

# The Unsatisfactory Nature of Existence

Dhamma talk by Tan Ajaan Suchart Abhijato on May 11, 2013 in  
the *sala chǎn* (Dinning Hall).

By

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# **“The Gift of Dhamma Excels All Other Gifts”**

- The Lord Buddha

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# Acknowledgements

The relevant words found in the glossary are taken from a number of sources. They are “A Glossary of *Pāli* and *Buddhist* Terms,” on the website Access to Insight, the glossary in the book *Paṭipadā* translated by Venerable *Ācariya Paññavaḍḍho* and also the book Venerable *Ācariya Mun Bhūridatta* Thera translated by *Bhikkhu Dick Silaratano*.

Translators

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# The Unsatisfactory Nature of Existence

May 11, 2013

Today is Saturday, the 11<sup>th</sup> of May, Buddhist calendar 2556. People who have faith and belief in the Buddhist religion have made up their minds to come to the temple to benefit themselves and others through wise wholesome actions such as giving, nurturing virtue, listening to the Dhamma and meditating. We have faith and belief in the teachings of the Buddha who taught that when our body passes away, we do not pass away with the body but return to be born again in accordance with our *kamma*. For our next life to be better than the previous one, we have to make merit do good deeds and avoid bad deeds. And if we do not desire to be born again, we ought to meditate and constantly develop *samatha* (calm) meditation and *vipassanā* (insight) meditation, and have faith in the Buddha who taught us to recollect and reflect on the certainty of impermanence of our body. If we constantly remind ourselves of death, we will not remain negligent or careless, but will quickly

put in effort to fully benefit ourselves and others without complacency.

If we do not recollect death constantly, we are being complacent. We will not remember that we will have to die and we will seek out worldly things such as food, money or people as our valuable possessions, not knowing that whatever things in this world we are able to gather up are only temporary. When the time comes for the body to die, we cannot take these possessions with us. But what we can take with us is our merit, our wise wholesome actions such as giving, nurturing our virtue, meditating, listening to and practising Dhamma. Developing goodness causing it to arise and be established within ourselves, is something that can be taken along with us. This is indeed very important, especially to our own mind, for it becomes our mind's refuge. Whatever valuable possessions, food or money are not refuges for the mind. They cannot cause *sukha* (happiness), fulfilment and contentment within the mind, and they cannot completely extinguish all kinds of *dukkha* (discontent and stress) within the heart. Our



material possessions cannot protect the mind from disturbing conditions that enter and give rise to *dukkha* within our mind.

Thus the *Buddha* taught us that we ought to continuously strive to make more wholesome merit, discard more wholesome actions, and make our hearts more and more pure. For these actions will truly benefit ourselves. It will not benefit the body, but will benefit the mind. The mind is us and is ours. The body is not us and is not ours. We should not be deluded into excessively seeking all kinds of things through the body, for the body. Be content and just obtain what is necessary for our livelihood. Seeking food, housing, medicine for illness and clothing is enough. It is proper that we seek a refuge for the mind more through cultivating merit and goodness by giving, maintaining our virtue, practising Dhamma, sitting and walking meditation, developing mindfulness, developing *samādhi*, and developing wisdom. By undertaking these actions, we can have Dhamma and merit to oversee and

maintain *sukha* in the mind all the time, and have no *dukkha* or agitation whatsoever.

This noble work is very important to us - to oversee and nurture our mind. Do not be excessively concerned about caring and nurturing the body. For no matter how much care the body receives, you still cannot prevent aging, prevent sickness, pain or death. However, with regards to caring for the mind, whatever progress we are able to make will correspondingly bring cessation of *dukkha*. This will build up happiness and contentment within our mind even more.

Overseeing and taking care of our mind is not empty of benefits but instead bring results here in the present as well as in the future. As for taking care of the body, we just get present benefits while the body is still alive. But when the body dies, we are no longer able to take care of the body. Whatever benefits the body used to give will also cease. This is something that we ought to constantly remember.

The Buddha teaches us to contemplate that as a result of birth;

I am of the nature to age.

I cannot escape from ageing.

I am of the nature to get sick and experience pain.

