



A TALK ON DHAMMA

At Wat Bodhisomporn, Udon Thani, Thailand

on 4th August, 1963

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Aciraṃ vat'ayaṃ kayo paṭhavim̐ adhisessati

Chuddho apeta-viññāṇo nirattham̐ va kaḷiṅgaram̐

— Dhammapāda : 41

(Before long it is certain that this body will lie stretched upon the ground,
discarded, devoid of *viññāṇa*, useless as a rotten log.)

At this time I will give a talk on Dhamma (*desanā*) which is the teaching of the Lord Buddha and which may be of value as “*Dhamma-savaṇānisamsa*” to all of you who are listening. So you should listen attentively to the teaching of the Lord Buddha and you will attain benefit both while you are listening as well as in the future.

Listening to Dhamma is necessary for all of us who are Buddhists because Dhamma is full of reason. Whoever behaves and acts either in the way of the world or in Dhamma, it is Dhamma that points out the way in both cases. Those who go the way of the world are likely to need it as a method or the skilful ways that they use in conducting their affairs so that they shall be right and harmonious for themselves. As for those who practise the way of Dhamma it will make for convenience, ease and the avoidance of making mistakes. Because in doing anything, if we do not listen attentively, so that we do not understand and know the method to begin with, and act without having learnt about it, whether in the world or in Dhamma, we are liable to make mistakes easily, and even if we get results they will not be worthwhile.

Therefore all activities must depend upon our having first of all attentively learned all about them. Learning is thus essential and is a “compass needle” pointing out what way to go so as to get good results, for regardless of what sort of activity or business we do, if we have not learnt about it so that it is well understood it is not likely to be done well, and this is especially so in

Buddhism.

So the Lord had the utmost interest in learning and it is said that he trained himself for a long time in order to develop the *pāramī* (perfection), and he also trained all classes of Buddhists to know the way of good and evil so that they may themselves go the right way. Even though, as we are told, the Lord was the originator (*Sayambhū*), knowing and seeing by himself without relying on a teacher, he still had to go away to be ordained and to learn from the ways of nature which surrounded him and which drew his attention, until he felt sorrowful and depressed and could put up with it no longer. Thus the capacity to learn by being observant or interested in reasoning, were forms of learning that were intrinsically in him already.

The Lord went out and was ordained becoming like a beggar. He diligently applied himself to practice, and to the development of meditation (*bhāvanā*) getting rid of the conceited opinion (*ditṭhi-māna*) of being a noble and making himself to be like a beggar. He performed the spiritual practices of a monk (*samaṇa dhamma*), living in the forests and hills so that anyone seeing him would not recognise who he was — for they would just see that this was a bald-headed monk.

It may seem that the Lord did not learn from anyone, but in truth teachers taught him everywhere and all the time by day and night. The Lord looked and saw leaves falling from the trees and he reflected on how when grow they begin as tender shoots, after which their form steadily changes until they become old and fall, and how our lives and *saṅkhāras* are like those of the leaves, and there are many other things which are like the leaves which fall from the trees.

The Lord investigated making comparisons, and reasoning both externally and internally using his wisdom so as to find out clearly about the truth, because external and internal things have the same characteristics. In other words, they arise, they change and finally they break up and cease to exist. When the Lord's investigation reached himself, he found that he had the same characteristics, and this is what is meant by saying that the Lord listened to the whole of Dhamma — which are the ways of nature — while he was living alone in the forest. But even before the Lord had left home to become ordained it seems that he received the highest training in the ways of nature,

On the night when the Lord left home to become ordained it is said that he saw all the concubines, minstrels and entertainers in the palace seeming as if they were dead and as though it was a cemetery of corpses. It even seemed to him that the Lord himself was also of that nature, and so he had a sense of urgency in his heart to find a place of refuge.

