King Asoka and from local history. His point was to show that monarchies and authoritarian regimes are not all bad, and can be less violent than the so-called "democracy" of today. If democracy is not able to solve some problems in certain situations, a more authoritarian approach might be considered.

Nonetheless, let's put aside the idea of using political authority and dictatorial powers. Instead we would like to discuss a system of living together as comrades in birth, aging, illness, and death. As human beings, we are all friends in birth, aging, illness, and death; we all share these basic realities and experiences of dukkha. With this attitude, we can develop a world that is beautiful and peaceful. When the employees and management of the Oriental Hotel, B. Grimm & Co., and other companies from Bangkok who have been coming here on retreats ask for Dhamma talks, the basic principle that we try to explain is for them to see everyone as comrades in birth, aging, illness, and death. Even the boss should be considered as just another comrade in birth, aging, illness, and death with whom we work in a cooperative, to build a world that is full of love, compassion, and peace. Our salaries need not be taken as wages or payment for services rendered, but as money the cooperative provides to cover living expenses. We needn't speak of "boss" and "employee," just a cooperative among comrades in birth, aging, illness, and death. We can create a wonderful ecology if we cooperate as true comrades in birth, aging, illness, and death. If we cling, however, to a system of employers and employees, capitalists and workers, we will go on arguing endlessly. Where will we find the time to deal with ecology? Why not just stop! No employers and no employees, no capitalists and no workers, only comrades sharing the realities of birth, aging, illness, and death. An enormous cooperative in which we all help each other to make a peaceful, just, and beautiful world. The way we ought to think, without worrying about what the employers think, is: "I'm not anybody's employee, but will be everybody's friend in building a beautiful world."

We must honor and worship the cooperative system. Take a good look. The entire cosmos is a cooperative system. The sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars are a giant cooperative. They are all inter-connected and inter-related in order to exist. In the same world, everything co-exists as a cooperative. Humans and animals and trees and the earth are integrated as a cooperative. The organs of our own bodies – feet, legs, hands, arms, eyes, nose, lungs, kidneys – function as a cooperative in order to survive. Let's bring back the cooperative in the form of comrades sharing birth, aging, illness, and death. Then we will have plenty of time to create the best ecology.

These birds and trees all around us form a cooperative. I watch each day as the birds eat the caterpillars that feed off the leaves of the trees: hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands of caterpillars. Without the birds these trees wouldn't last. This is an example of the mutual help in a cooperative system. Please ponder the essence and meaning of "cooperative," for we must live cooperatively. Without cooperatives, we would all die.

When I first came to live here, the forest in this part of the monastery was still wild and we had to endure great difficulties. At night, it wasn't possible to walk around as you are able to do nowadays, for a very large and ferocious kind of termite came out at night. They are about a centimeter long and when they bite blood flows from each wound. It was impossible to walk around after dark without getting bitten by them; they crawled back into their holes at dawn. There are still some around, but because of the chickens there isn't a problem anymore. This is our cooperative at Suan Mokkh; we depend on the chickens. Now we can walk around at night without being attacked by termites. If you see a very large termite mound about 3 or 4 meters high and many meters across, that's where they live. But the termites don't dare come out these days, except when no chickens are around.

The main enemy of cooperatives is selfishness. In Thailand, there have been many attempts to develop cooperatives, and most of them have failed due to the selfishness of the members themselves. The same is true around the world. Selfishness destroys cooperatives because it is the enemy of camaraderie based in birth, aging, illness, and death. Where there is selfishness there is not really any genuine friendship. We must combat selfishness and then we will have an abundance of friends in birth, aging, illness, and death. Only this, and not mutual greed, can be a proper foundation for cooperatives, otherwise selfishness will destroy the cooperative. For this, non-selfishness or unselfishness is good enough. It may be too much to expect selflessness. We would all be Arahant, perfected, awakened beings. Unselfishness is good enough for now. So hurry up with it. Don't be selfish and you will create associations, communities, neighborhoods, and a society of friends in birth, aging, illness, and death. Then solving ecological problems will be a trivial matter.

Our world is one of selfishness, and selfishness has taken over the world. All its problems are caused by selfishness, not just the ecological problems. So we must build more prisons, hire more police, build more mental hospitals, and open more drug rehabilitation programs, until there is no money left. This is how it is with selfishness, so why not get rid of it?

Forgive us for saying so, we don't mean to be coarse or crude, but we must mention that the United Nations Organization has not been able to solve any of the world's problems. This is because the UN, quite unfortunately, is

merely a meeting place for arguing among selfish people. This makes it impossible to solve ecological and other problems. Therefore, in place of UNO, we suggest URO or United Religions Organization. Then we can solve all those problems. Here, we don't mean the false religions of selfishness that compete for converts, or that will argue over whose belief system or mysteries or ceremonies are best. If we are to have both a UNO and a URO, the URO should supervise the UNO. If only one is possible, we will take URO, meaning a genuine organization of people dedicated to unselfishness, mutual understanding, and love in this world.

We must hasten to create correct understanding amongst the religions. All religions were originally founded with the intention of eliminating human selfishness. This is the core of every religion, and the basis on which they can cooperate. If we do this, they will become one world religion of unselfishness. Each religion may retain its own different methods and customs, but all will be united by unselfishness. That's when URO will be possible.

It is rather sad, or pitiful, that some religions, as well as some religious officials and leaders, are themselves selfish. This is the most sorry thing in the world — selfish religion — because it corrupts and betrays the very purpose of religion. We need to re-establish our motivations and develop good understanding among the religions, in order to banish selfishness from the world. Then ecological problems will disappear.

We will reconcile and surrender ourselves to God, to Nature. Reconciliation is to sacrifice all selfishness. To be selfish is to rebel against God and Nature, to be the enemy of Nature and God. So let's end selfishness and reconcile ourselves with God, with the law of nature, with the law of idappaccayata. Then all the problems will disappear.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to express my joy and blessing that you have come here to meet for such a commendable purpose as lessening the ecological crises of the world. I am delighted that your time and effort is used in such a meritorious way. Please look carefully to see the source, the real origin of these problems, so that we are able to solve them. Realize that they all come from selfishness. We have come here to discuss and share about how to remove selfishness. In doing so, we will end up with mutual good understanding and love for each other. We will be true comrades in birth, aging, illness, and death. We will have a new kind of political and social system called "Dhammic Socialism." This will solve our problems.

One last thing, if you don't mind. If you have any more of these meetings, please have them in the early morning so that your tea cups do not overflow. Then you can hear what each other is saying.

Notes

1 Peter Gyallay-Pap has requested that I contribute an introduction and occasional comments for this paper. These are formatted differently than the main text – italicized and flushed right – to distinguish my comments from those of Ajarn Buddhadasa.

2 This paper combines two talks given by Ajarn Buddhadasa in early March 1990. The first was given on the 4th, sponsored by the Komol Kimthong Foundation and Pacarayasarn Journal. The second was given three days later on behalf of the 2nd annual conference of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). Certain redundant and unnecessary passages have been left out of this version. (A more complete text will be available later.)

3 Sadaw is a leguminous tree whose pods and large seeds are a popular vegetable in southern Thailand.

4 In Thai these four words begin with an "s"; however, the alliteration is lost in English.

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Suan Mokkhabalarama

3 November 1997

The Prison of Life

(from a lecture given to foreign meditators on
10 February 2531 (1988) at Suan Mokkhabalarama.)

Today, we'll talk about the thing called "prison." This should help us to understand the thing called "life" better. Then, we'll know Dhamma better, which will help us to live life without dukkha (dissatisfaction, pain, stress, suffering). So today we'll talk about the thing called "prison." Please prepare your minds to listen carefully.

Wherever the conditions and signs of prison exist, right there is dukkha. You should observe that all the forms and types of dukkha have a quality of prison about them. Being captured, incarcerated, enchained, and put through difficulties and hassles, are characteristics of dukkha. If you understand this, then you will understand more clearly the meaning of what we call "upadana" (clinging, attachment). Wherever there is upadana, right there is a prison. This thing "upadana" itself brings about the conditions of imprisonment.

Wherever there is upadana, right there is bondage. The bondage may be positive or negative; both are equally binding. By regarding things and clinging to them as "I" or "mine," bondage occurs. When bound to something, we get stuck in it, just like being stuck in prison.

