

# THE APPLICATION OF THE BUDDHIST DOCTRINES IN DAILY LIFE

by Ven. Dr. Thich Buu Chanh

Head, Department of Pali, Vietnam Buddhist University

Buddhist doctrines itself contain nothing of a sectarian nature and can be accepted and applied by people of any background.

In summing up the Buddha's years of preaching the Dhamma, He declared explicitly that He did preach only Dukkha and the end of Dukkha and nothing else<sup>1</sup>: "O bhikkhus, in former times as well as nowadays I have preached only suffering and the cessation of suffering". War brings suffering. Peace means the end of suffering, that is why the Buddha is called "A messenger for peace".

The Buddha said very clearly that His purpose in teaching the Dhamma was not to quarrel with other religious leaders and to compete with antagonistic doctrines. There is no quarrel in His teaching. The Buddha just presents the way to liberation from all suffering.

The Buddha's attitude towards quarrels and disputes is very clear. He has no quarrel with the world. His preaching of the Dhamma has the only purpose to show the way to put an end to suffering. He never claims that his Dhamma is the only truth and everything else is false. He just makes it clear to every one to come, see and to judge by oneself.

Any war, if breaking out, will bring in its trails, untold suffering. Victory engenders hatred and defeat brings suffering. So the best way is not to resort to wars to solve disputes, but to explore all peaceful means to settle differences and conflicts.

The Buddhist doctrines are certainly to be learned, more to be practiced and above all to be realized by oneself. Mere studying is of no avail without actual practice. The learned man who does not practice Dhamma is like a cowherd who counts other's kin<sup>2</sup> or as a flower that is lovely and beautiful but is scentless<sup>3</sup>.

Nārada Mahā Thera says: "He who does not study the Dhamma is like a blind man. But he who does not practise the Dhamma is comparable to a library"<sup>4</sup>.

Application of the Buddhist doctrines leads to a happy, useful life. The practice of the teaching of the Buddha, especially Vipassanā, is very important because it provides result that are good, personal, tangible and immediate.

Ajahn Chah, a Thai meditation teacher says: "If one only has knowledge of books and scriptures, sermons and suttas, that is only knowledge of the map or plane for the journey, even in hundreds of lives one will never know purity radiance and peacefulness of mind. Instead one will just waste time and never get to the real benefits of practice"<sup>5</sup>

Practice of the Buddhist doctrines will dispel the darkness of suffering. The teaching of the Buddha is simply the truth and reality. The Buddha asserts that it is proper to doubt and to test whatever is beyond one's experience.

The Buddha stated<sup>6</sup>: "Therefore, Ānanda, you should live as an island unto yourselves,

<sup>1</sup> "Pubbe cāha bhikkhave etarahi ca dukkhañ c' eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodha ". M.i. 140: S. iii. 119.

<sup>2</sup> "Gopo'va gāvo ga naya paresa ", Dhp. v. 19. p.5.

<sup>3</sup> "Yathā pi rucira puppha , va avanta agandhaka ". Dhp. v. 51. p.15.

<sup>4</sup> Nārada, The Buddha and His Teaching, (Taipei: CBBEF, 1998), p.VIII.

<sup>5</sup> Ajahn Chah - Phra Bodhiyāna Thera, A Collection of Dhamma Talks, ([http://www.zencomp.com/great\\_wisdom/ebud/bodhin/bodhinoo.htm](http://www.zencomp.com/great_wisdom/ebud/bodhin/bodhinoo.htm)).

<sup>6</sup> "Tasmā' ih Ānanda atta dīpā viharatha atta sara ā, anañña-saranā, dhammadīpā dhamma-sara a aññasara ā". D.ii.100.

being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge”<sup>7</sup>.

The Buddha said<sup>8</sup>: “And how does a monk live as an island unto himself, ... with another refuge? Here Ānanda, a monk abides contemplating the body as body, earnestly clearly aware, mindful and having put away all hankering and fretting for the world and likewise with regard to feelings, mind and mind-objects. That, Ānanda, is how a monk a monk lives as an island unto himself, ... with no other refuge”<sup>9</sup>.

The Dhamma or the Buddhist doctrines are a way that each person can follow. This is the Noble Eight fold Path, the path of insight into the nature of truth, a path of truth realization.

The only way to experience truth directly is to look within, to see oneself. We have always seen what is happy outside. We have rarely if ever tried to investigate ourselves, our mental and physical factors, our own kammās.