I cannot escape from sickness and pain.

I am of the nature to die.

I cannot escape from death.

All that is mine, beloved and pleasing, will become otherwise, will become separated from me.

This is something that is worthwhile for us to remember constantly, many, many times a day. Otherwise this truth will not stay with us. We will then not forget and be deluded into working on anything that brings no benefit to ourselves and will instead take on worthwhile activities, such as making merit, nurturing our virtue, meditating and listening to and practising Dhamma.

If we do not reflect deeply, we may think that we will not experience old age, sickness, pain and death. We will then go seeking fortune, status, fame and pleasure

through ears, nose, tongue, eyes and body just like our current lifestyle. We will make very little effort to give, keep the precepts, meditate or listen to and practise Dhamma. On the contrary, when it comes to seeking fortune, status, fame and pleasure through the ears, nose, tongue, eyes and body, we strive the whole day and night, except when we are asleep. When we wake up, we are off again to seek pleasure through the ears, nose, tongue, eyes and body. We open the refrigerator, looking for snacks, looking for drinks or go off to the kitchen to what else there is to eat. Once our stomach is full, we are off again seeking pleasure through the ears, nose, eyes, tongue and body, seeking entertainment all night long, in all sorts of places, looking for this person or that person, looking for this thing or that thing. This is seeking that is of no use to our heart. It does not bring fulfilment and contentment, but leads only to more and more mental deprivation, hunger and craving continuously. When we don't have anything to protect our mind, we will have loneliness, irritation, depression and be easily agitated. This arouses *dukkha* in our mind and causes us harm. If we are only concerned with

seeking fortune, status, fame and pleasure through the ears, nose, tongue, eyes and body when the body cannot meet our needs our mind will be stressed and tormented. For instance, when the physical body falls into sickness or becomes bed-ridden, it is not possible to seek pleasure through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body. It is not possible to seek pleasure through fortune, status and fame.

When that happens, we will be lonely and depressed. It may even lead to feeling like we want to kill ourselves because we do not know what we are still living for without the means to enjoy physical pleasure as we did before. That is because we do not know the means to find happiness within the mind. For if we can find happiness within our mind, when anything happens to the body, we will not be agitated because we know the way to find happiness within our mind. Even if the body is sick, painful and bed-ridden or paralyzed, we can still find happiness within the heart. We can calm the mind, develop mindfulness and practice the repetition of “*Buddho*”, *Buddho*. If we practice *Buddho* continuously

without thinking of this or that person, this or that issue, our mind will be clear, cool and relaxed, leading to calm and stillness. There will then be bliss. This is happiness that does not need the body to fortune, status, and. This is nurturing our mind to have happiness that leads and delivers us away from *dukkha*. For when we are calm, we are bound to be able to see the origin of *dukkha* and the origin of our perpetual death and rebirth, thus leading us into deeper levels of calm and reducing our *kilesas* (defilements) craving and desire.

For when the mind is calm, defilement and craving stop working and as a result the stressful mind, agitated mind, and angry mind and so-on cease and disappear completely as well. This is the contentment that will stop discontentment, only it is temporary. The practice of mental calm through the repetition of *Buddho, Buddho* is not lasting, for when the calm mental state becomes weak, the *kilesas* will have the power to rise up, distressing the mind. To overcome this, we will have to use wisdom to teach the mind to understand that *kilesas*

are the origin that of mental distress and torment that not worth wanting.

If we do not wish to experience mental distress, but to instead have mental peace and calm forever, we should stop and resist desire, stop and resist greed, hatred and delusion. The method to stop and resist greed, hatred and delusion is to teach our mind that whatever we desire through the *kilesas* and the resultant *sukha* that it brings to us is not comparable to the happiness that is already within our mind. The pleasure acquired through desire is little, arises only once and will be followed by discontentment. Craving will arise again to regain the lost pleasure and we will want it even more. It is like someone who already has a handful who then wants a whole sack. Having a sack, he craves and wants the whole store. Already having \$10,000, his greed wants \$100,000, and then a million. Already having a million, he wants 10 million, 100 million without any end in sight. This goes on and on. Our mind is agitated, seeking all of this according to our desire.