All of the Dhamma principles of Buddhism can be summarized: upadana is the cause of dukkha; dukkha is born out of

upadana. We all must understand this matter of upadana well. To make it easy to understand, we must see it clearly as being just like a prison -- a mental prison, a spiritual prison. We come to study Dhamma and develop samadhi (mental stability and calm) and vipassana (insight) in order to destroy upadana. Or, if we speak metaphorically, we study Dhamma and develop the mind in order to destroy the prison that now traps us.

We're speaking about a mental or spiritual prison, but it has the same meaning as a concrete prison. It's just like the physical prisons that people are caught in everywhere, but now we're speaking of a purely spiritual prison. This prison's a bit odd, or extraordinary, in that we can't see its substance with our eyes. What's even more extraordinary is that people volunteer to get locked up in this prison. People are actually delighted to go and get locked up in spiritual prison. This is a very queer aspect of the spiritual prison.

Freedom is Salvation from Prison

You must recall the words "salvation" or "liberation" that are used in all religions. The final goal of all religions is salvation, or emancipation, or whatever word is most suitable in each language. But all these words have the same meaning -- getting saved. All religions teach salvation. Yet, from what are we saved? We are saved from spiritual prison. The thing that all of you want and need even right at this moment is the thing called "freedom" or "liberty,"

which is, simply, escape from prison. Whether a physical, material prison or a mental, spiritual prison, the meaning is the same. In all cases, we want freedom.

Those who lack wisdom can see and fear only the physical, material prisons. But those who have the wisdom (pañña) to look more deeply will see how much more terrifying and dangerous the spiritual prison is. Really, we can see that hardly anybody is locked up in the ordinary jails, while everyone in the world is caught in the spiritual prison. For instance, every one of you sitting here is free of the ordinary prison, but you all are incarcerated in the spiritual prison. That which drives us to be interested in Dhamma, to come to study Dhamma, to practice mental development, is the oppression and force of being caught in this spiritual prison. Whether you feel it or not isn't important. It forces us, no matter what, to struggle and search for a way out of spiritual imprisonment. Nonetheless, it's forcing all of you, whether you realize it or not, to find spiritual freedom. So you come looking here and other such places.

Although that which imprisons us is only one thing, namely, upadana all by itself, this prison takes on many different forms. There are dozens of styles and kinds of prison. If we take the time to study every type of prison, it will help us to understand this phenomenon much better. Then we will understand upadana better, and we also will better understand tanha (craving) and kilesa (defilements of mind) which, according to the Buddhist teaching, cause dukkha. We will understand the issue of dukkha if we understand the issue of prison clearly and thoroughly.

I'd like to advise that you use this word "upadana" instead of "attachment" or any other English translation. Those English words are constantly being misunderstood. You may not understand it fully at this time, but try to use this word upadana to accustom your mouth, your mind, and your feelings to it.

We must realize that the heart of Buddhism is to wipe out upadana. The heart of Buddhism is that which gets rid of upadana, or cut it out. Then there is no prison, and then there is no dukkha.

You must take the meaning of the English words attachment, grasping, and clinging, then combine them to get the meaning of "upadana." It's better for us to use the word upadana. Its meaning is broader and it will enable us to look into this matter more deeply and extensively.

The Single Essence of Buddhism

It may be just one simple word, but upadana is the most important thing. The heart of Buddhism is just to uproot or cut out this upadana. Then dukkha will be finished. Please understand that this is the heart of all Buddhism, it is found in every sect and school. Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, whatever kind of Buddhism you like, they're different only in name or in the external ceremonies and practices. But inside it's all the same thing: the cutting off of upadana.

Don't be sad, don't be disappointed or anxious, don't make trouble for yourself thinking that you haven't been able to study all the schools of Buddhism. Don't worry if you haven't been able to study Buddhism in Tibet, in Sri Lanka, in Burma, in China, or anywhere. That's a waste of time. There is just a single essence or heart of it all, namely, to eliminate upadana. The labels Theravada, Mahayana, Zen, Tibetan, and Chinese reflect only the outer covers of what seems to be different kinds of Buddhism. If there are any differences they are merely surface or superficial ones, just a bunch of accumulated rites and rituals. The true heart of the matter, the heart of all Buddhism, is the same everywhere: the uprooting and cutting out of upadana.

So just study this one thing. Don't waste time being sad or thinking that you haven't studied all the different kinds of Buddhism. Study this single matter of the cutting off of upadana, that is enough.

If you really want to know Mahayana Buddhism like an expert, then you'll have to go and learn Sanskrit. You can spend almost your entire life trying to learn Sanskrit and still not really know anything. Or if you want to know Zen well, then you have to learn Chinese. Spend your whole life learning Chinese and in the end you still won't know Zen. To know Vajrayana, the Buddhism of Tibet, you'll have to learn Tibetan. Just learning the languages will cost almost your whole life, yet you won't really have learned anything.

You still haven't gotten into the heart of Buddhism. These are just superficialities conjured up as new developments. Understand the heart of it all and learn just this one thing: the cutting off of upadana. Then you'll know the essence of Buddhism, whether it is labeled Mahayana, Theravada, Zen, or Vajrayana. Whether its from China, Japan, Korea, or anywhere else, it's all in one place: cutting out upadana.

Even in the single school of Theravada Buddhism there are many different forms. There are many different ways of mental cultivation, too. There's the kind of meditation from Burma, where they watch the rising and falling of the abdomen. There are the kinds based on the mantras "Samma Araham" and "Buddho, Buddho," as well as all other kinds of different things. But if it's correct, the heart of each is always in exactly the same place: the need to eradicate upadana. If it hasn't gotten to the elimination of upadana, it isn't the real thing yet. And it won't be of any use or benefit, either. Why not be interested in the matter of cutting off upadana, or, if we speak metaphorically, destroying the prison? So it's best if we speak about this prison.

Discover It Inside

To speak most correctly, we really can't learn from scriptures, from techniques, or from those various teachings if we are to be truly successful. To successfully reap any real benefits, we must learn in the thing itself, namely, the actual prison. Study the actual dukkha in itself, that prison itself. So we'd better look for and find this prison.

At this point, we are confronted by two choices: are you going to learn from the outside or are you going to learn from the inside? The distinction is crucial. The Buddha said that we must study from inside. The external learning is from books, ceremonies, practices, and things like that. Everything that we must learn, the Tathagata has explained in terms of the body which is still alive. That means a living body, with a living mind, not a dead one. That's where real learning takes place, so learn there. Learn from that inside, which means learn within yourself while still alive, before you die. External studies, learning from books and all those different ceremonies and rituals, hasn't really accomplished anything of value. So let's study inside. Please remember these words "learn inside."

Training in samadhi and vipassana (concentration and insight), that is, developing mindfulness with breathing (anapanasati-bhavana) as we have been doing here, is this learning inside. To do this inner study takes a fairly good amount of patience and endurance, but not too much. Actually, in comparison with some of the things other people are practicing, such as high level sports, gymnastics, and acrobatics, training in samadhi and vipassana is less difficult. Yet people have enough endurance and perseverance to be able to do such things. Just have moderate endurance and we will be able to train with samadhi and vipassana, through mindfulness with breathing. Some people can't take it, and have run away already. We have had enough endurance to get this far, and if we continue a bit more, then we'll be able to do it and we'll receive the proper benefits. So, please, apply yourself to this inner study and do so with sufficient patience and endurance.

Life Itself Is Prison

Using metaphors makes it easier for us to understand the matter we're discussing. So we will make use of them here today. The first prison which you must look for and see is life itself. If you look on life as a prison, and see the prison that it is, then we must say that you know the truth of nature quite well. Most people, however, look on life as something enjoyable, as an opportunity to have fun. They are willing to live for the enjoyment of life. They then become infatuated with and engrossed in life, which is what turns it into prison.

If we see life as a prison, then we must have seen the upadana in this life. If we haven't seen the upadana in life, we won't see that life is a prison and we'll be content to think that this life is heaven instead. This is because there are so many things in life that satisfy us, that trick us and engross us; however, in anything that we find satisfying, agreeable, attractive, and infatuating there will be upadana as well. That thing becomes a prison. However much we love something, it becomes at least that much a prison because of upadana. This is a positive kind of upadana. As soon as we hate something, or dislike something, that becomes a negative kind of upadana, which is a prison just the same. To be beguiled and misled, either by the positive or by the negative, is a prison both ways. And that prison turns life into dukkha.