“The attendants and the royal palace where we have dwelt from the day of our birth until now has seemed to be a gay and light-hearted place, but now in whatever direction we turn it all seems to be like a cemetery of corpses. We cannot even know when this palace will fall down and be destroyed.” Then examining reflectively within himself: “Those things which are *saṅkhāras* make up our bodies which are constructed out of earth, water, air and fire, thus forming an animal, a person, man or women. All of them must therefore have the same characteristics as all the forms of nature which we see now. It seems that nowhere is there anything that is stable and enduring which is suitable as a refuge and a shelter where our heart would be at peace.”

He could see only one way. To go away and be ordained so as to search for a quiet place in

solitude so that he could diligently examine the underlying principles. In other words, to become quite clear in regard to that impression of a cemetery of corpses which the Lord saw on that night. He compared himself with all his attendants and saw that he was the same as them.

“As regards birth we have the same nature as them, as regards old age we have the same nature as them; as regards suffering (*dukkha*) and bodily hardships we have the same nature as them.”

Examining outside beyond the palace, throughout the whole earth — throughout the whole universe — he saw that it was all of this nature and that there is no island or mountain where one can find peace, where one can find security and stability and where one can have complete confidence — but that: “It is all subject to destruction and dissolution in the same way as myself.”

Thus was the heart of the Lord obsessed with the idea of becoming ordained so as to examine birth, old age, sickness and death carefully and reflectively to understand them absolutely clearly in his heart — until he in fact went away to be ordained.

This shows that the Lord learnt the ways of nature which are to be seen everywhere, they were of value to him and they led to his feeling sorrow and heavy-heartedness at the fact of birth, old age, sickness and death that are to be seen everywhere throughout the realms of *samsāra* both in ourselves, other people and animals of all classes and types. Whenever a bodily form appears and is established, the process of natural changes is bound to be the shadow which follows such a body, and this is the first lesson which the Lord learnt using reason as the basis for comparing himself with others (people and animals) who had identical characteristics. These characteristics are those of *annica*, the natural process of change which was found throughout him and them, and *dukkha*, the distress in this world — which is not a world full of happiness but a world of turmoil.

“Who can live at ease? Nobody can when they have a physical body, which means that such a body is bound to be of a nature that leads to unbearable anxiety. We cannot just live at ease without sleeping, lying down, eating food, walking back and forth and changing our postures. We cannot not do these things. So if this is the case we cannot live in this world. In other words, when I cannot not “do”, it means that this world is a world of cannot and to live in ease and contentment here is not possible. Nor is it possible to sit, lie down and have no need to eat or sleep, for one cannot just do what is easy for the body and pleasant for the mind.”

So this world became entirely a world of ‘cannot’ in the heart of the Lord. “What world is there that is a ‘world’ of can?” So he investigated reviewing and searching with reason. “There is only the *Lokuttara Dhamma*.” In other words, that Dhamma which when a person has attained it enables him to go entirely beyond the world of cannot and reach the “world of can”, the world of attainment and the world of certainty, is the *Lokuttara Dhamma* which is the highest Dhamma.

Then the Lord resolved to leave his home that night. But even though he knew that he was a Prince and that he had loyal supporters throughout the whole country who were in the shadow of his own perfection, he left on his own, followed only by Channa to lead his horse Kanthaka back. He left in order to investigate the fundamental reasons of what he had seen that night until it all became absolutely clear to him.

In brief, the Lord worked, training for six years and he almost died, because when the Prince left home and became ordained he was prepared to risk his life, for he had never before had to put up with difficulties. In saying that he was a ‘Prince’, everything about him was that of a Prince, all his possessions were those of a Prince, the food he ate was that of a Prince, and where he dwelt and everything he used of all kinds were those of a Prince.

When the Lord left home and was ordained he had become a beggar and his status as a prince had disappeared. All that remained was a poor man, or a beggar, without anything that was of any value at all, for his belongings, dwelling place and everything else had become those of a beggar and he had not a thing left of the former Prince. Then he endeavoured to discard the conceit of being a Prince until it left him entirely and there remained just a beggar, the same as any other beggar that we may see. But it turned out to be a way of life which was pleasant for the Lord and suited him, and it was also a suitable basis to enable him to become the “Teacher of the World.”