If we want our mind to be calm, cool and happy, and not agitated, we have to fight against desire and teach our mind not to desire. For if we desire, *dukkha* will follow. Whatever happiness gained will be minimal because it is not permanent, and we cannot control it to provide happiness for us forever. Whatever brought *sukha* to us may within a day or night change and bring *dukkha* (unhappiness) to us instead. For example, when the relationship with our partner first starts, our partner is agreeable to us. Everything is delightful, and we are happy. But when our partner changes, whatever brought happiness before may become disagreeable and stressful for us. When our partner changes from being nice to being mean, from being truthful to being dishonest, our mind is no longer happy and only suffers. Additionally, it is not within our power to stop or change our partner. If our partner chooses to be bad, we will be depressed and despair. This is wisdom we use to teach our mind every time it desires anything. Teach the mind not to take things whenever it is not necessary. If we really need something, take it, such as our clothing. If it is torn and not possible to be worn, buy a replacement.



But know what is enough and sufficient; two or three sets is enough. The same goes for sandals and other goods. Do not want more than necessary, otherwise it is desire-driven. If you follow your desire, it will keep on increasing until it becomes too much and overloads your house. Owning too many things is not what increases the happiness in our mind.

This worldly happiness is in general more or less the same as all other worldly happiness we had before in that the happiness arises briefly before dying off. But it will cause to craving and hunger to arise even more. The happiness that we experienced before disappears and needs to be sought and acquired continuously with no end in sight. But if we can give up desire, the mind will become calm, and the mind will have happiness, fulfilment and contentment. Every time desire arises, this happiness, fulfilment and contentment will disappear. If we want this happiness, fulfilment and contentment to be with us again, we should stop new desires from arising.

If we can stop desire, it will be weakened, its power reduced; craving and wanting will be lessened continuously until we don't want anything at all. For we know that whatever we desire, we cannot have because we don't follow the commands of desire. Just like wanting to buy a new dress - we don't buy it. Wanting to buy a new bag - we don't buy it. Desiring a new pair of sandals - we don't buy it. That is because we already have enough. If we live like this, desire will not arise in the future because whenever it arises, it's foiled and gets nowhere. So then what's the point of desiring?

This is the method that we can use to get rid of desire and the resulting *dukkha* that arises out of it until all desire is depleted. Then our mind will have only happiness (*sukha*) forever, every hour of the day. From then on, we will be able to share this technique of meditation with others. Teaching and guiding them if they desire to learn. If they do not wish to know, teaching them would not be of any benefit. Instead, we teach those who are delighted to learn from us, people who have mental *dukkha* and want to extinguish it in

their hearts. We teach them based on the techniques that we have successfully learned and practiced by ourselves.

Teach the practitioner to renounce money, food and all valuable possessions. Not to want, not to cling to, not to long for, not to worry because it will cause the mind to be uncomfortable. Having only the four requisites to look after our body is enough. As for other things, there's no need to store them up. Take them out to be distributed and to help others. It's better to let others have happiness.

Then, tell the practitioner to develop virtue and refrain from unwholesome actions. Unwholesome actions will bring *dukkha* and mental agitation. By avoiding unwholesome actions, the mind will settle down into happiness and calm with no agitation, worry or anger. Then teach the practitioner to develop calm by repeating the "*Buddho, Buddho*" right from the moment they wake up to the moment they fall asleep continuously throughout the day. Then their mind will be empty<sup>25</sup>, cool

and relaxed. Whenever we are free, without any work, close our eyes and just repeat “*Buddho, Buddho*” so our mind will enter calm and be happy.

This is happiness that surpasses all other kinds of happiness. We will realize that there is no happiness in the world that surpasses the happiness that comes from calming the mind. We can then give up desiring all other types of happiness and stop all craving within ourselves. This brings benefit to ourselves and also to others.