In addition, one will be able to see that when there is upadana in life, then life becomes a prison. And so, when there is no upadana, then life is not a prison at all. You can see this right now, here, whether or not there is upadana in

your life? "Is my life a prison or not? Am I living in a prison of upadana, or not?" Each of you must look very carefully into your own hearts and see absolutely clearly whether life is a prison for you or not. Have you got a prison or not? Are you living in a prison or not? Otherwise, why are we coming here to meditate, to cultivate the mind? In essence, the true goal and purpose of mental development is the destruction of our prisons. Whether your studies and practice are successful, whether you can destroy the prison or not, is another question. Nonetheless, our real aim and purpose is to destroy the prison of life.

Consider this carefully. If we don't recognize upadana, we are caught in prison without even recognizing the prison. We are trapped in prison without knowing the prison at all. What's more, we are satisfied and infatuated with that prison, just as we are infatuated and satisfied with life. Because we are infatuated and satisfied in life, we get caught in the prison of life. What are we going to do that it won't be a prison? This is the question that we must answer most carefully and correctly.

How are we to live so that life is not a prison? This means that ordinarily, or naturally, life is not a prison, that we only make it into a prison through upadana. Because of our own ignorance, our own stupidity, our own lack of correct understanding, we have upadana in life. Life then becomes a prison for us. In Thai we have a phrase which is both crude and critical, "som nam na man," which means something like, "it serves you right." Life isn't a prison or any such thing, but through our own stupidity we make upadana with ignorance (avijja) and then there's the prison. What can we say but "som nam na man, it serves you right."

If you are successful in practicing anapanasati-bhavana (mindfulness with breathing mind cultivation), you will understand life well. You will know upadana well and you won't have any upadana in this thing called "life." Then any prison that is happening dissolves and disappears, and new prisons don't occur. This kind of life has the most value, but who gets it or does not get it is another matter. Please try to understand these facts as you ought to. This will motivate you to apply yourselves with energy and patience to be able to destroy the prison.

One way to look at these facts is to observe that life must carry on according to the law of nature; or that we ourselves must carry on in line with natural law. We must search for food, must exercise, must rest and relax, must work to maintain and support our lives: we must do these and all the other things that you know so well. Not to do them is impossible. We're forced to do them. This is a prison, too. The fact that we must always follow the law of nature is a kind of prison. How are we going to break out of this particular prison?

Why have we gotten caught in the prison of having to live subject to the law of nature? This prison comes from our upadana regarding ourselves, or regarding our lives. When there is upadana toward ourselves, then "I," the self is born. This "I" is anxious about, it worries over, it is frightened and afraid of, these natural duties, and so is made miserable by them. These difficulties come from upadana. If we had no upadana regarding "I," then these necessary duties would not be like a prison. We would be able to hunt for our needs, earn a living, and exercise and care for the body, without being miserable, if we didn't have any upadana toward life. This is very subtle; it's a mystery for most people. This is the subtlety of natural truth. How are we going to live so that there's no dukkha connected with the fact that everything in this life must be performed in line with the law of nature?

The Instincts Are Prison

The next prison to consider is that we live under the influence of the instincts. We are under the instincts' power. All living things, whether people, animals, or plants, have instincts. These instincts constantly force us to follow their concerns and needs. This is especially true for the sexual or reproductive instinct. How much does it control, hassle, activate, and complicate us? Sexual feelings and reproductive urges squeeze us, oppress us, disturb us so profoundly; they force us through all kinds of difficulties. But we can't stop. Sometimes we prefer it this way. Our children grow and mature to the stage where the sexual instinct ripens completely and then the child is caught in the prison of this sexual instinct.

Finally, even the instinct of showing off can run our lives. Many people wouldn't think of this as an instinct, but all animals have it. The need to show off, to brag, to display oneself is an instinct. Even animals have the condition of wanting to show off that they are beautiful, or strong, or agile, or whatever. Even this craziest, most ridiculous instinct is a prison. We want to show off and boast. If it wasn't a prison, it wouldn't force and oppress us in the least. Now, however, it forces us to buy beautiful clothing, beautiful jewelry, beautiful shoes even, and lots of them, too!

Why must we have many beautiful shirts and many pairs of beautiful shoes? Why do we need them all? (And forgive me, we must mention the women in particular here.) There is this instinct to show off and it is one kind of prison. Because people can't endure it, they are forced to follow this instinct, spending all kinds of money on all kinds of things. The instinct to show off is the funniest, most ridiculous of them all. Still it truly is a prison. People never have enough money because of this prison. Please consider and reflect carefully about these examples of instincts which we have raised. They are prisons too.

If we think about this, if we make an account of all our expenses, we'll discover that some people spend more money on clothing, jewelry, and keeping themselves always beautiful than they spend on food. Further, they insist on decorating and prettying up their houses, which piles up their expenses. Taken together, the two are more than they spend on food, which is necessary for life. We put more money into things which are unnecessary in life than we put into the necessities of life, like food. This is one more way of getting caught in the instinctual prison.

The Senses Are Prison

Next, we come to the most amusing prison, the prison that's closest to us. There are these eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind: the six *ayatana*, the six sense media or bases. They are prisons, too. Take a slow, careful look at them. Listen carefully in order to understand how our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind -- all six of them -- become prisons.

In Pali we call them the *ayatana*. The root of this word literally means "tools or means for communicating with the external world" -- places, mechanisms, means, or whatever, for contacting or communicating with the external world. We call them "*ayatana*." If you're willing, use this Pali word "*ayatana*." We aren't sure what to call them in English, maybe "sense media" or "connectors." All six *ayatana* are prisons.

We have *upadana* towards life, regarding ourselves, which has these six media for sensing, for experiencing, for communicating, or for tasting and receiving sense objects. When there's *upadana* regarding these six *ayatana*, we serve them and become their slaves. We serve the eyes to gratify the eyes. We serve the ears to gratify the ears. We serve the nose to satisfy the nose. We serve the tongue to satiate the tongue. We serve the skin and general body sense to make it comfortable. We serve the mind, the mental sense, in order to soothe and comfort it. This means that all our behavior is just for entertaining these *ayatana*. Everything we do is for the sake of these six *ayatana*. We surrender to them and become their slaves. Then, they squeeze and control us, there's no avoiding them. We call this "getting caught in the prison of the *ayatana*."

Consider whether there is anyone, whether there are any of you, who is not slavishly serving these six *ayatana*. And you serve them willingly, don't you? You endure hardships and bend over backwards in order to serve them, always looking for ways to make the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind comfortable and happy, in the most bound up way. So we must admit that we are slaves. Those people who lack wisdom will certainly be slaves of the *ayatana*, will keep getting caught in the prison of *ayatana*. Through the correct and successful practice of mindfulness with breathing, we can escape from the prison. If we practice *anapanasati* incorrectly and incompletely, we will remain caught in the *ayatana* prison for who knows how long.

Superstition Is Prison

For the next prison, we want to mention being deceived by the thing known as "*saiyasatr*". All the superstitious formalities and beliefs are *saiyasatr*. The more ignorance there is, the more one lacks correct knowledge, then the more trapped one is in superstitious prisons. Now, education and science (*vidayasatr*) have improved, which has led to a better understanding of natural truths, and of all things. Still, there remains too much entrapment in superstitious prisons. It's a personal thing. Some people are caught very much and others not so much. People are caught in different degrees and ways, but we can say that there are still people caught in the prison of *saiyasatr*, trapped by superstition.

Although in general superstition has diminished greatly due to the progress of science, there is still quite a bit of *saiyasatr* left in the temples and churches. Please forgive us for saying so, but the place we can find superstition the

most is in churches, in the temples, and in those kinds of places. Although superstition has lessened in general, there's a lot remaining in such places. Wherever there are altars, wherever people bow down and worship so-called sacred and holy things, there is the place where the "science of the sleeper" persists. Superstition, *saiyasatr*, is for people who are asleep. It's for those who don't understand correctly, who are ignorant. We are taught these things as children, before we have the intelligence and ability to reason about them. Children believe whatever they're told, and so "adults" teach them many superstitious things. If you still feel that thirteen is an unlucky number, that's *saiyasatr*. You're still sleeping. There are many other examples of superstition, but we'd better not name them. Some people might get offended. These kinds of things are prisons. Why not look carefully enough to see them as such. Even the number "13" becomes a prison when we're foolish.