Then he investigated the principles of birth, old age, suffering and death, which are the “world of cannot”, the world which cannot endure, the world which whirls around changing in this way, changing in that way, excited about old things, excited about new things, and this kind of thing is what is called *lokavaṭṭacakra* (the whirling round of the world).

When the Buddha had investigated this world until it had become quite clear, he saw that his heart was also full of this world. In other words, his mental activities (*cetasika dhamma*) displayed instability, whirling about changing: becoming good, becoming evil, going into the past or future, forming together going back and forth. His seeing clearly with *paññā* in this way is called *paccayākāra* or *paṭiccasamuppāda* (Dependent Origination), precisely investigating the arising and ceasing of *saṅkhāras* both of self and of others throughout the whole universe (*lokadhātu*) and seeing that everywhere it has the characteristics of the *Ti-lakkhaṇa*. In other words, *annica* throughout the universe, starting from oneself and going out; *dukkha* — all have *dukkha* in the same way; *anattā* — having died, anyone who wants to take anything from this world to the next one cannot. Ultimately even a single hair which is the lightest thing and being attached to this body goes wherever we go, but when we have left this world we must submit to its being returned to its original source — which is earth, water, air, fire. What remains is the heart and the things which are hidden there, these being the good and the evil which one has accumulated in one’s lifetime. Both of these natures are “shadows” following us.

When the Lord had come to know the foregoing, he again considered that: “Demerit is evil and this is a thing that may be clearly seen, but to where will merit, which is good, follow us?” So he investigated merit and demerit again to see them clearly by way of the *paccayākāra* which is called the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, searching inwardly until he reached *avijjā paccayā saṅkhāra*, etc... The story of birth originates from *avijjā*, being connected step by step branching out from there, as a branch leads to a twig which leads to a leaf to a flower to a fruit, going from the trunk outwards. Finally we get back to “*samudaya hoti*” which he called the “origin of *avijjā*” — the one to which they are all linked back and from which they branch out in this way.

When the Lord investigated backwards and forwards until he saw clearly and truly into *avijjā* that it has arisen from nature — which is the heart, then he investigated precisely with *paññā* into the heart which is *avijjā*.

On the night of the full moon of the sixth month, the Lord saw with absolute clarity and *avijjā* broke and dispersed from the heart of the Lord on that night. So it seems that our Lord Buddha was enlightened on this same night. After six years all the questions about birth, old age, sickness and death and about the whirling round and changeableness of the *citta* and all the *dhātus* and *khandhas* came to an end on that night, and he knew clearly that “Buddho” which is “purity” had arisen in the heart of the Lord. Buddho, freed from the *kilesas*, *taṇhā* and *āsavas*. Buddho which is entirely pure. Buddho, the end of all worry. This may be called: gone entirely free beyond this world of cannot — which changed and became the world that was given the name of *Lokuttara Dhamma* — in other words Dhamma which is above the mundane realm and which is free from the world of birth, old age, sickness and death, and he was the first to do this.

When the Lord had become enlightened on that night he had the intention to teach others. But to begin with the Lord was discouraged from guiding and teaching others for he saw that the Dhamma that he had known and seen was beyond the capacity of people to be able to know and see who have *kilesas* as all of us have. But when he investigated, comparing himself with other people he saw that he was a human being the same as all other human beings in the world. What was the reason that he had been able to know and see? He traced back his practice and the stages through which he travelled, and he saw that when there is the practice and the method for going on in the right direction, they must be causes which readily enable one to reach the goal. So he had the intention to advise and teach others, for he saw that all beings, if they are trained and taught in the right way, will be able to know and see in the same way as himself. Therefore he decided in his heart to advise and teach others gradually. And thus it was that the Lord was his own teacher and taught himself to completion first, after which he was able to be the Teacher, to teach the world to completion, gradually, right up to the present day.