The teaching of the Buddha is the path of self-observation. This path is also a path of purification (visuddhimagga). “We recognize the accumulated inner tensions that keep us agitated, miserable and we realize they can be removed. Gradually we can learn how to allow them to dissolve, and our minds become pure, peaceful and happy”<sup>10</sup>.

Following this path of purification we obtain benefits which must be concrete, valid, personal, experienced here and now. Buddhist doctrines to be practiced to gain happiness here and now. Saddhā or Faith is the Buddha and Buddhist doctrines will not help to liberate us from Dukkha. Only the actual practice of Buddhist doctrines will give concrete results and change our lives for the better.

To follow the path of purification we must live the life Dhamma, or truth. He who follows this path will be able to make a positive contribution that will increase the happiness and welfare of all instead of adding to the tension of society.

The cause of suffering lies with each one of us. When we understand our own reality, we shall realize the way to set free our suffering. We know our own nature. We realize that every being is a composite of five aggregates (pañcakkhandha). Four of them belong to mental factors (nāma), and one of them belongs to physical matter (rūpa).

The physical reality and the mental reality are changing constantly every moment. One should also be a scientist of the world, within, in order to experience truth directly. This moment, now, is the most important for us. We live only in the present.

Bhaddekarattasuttam of the Mjjhima Nikāya says:<sup>11</sup> “Let not a person revive the past, on the future build his hopes, for the past has been left behind, and the future has not been reached, instead with insight let him see, each presently arisen state, let him know that and be sure of it, invincibly unshakeably., today the effort must be made, tomorrow Death may come, who knows? No bargain with mortality can keep him and his hordes away, but one who dwells thus ardently, relentless, by day, by night, it is he, the peaceful sage has said,

<sup>7</sup> The Long Discourses, trans. by Maurice Walshe, (Kandy: BPS, 1996), p.245.

<sup>8</sup> “Kathañ c’ Ānanda, bhikkhu atta-dīpo viharati atta sara o, anañña - sara o, dhammahīpo dhamma-sara o anañña-sara o? Idha Ānanda bhikkhu kāye kāyānuppassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhā domanassa , vedanāsu... pe... citte... pe... dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhā domanassa , eva kho Ānanda bhikkhu atta dīpo viharati atta sara o añña sara o dhamma dīpo dhamma-sara o anañña-sara o”. D. ii. 10.

<sup>9</sup> The Long Discourses, trans. by Maurice Walshe, (Kandy: BPS, 1996) p. 245.

<sup>10</sup> S.N. Goenka, The Art of Living, ed. by William Hart, (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1987), p.16.

<sup>11</sup> “Atīta nānvāgameyya, Nappa ikankhe anāgata , Yad atīta pahīna ta , Appattañ ca anāgata , Paccuppannañ ca yo dhamma , Tattha tattha vipassati, Asamkīra asa kuppa , Tamvidvā-m-anubrūhaye, Ajj’eva kiccā ātappa , Ko jaññā mara a suve? Na hi no sa gara tena, Mahāsena mucunā, Eva vihāri ātāpī , Ahoratta , Ta ve bhaddekaratto ti, Santo ācikkhate munīti ”. M. 187.

who has had a single excellent night.”<sup>12</sup>

The teachings of the Buddha can be summed up in three parts: Sīla, Samādhi, and Paññā.

Sīla is the foundation of Buddhism. Without Sīla, we can not develop Samādhi and Paññā. Pañca sīla (five precepts) are the basic level of Sīla of the lay people. To follow and refine these precepts in every circumstance is itself a practice leading to liberation of all beings.

The Pañca sīla are:

- (1) Pā ātipātā verama ī sikkhāpada samādiyāmi<sup>13</sup> (I under-take the rule of training to refrain from killing living beings),
- (2) Adinnādānā verama ī sikkhāpada samādiyāmi<sup>14</sup> (I under-take the rule of training to refrain from accepting which is not given),
- (3) Kāmesu micchācārā verama ī sikkhāpada samādiyāmi<sup>15</sup> (I undertake the rule of training to refrain from wrong conduct in sexual relations),
- (4) Musāvādā verama ī sikkhāpada samādiyāmi<sup>16</sup> (I under-take the rule of training to refrain from false speech),
- (5) Surāmeraya majjha pamādātthānā verama ī sikkhāpada samādiyāmi<sup>17</sup> (I undertake the rule of training to refrain from intoxicants such as liquors, etc., causing carelessness),

The observances foster a basic purity that makes it easy to progress along the path of practice. Sīla is basic sense of humanity. We know what it feels like to be harmed and out of loving care and consideration we undertake to avoid harming others.