Sacred Institutions Are Prisons

We should continue with those institutions or establishments which are holy and sacred, or are famous and celebrated; or those that are rumored to be so elite and prestigious that anyone who becomes a member of one is prestigious, too. There are a number of such places and institutions around. As soon as someone registers as a member of that association or this organization, that institute or this establishment, they start to get ideas and feelings about it. They feel that "we're better than them" or "we're the ones who are right and the rest are stupid." They grasp and cling without the least bit of consideration or critical thinking. In this way, that institution, even that church -- we can't avoid saying so -- becomes a prison. So we beg of you, don't think that Suan Mokkh is some holy or miraculous institution, otherwise Suan Mokkh will become a prison. Please don't turn Suan Mokkh into your prison. You ought to think freely, examine carefully, evaluate critically. Understand and believe only what is genuinely beneficial. Don't get imprisoned in any of those prestigious or famous institutions.

Teachers Are Prison

Now we come to the prison called "ajahn" (teacher, master, guru), the famous teachers whose names reverberate afar. In Burma there's "Sayadaw This," in Sri Lanka there's "Bhante That," in Tibet there's "Lama So- and -so," in China there's "Master Whoever." Every place has its famous teacher whose name is bouncing around. Whether national, regional, provincial, or local, every place has got its Big Guru. Then people cling and attach to their teachers as being the only teacher who is correct; their teacher is right and all other teachers are completely wrong. They refuse to listen to other people's teachers. And they don't think about or examine the teachings of their own Ajahns. They get caught in the "Teacher Prison." They turn the teacher into a prison, then get caught in it. It's an attachment which is truly ridiculous. Whether a big teacher or a small teacher, it's upadana just the same. They keep building prisons out of their teachers and gurus. Please don't get caught in even this prison.

Holy Things Are Prison

The next prison is that of holy scriptures, which we can find everywhere. Among those people where there isn't much wisdom, these things are much clung to, and the more so as being "holy." They even become stand-ins or replacements for God. It's as if merely bringing in the holy books is the same as actually getting help. It leads to there being many kinds of holy objects: sacred relics, holy water, and all kinds of sacred things. Be most careful of this word "holy." It will become a prison before you know it. The more holy something is, the more greatly it imprisons. Watch out for so-called "sacredness" or "holiness."

You ought to know that there is nothing more sacred than the law of *idappaccayata* (the law of conditionality), the supreme holiness higher than all things. Everything else is holy by convention or by what people concoct themselves, which is holy through upadana. Wherever there is holiness through upadana, that holiness is a prison. The law of *idappaccayata* is sacred in itself, without needing any attachment. There's no need for upadana. It controls everything already and is truly holy all by itself. Please don't get caught in the prison of holy things. Don't make sacred things into a prison for yourself.

Goodness Is Prison

A further prison is one that is very important, one that causes all sorts of problems. This prison is what they call "goodness." Everyone likes the "good" and they all teach each other to do good. Then they worship what they call "good." But as soon as there is upadana mixed in with what they call good, that good becomes a prison. You ought to have good, have goodness, without having upadana. Then good won't be prison. If there's upadana it becomes prison.

Like we say, they go crazy about good, they get drunk on good, they get lost in good, until it turns into a problem. So be extremely careful not to make goodness into a prison. But there's nothing we can do to help now, everyone is caught in the prison of goodness -- blindly, obliviously, trapped in the prison of good.

If you are a Christian, we request that you think and ponder much about the teaching in the book of Genesis, where God forbids Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Don't go and eat it, or it will lead to knowing how to discriminate between good and evil. Then it attaches with upadana toward that good and evil. And then good and evil become prisons. This teaching is very profound and good, most intelligent and wise, but nobody seems to understand it. People don't show much interest in it and thus can't be correct Christians. If they were proper Christians they would not cling with upadana to good and evil. We must not make either good or evil into prisons. This means not getting caught in the prison of goodness.

We swallowed that fruit and came to know good and evil, then got caught and stuck in all the good and evil. We have had continual problems ever since, that's how it came to be called "original sin," or sometimes "perpetual sin." It became the original prison, a perpetual prison. Please beware: be careful not to get caught in this original prison, this perpetual prison. Don't ever let yourself get caught in this prison.

With being imprisoned in goodness, or the good, as soon as one gets caught it carries on further all the way to the highest good, to supreme goodness. Then the supreme goodness will become that supreme prison. If it develops this way, then God will become the supreme prison. May you understand and remember that upadana builds prisons in this way.

Views Are Prison

The next prison is our own ditthi. The Pali word ditthi is difficult to translate. Knowledge, thoughts, ideas, theories, opinions, beliefs, understanding -- all these are ditthi. Ditthi means all our personal thoughts, opinions, theories, and beliefs. It isn't just certain opinions and little beliefs, it's all of them, all views. Everything with which we view experience is called ditthi. We are caught in a prison of our own views. We don't obey anyone except our personal ditthi. This is a most terrifying prison, because we impetuously, rashly, hastily sail along according to our own personal views. We turn our backs on and lose out to the things that ought to benefit us, because our minds are closed to everything but our own ideas, beliefs, and views. Thus, these views become a horrible prison that holds us and locks us into just one way of understanding. Beware of the prison of one's own ditthi.

Purity is the Highest Prison

Next we come to a prison which is really strange and marvelous; you could call it the "highest prison." The highest prison is what they call "innocence" or "purity." It's difficult to understand exactly what they mean by these words. We hear all kinds of talk about innocence and purity, but people never seem to know what they're talking about. This purity is clung to and attached to, is regarded as this and that, is worshipped, is used for show and competition, is for boasting all over how pure "I am." But if there's upadana it's all just purity through upadana, not genuine purity. There are many forms of purity that are assumed out of clinging, such as, needing to take baths; making incantations; being anointed, sprinkled, or dowsed with who knows what; or any of the myriad rituals and ceremonies done for "purity." This purity is pure upadana, and purity through attachment is a prison. Please don't get lost and end up in the prison named "purity."

It's something pitiful to see. Clinging to self so much, then attaching to purity just as much, some religious creeds even go so far as to teach some perpetual purity as some eternal soul dwelling in some eternity, or some such thing. The whole thing comes from grasping and clinging to purity through upadana until one is caught in an eternal prison. It just ends up an eternal prison.

Voidness is Not Prison

May we tell you that this is the last one, the final prison. Escape from the prison of highest purity, break out of the purest prison, into the voidness free of soul and self. Not having any self, living free from self, voidness of self -- of any sense of self, void of all ideas and notions about self -- is true purity. Any purity which is truly eternal cannot be a prison in any respect, unless people misunderstand and cling to it as some self or soul, in which case it becomes a

prison again. Let go unequivocally, be absolutely free of self -- that is real purity. It's no prison. Voidness is the purity which isn't a prison.

So it is that the real prison, the collection of all these prisons that we have mentioned, is the thing they call "atta" (in Pali), "self," or "soul." Oneself is the prison. This self here is the prison. Every kind of prison is included in, comes down to the words "oneself" or "myself." Clinging to self as self, and then as belonging to self, attaching to "I" and "mine," this is the true prison, the heart and soul of all prisons. All prisons are gathered in the word "atta." Tear out the foolishness that creates atta, along with atta itself, and all the prisons will be gone. If you practice anapanasati (mindfulness with breathing in and out) correctly until truly successful in it -- real, not imagined success -- you will destroy all the prisons completely. That is, destroy atta, then all the prisons are finished and we won't build any more of them ever again. May you all experience success in destroying the prisons, that is, atta or self.

The purpose of anapanasati is to remove all vestiges of upadana regarding self. The complete removal of attachment toward self is the final and perfect quenching of dukkha, which happens to be the meaning of liberation, of salvation. The highest goal of every religion is salvation, the value and benefits of which are beyond words. So please try. Anapanasati, when practiced correctly, leads to this liberation from atta. I have been trying my best and I am willing to do whatever I can to help everyone understand anapanasati and practice it successfully, in order that all of us can escape from all aspects of humanity's prison.

FOREST WAT WILD MONKS 1

by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

Today, I'll speak about "Forest Wat Wild Monks." A topic like this is easy to remember and understand. It's straightforward and clear. Since you only have a month left as monks, I think you ought to live as "forest wat wild monks," correctly and completely, for at least a little while. Later, it will probably be beneficial, that is, it might make you fit and adequate after you have disrobed. Even ordinary householders should know something about "forest wat wild monks."

These words may sound ugly, but the Buddha and the Arahants (Worthy Ones, Perfected Ones) lived in this way. Please

realize that originally all of the wats, monasteries, and ashrams were outside the cities and villages. None were within the city walls. They were forest wats implicitly and in truth. To say "wild monks" is a bit hard on the ears, because the word "wild" can have bad connotations. Here, however, "wild" means the opposite of cities. Town wats and city monks are the opposite of "forest wats and wild monks." Take the meaning of "wild monk" merely to be the opposite of "city monk."