Therefore, today all of us who are Buddhists have made the effort to come and increase our merit in this place which is associated with Venerable Chao Khun Dhammachedī who died and whose body was put in a funeral urn; and you have come to listen to a Dhamma *desanā* and to accept the “Dhamma of sorrow” in that the Venerable Chao Khun Dhammachedī and ourselves are composed of four elements — earth, water, air, fire — in the same way. As in the Pāli quotation at the beginning of this *desanā*: “*Aciram vat’ayam kayo*” — the body is not a stable lasting thing. As with the Venerable Chao Khun’s: “*Pathavim adhisessati chuddho apetaviññāṇo*”. However it is, it must lie on the ground when consciousness had departed from it.

This shows to all of us that we should contemplate he who has died and make comparison with we who are still living. In what ways are there differences? They are different in that one who has consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is still in charge of himself, as against he whose consciousness has gone, of whom they just say “he is dead”.

When consciousness has gone from ourselves, what will they then say of us? We must go in the same way as the Venerable Chao Khun who shows the moral for all of us at this present time. Therefore all of us who have come here have come to accept the Dhamma of sorrow, which is the cause for us to think about ourselves so that we shall not be careless and indolent in the performance of virtue, which is a means to promote one’s heart so that it may in the future be born in a good place. Then even if one is born as a human being, one will be a good

person who is clever, under the influence of good tendencies, having abilities and also property, wealth, enjoyment and servants, which will come from the influence of one's own virtue. When one is dead there is an end to the doing of good and evil, and then one will probably experience the fruits of the *kamma* that one has done.

At present, on this occasion it is not too late for any of us, for we are in a suitable age and time which is called *majjhima* (middle, median) in so far as it concerns the practice of virtue, for we are able to behave in such ways as will lead to development both in the world and in Dhamma by means of our own actions. When we die, we will from then on have lost the situation in which we are able to do good and evil, and this the Lord compared to a log of firewood which is useless — except that firewood can still be used to cook food, or in other ways, whereas when we are dead we are no use, neither as fuel, nor to make charcoal, nor as salted fish or fish sauce. So we say: dead men have no value, and they can no longer practise the ways of virtue.

The Lord constantly said that: “*Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ suññaṃ*” — *Nibbāna* is the Dhamma which is void of *dukkha*, danger and all kinds of faults and blemishes. At the same time it is: “*Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*” — as soon as one is void of the foregoing things a change takes place into the Dhamma of supreme happiness (*sukha*). Which is superior to all forms of *sukha* in this world, and thus: “*Kho nu hāso kimānando niccaṃ pajjalitesati*” (“Why mirth, why pleasure, when everything is always burning?” Dhṛ. 146) — therefore let all of us quickly follow the Tathāgata now. Do not let yourselves be negligent and careless in your life and your *citta* (heart), which is evident just in your breathing, for when your breathing finally ceases, whether you are young or old or however else, it is just said that “you die”.

Therefore, do not let yourselves be negligent and careless with your breath, for the fire of the *kilesas* and *taṇhā* is spreading and burning the hearts of those who are careless. But those who are clever will gain freedom and go with us, the Tathāgata free from the power of the *kilesas* to overtake us. You must hurry and follow us the Tathāgata in the various methods of practice, in *dāna* (generosity), in *sīla*, and in *bhāvanā*. You must examine your body and see it clearly; look at the skin, the flesh, the whole body and see it clearly with *paññā*”.

The “skin” outside which we go and watch at the cinema, at the folk drama and the theatre is “skin” which will increase craving, pride and conceit. From children to adults it spoils people's characters and it wastes a lot of money, because they rarely gain any good moral teaching, and apart from this it generally leads to people becoming too engrossed in them.

In looking at the skin, flesh, sinews, bones and all the other parts of our bodies, which is the cinema within ourselves, there is no need to spend money, and ultimately it will arouse the “Dhamma of sorrow” which causes us to walk in the footsteps of the Buddha with insight into the banefulness of this mass of *Dukkha*, of which he taught saying:

“*Kho nu hāso kimānando niccaṃ pajjalitesati*” — “Do not be too cheerful, gay and joyful. Look at the body, old age, dotage, senility, its breaking up and destruction — for its destruction will not take place anywhere but within yourself, and death will take place just within yourself.”