From the Buddhist point of view, there is a way of peace that is the practice of Pañca sīla. It brings about peace and harmony everywhere.

People do not fear or doubt those who observe and practice the Pañca sīla because they are not murderers, thieves, immoral persons, liars or drunkards. They are good people who try to spread peace harmony, ect.

Pañca sīla is to bless all beings with the gift of security, non-hate and harmless.

All happiness of men in this world depend on their lives. One who abstains from killing other beings saves his dear life and others. Abstaining from killing other beings is to keep peace in the world. “Those who refrain from the slaughter of beings, who are protectors of all living sentient things, who give all other beings the gift of security are like mighty trees that shelter and shade people, birds and beast with their myriad foliage”.<sup>18</sup>

Who keeps the rule of abstaining from the theft games in inner and outer well being. He lives a happy life and gives happiness to others. He keeps the rule of abstaining from misconduct “is blessed with a heart that is ever at peace and serene and a body possessed of strength and energy at all times”.<sup>19</sup>

Who keeps the rule of abstaining from false speech wins the trust and confidence of many and is honoured by those who know him.

One who abstains from intoxicants keeps the mind free from confusion. He who

<sup>12</sup> The Middle Length Discourses, trans. By Bhik. Ñā amoli and Bhik. Bodhi, (Kandy: BPS, 1995), p.

1039

<sup>13</sup> Khuddakapāṭha, e by Helmer Smith, (London: PTS, 1978), p.1; ī. 180.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Piyadassi Mahāthera, The Spectrum of Buddhism, (Taipei: CBDEF, 1991). 423.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.424.

drinks intoxicants becomes full of dosa and moha.

The Buddha taught us not to kill others for life is dear to all.<sup>20</sup> “All men tremble at punishment, all men fear death. Likening others to oneself, one should neither slay nor cause to slay”.<sup>21</sup>

The Buddha advises us not to cause to kill for everybody fears punishment.<sup>22</sup> Everyone fears punishment, everyone loves life, as you do. Therefore do not kill or cause to kill”.<sup>23</sup>

When we take care of one another and live without harming other beings we create freedom and happiness.

The Buddha said that whoever seeking his own happiness, harms with the rod other pleasure-loving beings experiences no happiness hereafter and he also taught that whoever seeking his own happiness, harms not with other pleasure-loving beings, experiences happiness hereafter.

The Pañca sīla are the first step along the Buddha’s path as Ve Hoang Mai explains, “they would provide an excellent basis of virtue. Each person has the opportunity to practise to the best of his abilities until he becomes more mature and is spiritually ready to give up unwholesome kamma”.<sup>24</sup>

The positive power of virtue is enormous. Sir Jack Kornfield says: “When we do not live by these precepts, it is said we live like wild beasts, without them, all other spiritual practice is a sham, imagine what a different world this world be if everyone kept even one precept- not to kill, or not to steal. We would truly create a new world order”.<sup>25</sup>

To obey sīla is to train our respect. Pañca sīla can actively brings mettacitta and karu āci tta in our life. No killing can develop into a respect to life. Not stealing can become the protection of ecology, honouring the limited resources of the earth. To refrain from wrong conduct in sexual relations can become expression of love, joy and tenderness. Not telling a lie can develop our voice to speak for compassion, understanding and justice. To refrain from intoxicants such as liquors etc., can develop an alert mind in all manner. “At first, precepts are practice ... then they become a necessity ... and finally become a joy”.<sup>26</sup> Better than perfume, fragrance of sīla rises to everywhere even to Devas.

The Buddha teaches: “The scent of flowers does not travel against the wind, nor that of sandalwood, nor of tagara and mallikā flowers, but the fragrance of good people travels even against the wind. A good man pervades every quarter”.<sup>27</sup>

The Buddha says: “Little is the scent that come from tagara or sandalwood, the perfume of those who possess virtue rises up to the Gods as the highest”.<sup>28</sup>

The perfume which is from sīla, the generosity which is from sīla, the peace which is

---

<sup>20</sup> “Sabbe tasanti da assa, sabbe bhāyati maccuno, attāna upama katvā Na haneyya na ghātaye”. The Dhammapada, ed. and trans. by Nikunja Vihari Banerjee, (Delhi: MNP, 1989), p.36.