However, we should first gain the benefit for ourselves. Tame and train the mind to have happiness and relaxation. Train the mind to be without *dukkha* first. Once we have succeeded in training ourselves, we may help and teach others whenever they need it. If there is no need, refrain from teaching for it would only waste time and annoy the listeners. If they do not want to listen, they will be disinterested and feel cynical towards us. Don't insist on teaching. If someone truly wants it, teach gradually, otherwise don't. It could be that someone can't be helped. We have a priceless teaching

and if someone doesn't want it, what can we really do? This is to be complacent.

As for us, we should be mindful of death constantly, for if the doctors were to diagnose us with a fatal illness leaving us with no more than three months of life, what would we do? Would we still seek money, possessions, fortune, status, fame or pleasure through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body, or would we seek a refuge for our mind. Without a refuge for our mind, when the body is dying, our mind will be greatly pained and tormented. One who knows that death approaches and not much time remains, he will no longer have any desire to seek money, worldly possessions or pleasure through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body but will only desire a refuge and happiness for the mind.

We should continuously think like we may one day see a doctor and be diagnosed with a fatal illness with not much time left. Thinking like this, we will not waste time seeking things that are of no value to the mind but seek a true refuge. We will then be totally committed to

making merit, maintaining our virtue wholeheartedly, practising meditation wholeheartedly, listening and practising Dhamma wholeheartedly. For we know that, doing this will be a refuge for the mind that can enable us to accept the death of our body.

This is something we ought to deeply contemplate. If we do not reflect and contemplate old age, sickness, pain and death, we will forget and be distracted by all kinds of issues. Though we know that birth is followed by old age, sickness and death, in our forgetfulness, it is like we do not grow old, become sick and or die. We will then be forgetful and immersed in activities that do not benefit our mind or provide a refuge for us nor help to find a refuge for our mind. When the time comes to face the reality of death, we will not have a refuge. We will not have enough time to build a refuge for our mind. Then we will end up living with mental pain and torment. We will be unable to eat or sleep; we don't know what we should do.

Thus we should recollect and reflect on the nature of old age, sickness, pain and death continuously to benefit ourselves through merit making by giving, nurturing our virtue, meditating and listening to and practising Dhamma. Do what you are doing today more and more regularly. Don't come just once or twice over a long interval because it is just like filling water into a barrel. If we fill the barrel with a cup just once or twice over a long interval of time, the barrel will not be full. If we don't meditate regularly, but only once or twice, we cannot build up a refuge that will stay with our mind 100%. At best what we get are only bits and pieces.

This is our responsibility. What is the purpose of our birth? We are born to establish a refuge for our mind. The mind does not go along with the dying body. The mind has to undergo perpetual rounds of death and rebirth because of not having a refuge. It has to look for a new body to be its refuge, but instead of having a refuge we always end up in circumstances that create even more *dukkha* for ourselves. Because every time we are born, we have to grow old, experience pain and

die. So as much as possible, it is proper for us to persistently develop a refuge for our heart as much as possible.

Right now, we have this valuable opportunity to build our refuge, just as the Buddha and his noble disciples did before. If we can achieve enlightenment, we will be able to live with happiness in our hearts forever and no suffering or stress will arise for the rest of our lives. After their enlightenment, the Buddha and his noble disciples were never agitated by any form of suffering. No more *dukkha* existed within the heart, regardless of whether the body was old, became sick or died.

These experiences do not create any problems within the hearts of the Buddha or his noble disciples. This is because they have a refuge that protects their mind from suffering because of old age, suffering because of sickness and pain and suffering because of dying. It does not matter whose body it is, be it our father's, mother's, children's, grandchildren's, husband's, wife's, close relatives' or friends'. There will be problem no



issue or pain in the heart at all. It is our responsibility to having been born as a human, build a refuge for ourselves. Without a refuge for our mind, we are bound to undergo perpetual death and rebirth forever. Revolving within *samsāra*, we have to suffer birth, old age, sickness, pain and death without end.

If we are able to establish a refuge for our mind, we can stop this circle of existence. The mind need not seek other refuges because it already has an inner refuge with complete happiness, fulfilment and contentment.

May all of us persevere to build a refuge during our valuable human life span and work related to build up this refuge by consistently recollecting and reflecting on the nature of old age, sickness, pain and death so that we don't become negligent but stay always vigilant.