Hurry and search for virtue, for even now the sun has not yet gone down — in other words one is not yet dead. Hurry and follow the Tathāgata now so that all of you will be safe. Then the fires of *rāga*, *dosa* and *moha* will never again surround and scorch you, like us the

Tathāgata, for we the Tathāgata have been born for the last time and we have cut ourselves away from friends and companions — in other words, from birth, old age, death and from all worries and we need not come to the hard and turbulent world again”.

This is the Dhamma that was taught so that all of us Buddhists should know it and be awake to it and not addicted to heedlessness, and this Dhamma teaching that the Lord taught is always *majjhima* — the middle way.

On any day or whenever someone does good, gives *dāna*, develops their meditation (*bhāvanā*), guards their *sīla*, it is virtue the result of which is apparent at all times. Let us follow the Tathāgata in this way, for this is the instruction of the Lord Buddha which displays the story of that nature which is more excellent than anything else in the world. In other words: *Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ suññaṃ* — which means, *Nibbāna* is the Dhamma that is entirely void of all things. This means that there is not even the least *dukkha* in *Nibbāna*. And further: *Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ* — there is no *sukha* which any of us have ever experienced in this world to equal the *sukha* of *Nibbāna*. And once again: “*Apetaviññāṇo niratthaṃ va kaḷiṅgaram*” — “None of you should become enraptured and pleased with a ‘log of firewood’ which is going to break up and die away, nor with the breath which goes in and out until it goes for good. You must follow us the Tathāgata in your routine duties, in your practice, in giving *dāna*, in *sīla*, and in *bhāvanā*”.

Do not be indifferent and careless in your life and formations (*jīvitā-saṅkhārā*) for such as they are dying all over the earth, and they are teachers teaching us. Why then is everyone so heedless when they are showing us as though shouting at us to hurry and develop ourselves so as to follow the Lord and attain freedom from those dangers which are the mass of *dukkha* that dwells in our bodies and hearts (*citta*) and are burning round us all the time without letting up for a moment.

The constituents of our bodies are always defying us and telling us that this state is of such a nature as is bound to break up. If we should put it in normal forms of speech, it is as though we were asked, “Do you yet know the mass of *dukkha* which fills you?” At all times it shows its advantage and hold over us for if we do not eat or lie down and sleep regularly these *khandhas* are bound to break up and disperse, for they are things which cannot remain passive. So we must try to humour and support them, we must look after and take care of them in their four postures. These are the things that we must do for our bodies.

But in so far as revealing the whole of this Dhamma, you who are listening will bring yourselves to do the practice and gain results and benefits for yourselves, the amount depending on your ability, upon the strength of your Sati and *paññā*, on your own thoughts which are able to accord with the strength of your *saddhā* and ability, and you are not liable to waste your effort.

Today I have commented upon: “*Aciraṃ vat’ayaṃ kayo pathaviṃ adhisessati*” — regardless of whose body — non-enduring is the story of repeated birth and death. As for ourselves, if we reckon that we shall reach sixty or seventy years old, from then to the day we die is not long — as though it is only an hour. Wasting time and repeating birth, death and *dukkha* over and over again were troublesome things for the wisest of men — which means the Lord Buddha. But even though we are unable to do so as the Lord did, we should at least examine his example and make a special effort to do the practice according to his teaching. This will be for our development and prosperity both in this life and in future lives, and we will not waste our

time as human beings, which is the highest form of life and superior to all other beings, who do not have the opportunity as we do, to be in control of the “wealth” of being human at this time.

In conclusion of this Dhamma *desanā*, may the power of the merit of the Lord Buddha as well as the Dhamma and the Sangha overshadow all of you Buddhists who have made the effort to come with willing hearts, and may you have bodily happiness and ease of heart everyday.

Having now given some explanations of the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha, this would seem to be sufficient for the time being, so I beg leave to stop here.

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Such is the way of it.