Consider Suan Mokkh a bit. We've intended for it to be a forest wat from the very start. Things I had studied led me to

know more about how the Buddha lived. Understanding how he lived, I wanted to have a lifestyle like his. So I thought of supporting the forest style of living. Then, we went even further using the words "to promote vipassana-dhura." We used the phrase that was common then. They called the practice in solitary and quiet places, such as in forests, "vipassana-dhura." 2 We intended to promote vipassana-dhura, or the meditation-duty, to revive it, so we thought of having a place in the forest.

Now, although the village is encroaching, we can probably maintain the condition of a forest wat. To do so, the monks must have a discipline or system of living which is most intimate with nature. This means being comrades

with nature, to sit and talk, to sit and watch, to sit and listen, together with nature. The meaning of "wild monk" is to live naturally.

In the past, the elders and old teachers called the monks who live in the forest "nature monks," while the monks in the towns and cities, especially Bangkok, were called "science monks." This is a rural way of speaking, we need not judge whether it is right or wrong: "science monks" and "nature monks." Here, we are nature monks, living in harmony with nature, close to nature, studying nature, until realizing nibbana, which is the pinnacle of nature. Please understand the words "forest wat" and "wild monks" like this.

Please take only the essential meaning of these words. If we take the essence of "forest wat," it means "the most simply way of living" and "wild monks" means "to live most simply." You can blend the two together, they mean the same thing.

So, would all of you please live in the most simple way. So far, you're not yet living most simply, although you may be close. Try to readjust things yourself, through the end of the Rains. From now on, make your living even more easy. The more simple, the more natural it is. The more natural it is, the less opportunity for "I" and "mine" to be born. Thus, it automatically becomes correct and beautiful according to our monks' way.

This is an extremely important and genuine fact. Live naturally and it will be Dhamma (Natural Truth) and Vinaya (Natural Discipline), or Nature, in and of itself. Living naturally is near to nibbana, more so than living scientifically, because nibbana is already the highest nature: naturally clean, clear, and calm. Live naturally, it helps make us clean, clear, and calm more easily.

Now, I want you to hold the general principle that Nature, the Law of Nature, Duty in line with the Law of Nature, and the Fruit received from doing Duty according to the Law of Nature, are the most important matter. This is Buddhism, it's the essence of religion without needing to call it religion. It's better to call it "Truth of Nature" or "Natural Truth."

Now, don't have regrets about anything. There isn't much time left, so you won't be missing much. Just sacrifice your pleasures and comforts. Try out this natural living which automatically has lots of cleanness, clarity, and calm. You've had enough time to read, hear talks, and study the basics of being a monk. Henceforth, know especially the things which will have the most benefit. Then your time as a monk will be over, you will have beneficial knowledge which is complete, that is, you know in general and in specifics, you know loosely and strictly, until you know how the Buddha lived.

When we speak of the Lord Buddha, never forget that he was born outdoors, awakened outdoors, realized nibbana outdoors, taught outdoors, lived outdoors, had a hut with an earthen floor, and so on. We give it as much of a try as we can. Even now, we see that we're sitting on the ground, which is much different than in the city wats. There they sit on wooden floors, on mats, on carpets, depending on the status of each wat. Some wats spread expensive carpeting in the temple building for all eternity. So they sit in their chapels on carpets. Here, we sit on the seat of the Buddha -- the ground. This is one example for you to understand what nature is like, and how different it is from the cities, and how different are the hearts of those who come sit and interact with Nature.

I've tried my best in this matter. When Suan Mokkh was first started, I slept on the ground. I slept next to the grasses in order to know their flavor. I used to sleep on the beach, too. Then, when I first slept in the "middle hut" after it was newly built, I would stretch my hand out the window to fondle the plants next to the window. This completely different feeling is the meaning of "forest wat wild monk."

Everything changes. Feelings, sensitivity, standards, what have you, they change by themselves. Matters of food, shelter, clothing, rest, sleep, aches and illness: they changed completely. They caused us to understand Nature more than when we hadn't tried yet, until finally there were no problems at all. Things which I had feared all disappeared. Fear of loneliness in deserted places, fear of spirits, fear of anything, they didn't last more than seven days. They gradually disappeared themselves. This led to mental comfort, ease, and other fruits. The mind became strong, agile, subtle, and refined. Those were its fruits. Thus, whatever I thought of doing, I could do it better than before I came to the forest, better than in the city. There's no comparison between living in Bangkok and living here. They're totally

different. I can say there's more ability, more strength, more of everything. One can do anything beyond expectations and personal limitations. Whether writing a book, reading, or thinking, much more can be done.

One lives in the lowest way materially and physically, but the mind goes its own separate way. It takes a higher course, because when we live simply the mind isn't pulled in. The heart is released so that it lifts up high. If we sleep comfortably, like wealthy householders, that comfort grabs the heart. It traps the heart, which can't go anywhere, can't escape, is stuck there. So live and sleep more lowly, since humble things won't trap the heart. Live humbly and the mind will rise high, will think lofty things.

Living in a humble condition, in one that can't fall lower, the mind can only proceed in a higher way. It's easy because we needn't carry or load down the mind with anything. The mind can be "normal" and free. It is free in its movements, reflections, and actions. Thus, we can freely do anything of the sort which is not like anyone else. Through the power of nature, there isn't any carelessness, we don't make mistakes. Since the mind is heedful there are no mistakes.

That the heart can find a way out like this must be considered freedom. Know the mind that is independent, that isn't caught and held by deliciousness and pleasure, by the happiness and comfort of eyes, ears, nose tongue, body, and mind.

Here I want to make a distinction. If something is in line with original nature, and there's no indulgence in new pleasures, we'll call it "natural." If it goes after new pleasures, if newly concocted for more tasty pleasures than nature, we'll call it "unnatural." They're truly different. If going naturally, the defilements arise with difficulty, they can't arise. If acting in an unnatural way, it's easy for the defilements to be born, or else it's defilement from the very start. Thus, living as nature's comrade makes it hard for the defilements. It automatically controls and prevents against the defilements (kilesa).

This is the spirit of Suan Mokkh, of setting up a place like this. When you want this enough to come here, then you ought to get it. Besides this, there isn't anything. We've tried to prevent other things from happening, so that there are only these things: how to eat, how to live, and how to sleep. We've spoken many times of the specific details of each.

I've said it before, but nobody believes me that to take exactly what nature provides is sufficient, is good enough. When we must die, then die. Don't postpone and make it difficult. It's like the medical care that has progressed to the point that people are unable to die, they can't drop. They live inhumanly, but not dead. That's too much. Heart transplants, liver transplants, and all that exceed nature. It's better not to. And please look, it doesn't make humanity any better. It doesn't create peace in the world. If mental matters don't progress, if there's only defilement -- delusion and all -- there'll be no end.⁴

In summary, make things humble so that they don't trap the mind. Then this heart of ours is free to think, consider, decide, and choose. Please use the mindfulness and wisdom that you receive from this style of living to choose and decide what you must in the future.

If you were born in Bangkok, you were surrounded by man-made things and raised far from the forest, much more than

people born in the forest. Those born in towns and cities hardly know the meaning of "forest" or "wild." Those born in the sticks know something, but don't pay any attention. They must work, must always be doing something according to their moods, so they hardly notice how calm and clean it is. Sometimes they are even dissatisfied with it, although born in the country. Our hearts don't like it and always aim to get into "developed and beautiful" areas in the cities and capital. Thus, we don't know the taste of the forest and of Nature, even if born in the forest, even when splattered with mud, because the mind is occupied in another way.

Now you're in robes and needn't work like lay folk. The heart has a chance to know the peaceful flavors and quiet nooks of Nature, which is the cause of the mind's freedom in the first place. You ought to use this final chance here to keep walking until knowing the heart that is naturally pure, which is something like the heart of the Arahant. The Arahant's heart is just like that -- natural -- except it's that way totally. Now, we may have a heart like that, but only momentarily, temporarily. The next moment it changes off in another direction, and we can't pull it back. Try to penetrate this heart of nature.