<sup>21</sup> The Dhammapada, ed. and trans. by S. Radhakrishnan, (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.102.

<sup>22</sup> “Sabbe tasanti da assa, sabbesa jīvita piya , attāna upama katvā, Na haneyya na ghātaye”. (Dhp. 130). The Dhammapada, ed. and trans. by Nikunja Vihari Banerjee, op. cit., p.36.

<sup>23</sup> The Dhammapada, trans. by Eknath Easwaran, (London: Arkana, 1987), p.111.

<sup>24</sup> Hoang Mai (1998), A Critical Study of the Puggala as depicted in the Pañca Nikāya, Ph. Thesis, Delhi University, Delhi, p.237.

<sup>25</sup> Jack Kornfield, Conscious Conduct: The Five Precepts, (London: Giac Quang, 1997), p.39.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> “Na pupphagandho pativāta eti, na candana tagara malliaka vā, sata ca gandho pativāta eti, sabbā disā sappuriso pavāti” The Dhammapada, rd. and trans. by Nikunja Vihari Banerjee, op. cit., p.22.

<sup>28</sup> The Dhammapada trans. by S. Radha Krishnan, op., cit., p.77.

from sīla are our greatest gifts to the earth.

Mr. Jack Kornfield explains as follows: “In extension of our practice on sīla we become the center of a circle, like a stone thrown into a pond that sinks softly to the bottom while ripples move to touch each shore. As the center of the circle, we become peaceful in ourselves and bring alive this same peace to others no matter what changes of life are before us.”<sup>29</sup>

Buddhist doctrine is life-giving. Dr. Sandeep Gopinath told a story about a sacrificial ceremony in a poor Buddhist family in Ladakh as follows: “On the snow clad mountainous terrain of Ladakh, a poor Buddhist family decides to offer its precious white yak as a sacrifice.

A Buddhist priest initiates the sacrificial ceremony. Once the ceremony is over the yak is taken towards the mountain for the final will release it from all bondage.

At the appointed time, under the watchful eye of the priest, the yak is set free to the wilderness of the mountains. This is no bloody sacrifice, it implies the sacrifice the family makes by letting go of their prized possession- in this case, a yak. Buddhism does not believe in taking-life, it believes in giving-life”.<sup>30</sup>

A method which is needed to help us realize the real nature of life i.e., Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta is Vipassanā meditation. In meditation we seek a deep, clear and precise awareness of the mind and the body.

The Dhamma is the path of here and now. Practicing Ānāpānasati is an important method to develop awareness of oneself. By practicing ānāpānasati we are aware of the present moment.

Practicing ānāpānasati can help us search whatever is known about ourselves.

Practicing ānāpānasati can help us to destroy lobha (craving), dosa (aversion), moha (ignorance) by first becoming aware of them. In the moment when the mind is fully focussed on breathing in and breathing out, the mind is free from lobha, dosa and moha. In this way we begin to cleanse the mind and advance toward liberation (vimutti).

Sir S.N. Goenka states about the result of practicing Vipassanā meditation as follows: “As we persevere in meditation, we soon realize one basic fact: our sensation are constantly changing”.

Every moment, in every part of the body, a sensation arises, and every sensation is an indication of a change.

Every moment changes occur in every part of the body, electromagnetic and biochemical reactions.

Vipassanā or the practice of four foundation of mindfulness (satipa hāna) is a technique that purifies the citta, that helps us overcome negative qualities of lobha, dosa and moha cetasika

Vipassanā can help generate peace for oneself and for the world. By practice of Vipassanā we abstain from actions that cause harm. Vipassanā help in speech, body and mind control.

The practice of Vipassanā makes one penetrate into one’s entire physical and mental structure with the clarity of insight. How will Vipassanā helps the world if only a few persons practice it? How can the problems like poverty, unemployment, disease, violence, discrimination, war and exploitation, be solved by a few people practicing

---

<sup>29</sup> Jack Kornfield, *Conscious Conduct: The Five Precepts*, (London: Giac Quang, 1997), p.39.

<sup>30</sup> Sandeep Gopinath, *Buddha Dharma Is Life-giving*, *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 29-4-2002, p.14.

Vipassanā?

S.Krishna answers as follows: “The individual is the key. An individual is a unit of society. Society consists of individuals. Individuals make up society, societies make up nations and nations make up the world. We can share with the world only that which we have. If we have money we can share it with others. But, if we do not have even a single paisa how can we share it with others? Similarly if by practicing Vipassanā we can make our own life happy, we can then distribute happiness to others.