In clear and simple terms, we call it pure nature, nature which isn't concocted ("cooked and seasoned") by anything. And we don't concoct that nature either. It exists simply, humbly, freshly, peacefully, coolly, however you want to describe it. If you know this flavor, you know the flavor of Dhamma, in its aspect of the only fruit worth having, because Dhamma's reality (literally, "body") has been captured. Those who just study and take exams never receive Dhamma's reality. All they can do is holler about it. If somehow you can catch Dhamma itself, it's like catching a crab or fish, it's something tangible. Here we can catch the substance of cleanness, clarity, and calm -- the body of Dhamma. Even temporarily is worth it. To have grasped it and seen it just once is better than never having grasped, known, or seen it at all.

The academics only memorize and recite, then take examinations, then memorize and recite some more. They think only according to what they're told. Their minds don't reach cleanness, clarity, and calm at all. From the theoretical studies or scriptures, one just gets stories and information. To phrase it more politely, one gets only a map. Actually, they don't even get the map. I know this well because I've tried that way myself. I've taken the full Dhamma Course, studied the Pali language (in which the Theravada scriptures are written), and researched continuously. It seems I got only complicated stories -- mostly mixed up and confused to boot -- without getting even a map. Those who talk of scholarship, of being Pali experts and Dhamma Masters, of having a map, they make it up, imagine, and arrange it themselves.

Actually, the real map is much clearer than all that. We must pass through, must arrive at, and receive "something" - - appropriately and sufficiently -- in order to know the correct and true map. It's as if we're making a map and must wade through that respective subject or area in order to draw the map. If we draw it from guesses and imagination, it will be a mess. If we try to make a map of everything, it's a huge mess. These scholars who have finished their studies end up with a scholarly map that's a mess. It's a mess because it is wrongly explained, wrongly remembered, wrongly taught, and, especially, wrongly interpreted. Who knows what kind of map it is. These literary maps according to the study books are a mess because they're all mixed up.

That's not our way. We'll do something, find some method, which takes the heart all the way to that city: the city of peace, the state of peace, the nature which is peace. This short cuts the map. This is the methodology of "forest wat wild monks": keep looking for and aiming at only the peaceful mind.

Just this single word "peace" has multitudinous meanings. It's easy to say "peace," but it's hard to understand and difficult to practice. But you must try. Therefore, please try to continually follow and search: "Is this peace? Is this peace?"

The word "peace" means "not troubled, not anxious, not agitated, not disturbed, not painful, not pierced." To begin, remember these meanings. On the other hand, the minds of most people are troubled, stabbed, cut, and roasted by desires, by doubts, by worries, by the kind of wishes that build castles in the sky. They usually happen all the time; you ought to get rid of them. I'm not forbidding you to want anything or do anything. I only want things to happen peacefully.

Some people may think that this runs counter to human existence in the world. Listening superficially, it may sound like that. When human beings in this world don't want peace, they will want stimulation, they will want the state that stimulates pleasure through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, whichever way, all ways. They want to get excited, they don't want peace and calm. This makes it somewhat difficult to speak about these matters.

We have a choice. Stimulation, the state of having kilesa always waiting to drive and manipulate us, what's that like? And we must ask, which direction will it lead? How far will it reach? It has no end. So we could exploit this and make some money from the fact that humanity has endless wants, make a business out of humanity's endless wants, and get rich ourselves. The rich have wants that never end. They follow after these endless desires, then what kind of world will that be? This is how different it is in the cities, totally opposite from "forest wat wild monks," who want to stop, to be cool, and to be calm.

The problem is like this: the world's people don't want peace. How will we pursue peace? And when living in the middle of people who don't want peace, how will we live peacefully? Another way is to live by making money off the people who don't want peace. Now, however, we should focus on the fact that it is necessary to live in the midst of such people. How can we be peace? How can we use our understanding of this peace to solve those problems?

I still think that it can work. Please know how to calm the mind; then work with those non-peaceful people in those incredibly chaotic cities and capitals. We can have minds that are under control, are "normal,"⁵ are on track, are disciplined, are at peace; they do what they should. Finally, if we must work for people who are not calm, we are up to it.

In the scriptures there's a story of a woman Stream-Enterer⁶ whose husband is a hunter. They still were able to live together. It doesn't sound believable, and probably nobody will believe it, but that's what the scriptures say. She wasn't tainted by her husband's sins. They could live as husband and wife without losing her Stream-Entry. Think about it. You

must know how to take special care of the heart. Guard the condition of peace according to your own particular skills.

Close your eyes and imagine this scene. One person is "normal" and able to smile. He works with another who always acts like a demon or devil. How can he do it? I say he can. If a person is at peace, has sufficiently trained, he can do it. But he probably wouldn't want to bother. He's more likely to find another place to work. Here, we're just trying to show that if one tries, it is possible. If one's heart is secure and "normal," there's nobody who could shake him. If anyone tried to get him to do something wicked, he wouldn't do it and would probably run away.

This talk is to help you begin to see that this matter of calmness is no obstacle. Further, it's beneficial in that it gradually

transforms those who aren't calm, making them more calm and in love with calmness. One makes blessings without being conscious of it. People with Dhamma who work together with people who lack Dhamma will do good without being aware of it. They'll cure the people without Dhamma, so that Dhamma develops in them steadily.

I have seen people who have gone to work as clerks or officials, who are calm, humble, and have Dhamma. They are able to cool down bosses who fly into rages, are hurried, and lack Dhamma. Know that if we have an employee who is cool and calm, and shows it, we can't explode. We would be too ashamed, or else feel pity for him.

Even with these wat boys, some have something cool about them and others are almost the opposite. We must have our own sensitivity for this: "Ahhmm, they're totally different. With that boy there we act in one way, with this one we must act another way." Such cool kids will help to cool down the old folks and grey-hairs, if the kids have cool characters.

I believe that Dhamma isn't likely to be objectionable for use in a world lacking peace and coolness. A monk coming from correct "forest wat wild monk," who stays at a city wat with a totally different style, will have an immediate influence on the city folk. They'll notice that "we're hot and he's cool." The only question is whether or not the cool monk from the forest can guard that calm and correctness all the time. Mostly they lose it, change, and are swallowed up. If not, they must escape back to the forest. They can't handle the city, it's full of annoyances. No harm done, because we ought to be able to choose in this world. If we want peace, we have the right to find a peaceful place. But wherever the wild monk goes, he automatically teaches the "Peaceful Creed" right there. There will be some success, and some automatic "blessings," too. Make an example of peace for them to see, be truly happy for them to see, they'll be interested and some will even follow. You'll get "merit" and the world becomes a better place.

If we speak of the Arahant, various principles show that such a human being can never get hot again. So she can go to the city, to the capitol, to any chaotic place, without dying. He wouldn't die, but probably would get fed up beyond toleration, then have to flee. If she couldn't escape, she might die. But I don't think so, because he'd adjust his heart inside in an unbelievable way. There's no need to get hot with those people. Yet, what's the point of being troubled by it all, avoid it to find an appropriate place.

This talking and raising examples back and forth is to increase understanding of "forest wat wild monks." Do you know the difference between living as a forest wat wild monk and living as a city monk? You've never lived as forest wat wild monks. There's only a little time left, you better try it out quickly. Quickly live up to its standard, you'll understand the matter well. Although you return to the city later, you won't be the same. It will change you from how

you were. You'll change in a good and useful way, too. So I felt we should talk about this for the sake of the time left in the Rains, that you might get more interested in the "forest wat wild monks" style.

At the beginning of the Rains, I already told you about these things, such as, don't laugh a lot, speak only a little, try to stay with Nature. But I understand you couldn't do it, and just let it go. More than enough time has passed, now you ought to be able, at least a little more than before. This means just "live like a monk (Phra) " 7 more and more. You'll know the flavor of the monk's life which we call "forest wat wild monks." You'll never have a chance to try living like a wild monk in the city. You must come to the forest, to a naturally free place, to taste and to try it, to know Dhamma of the sort the Buddha realized and proclaimed.

If not that, then why ordain? Each of you ought to ask yourself why you ordained? Why did you take leave to do this temporary going forth? To understand what? To sample what? To get what? With certainty -- like pounding a fist into the ground -- we answer, "to get exactly what we've been talking about." Without leaving home, you couldn't get it. You would have no chance even to see or sample or give it a try. Ordination was necessary.

Now that you've ordained, to get what the Buddha got, you must live close to how the Buddha lived. He lived and maintained life in such a way that we turn back to the "forest wat wild monks" life-style. If we don't live this way, we couldn't get, experience, or sample the Buddha's life.

The monks in the Buddha's time, the Buddha himself, and whichever founder of whatever religion, all got started in a life intimate with Nature. All of them awakened in forests surrounded by Nature. Whether the Buddha, Jesus Christ, or the prophet of any religion, they lived close to nature. To awaken as a Perfectly Self-Awakened Buddha; or to become One with God, to communicate with God, according to the religions that have a God; that moment is living as a comrade of nature. So try to remember the words: how good it is to be nature's comrade."

This means that you have accepted, have believed, and have seen that the Lord Buddha is a real Buddha (Awakened Being), the highest sort of person, who knows the best thing that humans ought to know, and you want to know that, too. This is why we make this effort. We shouldn't be tricked into believing that the Buddha taught only "householder virtue" (gharavasa-dhamma) for the lay folk.⁹

If he only taught ordinary household matters, he would have served no purpose, since anybody could and was teaching those things well enough already. Although the Buddha sometimes taught about householder subjects, it was solely the sort of Dhamma fit for lay folk who were looking for nibbana. The lay folk already were being taught well enough. For the Buddha to help teach these matters, he would teach the type of lay person who is ready to discover Dhamma, to reach nibbana. This brings us back to our subject.

There's merely a small amount which the Buddha taught lay folk for the sake of being lay folk. But what he taught with the fullest satisfaction of his heart was the matter of *ofsuññata* (voidness). Some householders asked him for the Dhamma most beneficial for the household life and he came back with voidness. He told them to have voidness, namely, a heart void of "I" and "mine." Then they could do anything in the form of a householder, thus becoming householders who are ready to be Arahant, or more than half ready to proceed along the Arahant's line.

Thus, that we live like "forest wat wild monks" to understand voidness well is in the same line. It follows the trail of householders who should study voidness. You can read in all the books about voidness that they've printed how the Buddha taught voidness to lay folk.

Now, I'm afraid that those who will return to lay life, or already are householders, have not yet found voidness at all. Because the customs and traditions have changed, there's no Buddha to teach voidness to lay folk. Nor are any of the monks in the cities likely to teach voidness to householders. Then, how are lay folk going to understand voidness?

I insist that by trying to live like "forest wat wild monks" for a little while, you'll understand voidness. Although you don't call it voidness, although you don't feel you're practicing voidness, you still will get the results of practicing voidness: a heart which is void and cool, which is clean, clear, and calm.

Do your work with a heart that doesn't suffer. Receive the fruits of labor without making it a problem, not dancing with joy or going crazy over the benefits received. You can work more, until however wealthy you want, but with a different heart, that is, a cool and peaceful one. It's a heart that always wins, nothing can make it anxious. Nowadays,

people can work, earn money, find status, and gain fame, but they're always losing. They're always hot, always made and kept hot. What's good about that? Before long, they'll have some nervous breakdown or drop dead.

Very few people are naturally -- "accidentally" or "flukishly" -- cool. That lay folk can have cool hearts naturally in line with Dhamma principles is, of course, possible. It isn't beyond or against their nature, but it seldom happens. It can happen with good surroundings, with good genes, or with a nervous system that nature coincidentally built to be like that. But don't cross your fingers and wait, because it's rare. Let's just say most of us are born ordinary.

What can we do to become special individuals, that is, unable to suffer? No matter what happens, we can't suffer and can't get hot. Whether rich or poor, we are unable to get hot or anxious. Who can insure that the wealthy will always be wealthy or that the poor will always be poor? Things change constantly. Especially this modern world, it changes so easily, so fast, so suddenly. Regarding the progress of humanity which is quickly, violently destroying the world with War and what have you, both changing up and changing down, don't be the least hot or anxious about it.

Should war erupt and wipe out life on earth, such people don't give it any meaning. They can still laugh because they've reached Dhamma. They've attained the sort of Dhamma that makes further suffering impossible. They have no more problems here. Impoverished for necessary reasons, they don't suffer. Not anxious or miserable, they get out of poverty before you know it. If one has Dhamma, there's no suffering. If one lacks sufficient Dhamma, there's nothing but suffering and anguish. Rich and miserable, poor and miserable: they're hot no matter what. So take the side which is neither hot nor miserable while you've got the chance.

This is why I ask you to hurry up and study-practice, hurry to try it out, hurry to find the point where suffering can't exist, the point which can't get hot. Discover as much as you can, so that your life in the future can't get hot, or is hot as little as possible, or once hot can be dropped quickly.

They call this "The Noble One" (ariya), but I don't want to talk about that. Before you know it, all kinds of distracting thoughts will come up. To be incapable of hotness is to be a Noble One, according to the particular level or state: Stream-Enterer (sotapanna), Once-Returner (sakadagami), Non-Returner (anagami), or Worthy One (arahant). Ultimately, the mind can't get hot at all. It gets hot less and less until it's unheatable and nowhere hot. The Noble One's feelings 10 are thoroughly cooled. That's the meaning of the highest level of "Arahant," the level of anupadisesa-nibbana-dhatu (the nibbana element with no fuel and heat remaining):11 thoroughly cool. The rest are progressively cool; even when hot, they aren't hot like a thickster (putthujana, worldly person) is hot. The hotness of thicksters is like being singed by fire or scalded with boiling water. The first stages of Noble Ones might feel a bit hot sometimes, but never like the thicksters burn. Nevertheless, I don't want to use these words very much, or get you stuck on or attached to using them. So let's just say "human beings." Just people, just us, all the same. Yet, we can be less hot and more cool, until we can't get hot in ordinary situations, and until we can't get hot in even the worst situations.

There are loads of the Buddha's words recorded in the Pali which encourage us to think and train so that we need not get hot. I don't have to quote the Pali any more, you can believe me that they are there. If the scriptures aren't like that, what good would they be? They teach us to be cool.

If you get hot through carelessness, be very sorry. If you haven't felt these things, you're heedless, the same as dead. If you feel them but pretend that you don't, you're shameless, lacking in hiri (moral shame) and ottappa (fear of the results of evil). To get hotter with age, to get more angry, to get worse in any way, is to lack hiri-ottappa. You must know spiritual shame and fear. The most frightening thing is to be a human who is hot, just a fool, a lost person who is full of defilement and selfishness. You can't call that a human being. Better call it a "fool."

So for the time that remains, test yourself as if taking exams. Is it hot or not? Even a small slip into hotness should make you quite sorry and ashamed. You ought to penalize yourself appropriately. You can do it without anybody knowing. But please penalize yourselves whenever careless, when going wrong on this point and becoming hot. Eventually the mind changes, becomes more careful, and can make progress along the Dhamma way.

Hot due to lust or greed is one form. Hot due to anger or hatred is another form. Hot due to delusion or ignorance is a third form. You've learned these names before, I shouldn't have to explain anymore. As soon as mindfulness is

missing, ignorance takes over. It lusts and covets, it gets hot with the emotions of avarice and lust. In "negative" situations, it gets angry and hateful. It becomes hot with anger, with aversion, with malice. Then, in some cases we don't know anything: don't know the original cause, don't know what's up, don't know even what we want. We're full of doubts about what we ought to want. There's no certainty about how our life is, what should come of it, how it should be lived. This not knowing is delusion. It too is hot.

So if you want to test yourselves, it won't be difficult. The time remaining is enough to do some self-examination. Speak little, keep to yourself, and constantly observe the heart. Call it "constantly guarding the heart." It's automatic mental development, or meditation. When always watching over the heart, that's vipassana, that's meditation. If you find it's hot, then know it's hot, that it's still low, wrong, and must be cured. And you better have some regret. At the same time, know how it is hot and what caused the hotness.

In the end, you will find the truth exactly as the Buddha taught. Before, we didn't know it, we just heard about it. Now we know that thing truly. We understand Dhamma from ourselves, without needing to know the Buddha. And if they force us to speak, we automatically will speak the same as the Buddha regarding the nature of greed, hatred, and delusion.

This very thing is the Buddha's supreme aim, yet the big monks never talk about it. They usually threaten us not to raise

ourselves up as equals to the Buddha, not to insult the Buddha. In this matter, if you want to understand something, I can tell you straight that the Buddha wanted people to reach the Dhamma without needing to believe their teacher, and then are able to explain that Dhamma without needing to repeat their teacher's words. Did you listen right? Listen again: know the Dhamma without believing the Buddha. Because we know personally, then we know the same thing as the Buddha. Then, if we must speak for the sake of others, we needn't repeat after the Buddha, needn't quote Pali, needn't recite the texts. Just speak according to experience. Then it will be identical to what the Buddha said. Then, people needn't repeat after the Buddha, they can speak their own hearts. This state of affairs is what the Buddha himself wanted. You can find it in the Pali, in many places. That they must memorize and recite the Buddha's words, afraid of getting just one word wrong, that's merely a custom, a tradition of people who don't really know, or still don't really know, still don't understand Dhamma.