Only happy people can make a happy world. Miserable people make a miserable world. If by practicing Vipassanā, we can become happy, healthy and peaceful, we can then distribute and share this wealth with others”.<sup>31</sup>

Each moment we are unmindful, the penetrate into the mind. A pleasant visual object presents itself, the unguarded citta will be naturally filled with craving and clinging, closing tightly around that object. If the citta is unmindful, when an unpleasant object appears, hatred naturally arises.

What is important is to maintain a wholesome relationship with pleasant and unpleasant objects. The practice of restraint is an effective way of preventing this assault by kilesas.

Mindfulness is actually the cause for restraint to arise. When we are mindful in each moment, lobha, moha, dosa and remaining akusaladhammas can not arise. As soon as we come into contact with an object, we note it immediately for what it is.

The way to practice Vipassanā, according to U. Pandita Sayadaw, is simple and easy to do. He says: “We want to be sure that in seeing is only the seeing, in hearing only the hearing, in touch only the touch, in taste only the taste, and in thinking just the thought. Each of these processes should be clear and simple, not burdened with a lot of extra rumination, not clotted with kilesa. If we are able to be really mindful, objects will arise and pass without further thoughts or reactions, just the process in itself. No matter what kind of objects we are forced to encounter, we will be safe from desire or aversion”.<sup>32</sup> No one is there, just nāma and rūpa. No one creates nāma rūpa.

The practice of Buddhist doctrines, i.e., Vipassanā can help us further see how these phenomena are conditioned. Wisdom is to see clearly the cause and effect. Observing the true nature of nāma and rūpa, we have insight into their permanence, suffering and not-self.

The Paññā of anicca is direct. We feel anicca anywhere we place our attention. Even simple observation tells us that the whole body is impermanence, very naturally the factor of suffering will also become apparent.

Everything is in flux, and this is unsatisfactory. Suffering itself is actually a kind of synonym for anicca, referring to all impermanent things. Anatta refers to all impermanent phenomena which possess no self-essence.

The characteristic of Anatta is seeing that an object does not arise or pass according to one's wishes. All nāma rūpa that appear in us come and go of their own nature laws. Their appearance is beyond our control.

U. Pandita says: “While conscientiously watching all the mental and physical phenomena arising and passing away within, one may be struck by the fact that no one is in control of the process. Such an insight comes quite naturally. It is not affected or manipulated in any way. Nor does it come from reflection. It simply occurs when one is

---

<sup>31</sup> S.Krishna, Vipassanā Can Help Generate Peace, (Delhi: Times of India, 14-5-2002).

<sup>32</sup> U. Pandita Sayadaw, In This Very Life, (Kandy: BPS, 1993), p.172.

present observing the passing away of phenomena”.<sup>33</sup>

How to practice meditation in everyday life? The simple answer is to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is the greatest protection. One hour a day for meditation is very good. “A good time might be the first thing in the morning when get up, as a way of setting up mindfulness for a day, and one hour in the evening which becomes a time of cooling out and relaxing the mind and body”.<sup>34</sup>

A regular sitting practice is of inestimable value. Be mindful of certain activities which are done everyday, such as eating, bathing, cleaning, etc. Be mindful when we are walking everyday. We can simply be aware of the whole body in movement. Please remember the breath with mindfulness.

The mind will become concentrated and tranquil with a silent peaceful mind, there is a nature unfolding of the Dhamma.

Living mindfully means living in the present moment, deeply observing what is happening.

To live mindfully does not mean to reject the world and society. We are fully alive in the present moment means we live with mindfulness.

If we live in forgetfulness we will not be able to live each moment of our life deeply.

Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh says: “We do well to do simple things, like walking or sitting meditation, washing our clothes, cleaning the floor, making tea, and cleaning the bath room in mindfulness. If we do these things we will restore the richness of our spiritual life”.<sup>35</sup>

If we live in mindfulness, we are very rich, no longer poor, because our practice of living in the present moment makes us rich in joy, peace, understanding and love. Life can be found only in the present moment because the past no longer is, and the future has not yet come.

---

<sup>33</sup> U. Pandita Sayadaw, *In This Very Life*, op., cit., p.195.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Goldstein, *The Experience of Insight*, (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p.164.

<sup>35</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Our Appointment with Life*, (Delhi: Full Circle, 1999), pp.28-29.