So we hurry to know Dhamma. That itself will be in line with what the Buddha realized. We can speak out according to

what we know; it will be identical with what the Buddha said. It might look like one's a Buddha oneself, so they forbid anyone to do such a thing, afraid that one is raising oneself up equal to the Buddha or is disparaging the Buddha. This here is an obstacle preventing us from progressing along the Buddha's path.

OK, so we study Dhamma from within, by living in the midst of Nature which reveals and demonstrates the Dhamma all the time. Uphold a form of life which doesn't sound very good at all: live like a forest wat wild monk. It doesn't sound right, but it is most meaningful, most real, and most necessary to live in this way up until you must disrobe. You may change back to the householder's way of life, but this should stick with you: knowledge, understanding, and certainty about the Dhamma which makes us incapable of hotness. Take it with you. By bathing yourself in coolness until understanding coolness, you can't do wrong or get hot. You'll probably get cooler and cooler because it's something naturally attractive: the absence of dukkha (suffering). Please don't forget this short phrase: "forest wat wild monks" is the way of living for the person who wants to reach the Buddha quickly.

Translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu

Endnotes

1 A wat (Thai) is a place where monks (bhikkhus) live, study, and practice. The wat usually serves the local community and is treated as public domain. So, "monastery" or "temple" doesn't quite convey the atmosphere and purpose of a wat. This talk was given 9 September 1976 to a group of temporary monks, who ordained for the three month long Rains Retreat, following an ancient Thai tradition. (Short additions have been made from another talk, "Suan Mokkh and Nature," which was given to a similar group 30 July 1979.) This translation originally appeared in

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2 Literally, the "burden (or task) of insight development," that is, meditation (as opposed to book study).

3 "Heart" and "mind" are interchangeable. Both are partial renderings of the Pali word *citta*. Similar Thai words don't make a distinction between heart and mind, as we do in English.

4 Tragically, when Ajarn Buddhadasa went into a coma just before his 87th birthday, this teaching and his personal wishes were ignored.

5 The meaning of "normal" (*pakati*) here is not "common, typical, ordinary," but refers to the original, natural state of peace when mind is void of "I" and "mine".

6 *Sotapanna*: first stage of "nobility," arises from the first "glimpse of nibbana" which ends belief in oneself as an individual "personality."

7 *Phra* comes from the Pali *vara* which means "excellent, splendid, best, noble."

8 *Pabbajja*, to leave, to go forth from, the household life and its sensual concerns.

9 *Gharavasa* (household life, lay life) is traditionally opposed and considered spiritually inferior to the homeless life of monks. While admitting the external and social differences, Ajarn Buddhadasa emphasizes that spiritually everyone has the same duty.

10 *Vedana*: basic mental feelings of pleasure, pain, and neither-pleasure-nor-pain. Emotions are not included here.

11 The second of two distinctions in how nibbana is experienced. The first is *sa-upadisesa-nibbana-dhatu* (the nibbana element with fuel remaining). "Fuel" refers to the seeds of positive and negative which are the bases of desire, attachment, and suffering. There is no difference in nibbana itself.

THE STYLE OF PRACTICE AT SUAN MOKKH

PRINCIPLES OF THE DHAMMADANA GROUP

First of all, we must go back and recall the original principles of the Dhammadana Group. Our objective has been to resurrect and support Dhamma practice for those who already have studied the *pariyatti-dhamma* (Dhamma to be studied) sufficiently, such as those who have passed their Dhamma examinations and some Pali levels. Consequently, we have set up a place as convenient as possible for those who wish and intend to practice. This place goes by the name "Suan Mokkhabalarama" (The Garden of the Power of Liberation). It has been active since May of 2475 B.E. (1932 CE).

According to these principles, all who stay in this place must use their own studies and knowledge as the standards for their practice. There is no person who is set up as the "Teacher" or "Leader." Everybody is just a good friend, or "*kalyanamitta*," ready to help each other when problems arise. These principles have been announced in the Dhammadana Group's "Buddha-Sasana Quarterly" since 2476 and have remained in affect without any changes through to the present.

That we hold to this principle of having no individual as Teacher is on account of three reasons:

1. We are not yet able to find any person who ought to be called "Teacher" in an era, such as this, when Dhamma practice is in decline and turmoil.

2. Even if we could find such a person, nonetheless, we see the danger of practitioners sticking and attaching to the person who is their teacher to the point that the mind isn't fit for the stage of practice that quenches *dukkha* on the highest level.

3. The Buddha said, "The Dhamma and Vinaya that the Tathagata has shown and laid down will exist as the guru or teacher for you all when the Tathagata has passed on."

These are times when circles of religious practice are in turmoil due to the deterioration of Dhamma practice. This has gone on for so long that different centers are quarreling and competing over ways of practice and so are generally practicing in foolish ways. Those who originated the activities of the Dhammadana Group, and of Suan Mokkhabalarama, consequently feel that we ought to hold to the Dhamma and Vinaya (Discipline) which the Buddha demonstrated -- as far as appears in the Tipitika, using the Mahapadesa Standard for the Suttanta¹ to identify them -- as our standard of practice or as the teacher, rather than clinging to a certain person or the methods of a certain center as our standard, because they're all confused and disordered these days. Due to the above mentioned three causes, this center has laid down the standard that no individual is considered to be the teacher. In addition to the Dhamma and Vinaya principles which each person has studied sufficiently, each of us can act as kalyanamitta for each other in our continuing practice, without any individual being set up as the Center's Teacher.² This still holds true at the present.

For the reasons mentioned above, principles of practice to be used in this center have been gathered directly from the original Pali sources and commentaries. Each person may choose directly as best suits him. Or, anyone may choose from what those responsible for the center's texts department will gather together for them to choose from. Thus, our line of practice can't be called the Burmese way, the Sri Lankan way, or the Thai way; the way of this monastery, that monastery, or whatever monastery; the way of this teacher or that teacher. One can only say that we practice in the way which each of us personally chooses from the Pali texts taught by the Buddha himself. Further, the commentaries and special texts such as the Visuddhimagga will not be followed where a passage conflicts with the original Pali texts.

Because I (the speaker) have been in a position to observe the circumstances and developments of this center from the start up to the present, that is, for more than twenty-five years; as well as being responsible for the center's texts department, which has put me in a position of constantly being asked about various matters concerning standards and Dhamma principles for practice; I'm consequently in a position to know well what lines of practice have been followed at this center. This makes it possible to gather them into an outline that conveniently answers the inquiries of visitors, especially newly arrived "Sahadhammika Friends," who naturally must ask about these matters. This will also serve as a central standard for all practitioners, in order to be an asset from the beginning of their practice onward.

[from Evolution/Liberation #4]

Notes

1. The Mahapadesa (Great Authorities) for the Suttanta are one of the primary sets of principles for determining what it and is not the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha observed that various persons will claim that certain ideas and teachings are his, based on various authorities, such as, 1) having heard it from the Lord Buddha Himself, 2) having heard from a Sangha with an elder monk as leader, 3) having heard it from a group of elder monks learned and expert in Dhamma & Vinaya, or 4) having heard it from a particular learned monk expert in Dhamma & Vinaya.

The Buddha advised that no matter what authority is claimed, "the words of that monk (or speaker) are neither to be welcomed or scorned, their letter and spirit is to be well studied, laid beside the Suttas and compared with the Vinaya." The Suttas (lit. "thread") are the recorded discourses of the Buddha and some leading disciples; here the unifying thread that runs throughout them is emphasized. The Vinaya is the monastic discipline gradually laid down by the Buddha for his monks and nuns. (Note that the "Abhidhamma" did not yet exist.)

"If, when laid beside the Suttas and compared with the Vinaya, the letter and spirit of these words does not lie well with the Suttas and does not agree with the Vinaya, then you may come to the conclusion: Surely this is not the word of the Blessed One and it has been wrongly grasped by that monk. Then you may reject it (as my teaching)."

"If, when laid beside the Suttas and compared with the Vinaya, the letter and spirit of these words lie well with the Suttas and agree with the Vinaya, then you may come to the conclusion: Surely this is the word of the Blessed One and it has been correctly received by that monk. Then you may accept it (as my teaching)." (D.ii.123; A.ii.167)

2. That others started seeing Ajarn Buddhadasa as "The Teacher" does not change the principle, which he stuck to through out his life even though others didn't.