Since our time is up. Let me stop now. May the three refuges (the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha) and the accumulated merit and wisdom you gained act as the causes and conditions to bring you happiness and

prosperity, and to dispel all suffering and danger in the future.

Audience: *Sadhu!*

# Glossary

The following is a list of Pāli and Thai words as used in the text together with a brief translation and comment when necessary.

**Ajaan, ajahn, achaan, etc.:** (Thai). Teacher; mentor. Equivalent to the Pāli ācariya.

**Buddho:** Supremely enlightened. A traditional epithet for the *Buddha*, *buddho* is a preparatory meditation-word (*parikamma*) that is repeated mentally while reflecting on the Buddha's special qualities. In its simplest form, one focuses attention exclusively on the repetition of "*buddho*", continuously thinking the word "*buddho*" while in meditation. One should simply be aware of each repetition of "*buddho, buddho, buddho*" to the exclusion of all else. Once it becomes continuous, this simple repetition will produce results of peace and calm in the heart.

**Dāna:** Giving, making gifts.

**Demerits:** Bad, unskillful, corrupt.

**Desanā :** The Teachings of Dhamma; Dhamma talks.

**Dhamma [Skt. dharma]:** (1) Event; a phenomenon in and of itself; (2) mental quality; (3) doctrine, teaching;

(4) nibbāna. Also, principles of behavior that human beings ought to follow so as to fit in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realize the inherent quality of the mind in and of itself. By extension, "Dhamma" (usu. capitalized) is used also to denote any doctrine that teaches such things. Thus the Dhamma of the Buddha denotes both his teachings and the direct experience of nibbāna, the quality at which those teachings are aimed.

***Dukkha:*** Stress; suffering; pain; distress; discontent.

***Kamma:*** Lit: "action". But in Buddhism, action of the body, speech or mind which has a moral content of good, bad or neutral. Such action brings back a corresponding result.

***kilesa:*** Defilement — lobha (passion), dosa (aversion), and moha (delusion) in their various forms, which include such things as greed, malevolence, anger, rancor, hypocrisy, arrogance, envy, miserliness, dishonesty, boastfulness, obstinacy, violence, pride, conceit, intoxication, and complacency.

***Pāḷi:*** The canon of texts (see Tipiṭaka) preserved by the Theravāda school and, by extension, the language in which those texts are composed.

**LuangPu; LuangPor** : Central Thailand word for Venerable Father.

**LuangPii** : Central Thailand word for Junior Monk.

**Merits**: Good, virtuous, skillful.

**Nibbāna**: The ultimate goal of Buddhist training. Lit: "Extinguished".

**Parikamma**: Preparatory practice. Preparatory meditation.

**Samatha (Samādhi)**: Absorbed concentration which has many levels and kinds.

**Phra**: (Thai). Venerable. Used as a prefix to the name of a monk (bhikkhu).

**Sādhu**: (exclamation) "It is well"; an expression showing appreciation or agreement.

**Sīla**: Morality, moral behaviour.

**Sukha**: Pleasure; ease; satisfaction. In meditation, a mental quality that reaches full maturity upon the development of the third level of jhāna.

**Than, tan**: (Thai). Reverend, venerable.

***Theravāda***: The "Doctrine of the Elders" — the only one of the early schools of Buddhism to have survived into the present; currently the dominant form of Buddhism in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Burma. See also Hīnayāna.

***Tipiṭaka [Skt. tripiṭaka]***: The Buddhist (Pāli) Canon. Literally, "three baskets," in reference to the three principal divisions of the Canon: the *Vinaya Pitaka* (disciplinary rules); *Sutta Pitaka* (discourses); and *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (abstract philosophical treatises).

***Vipassanā***: Clear intuitive insight into physical and mental phenomena as they arise and disappear, seeing them for what they actually are — in and of themselves — in terms of the three characteristics (see *ti-lakkhaṇa*) and in terms of stress, its origin, its disbanding, and the way leading to it disbanding (see *ariya-sacca*).

# Related Websites for Further Reading

More teachings on Theravada Buddhism and the contemporary Thai Forest Tradition can be obtained from the following websites;

[www.kammatthana.com](http://www.kammatthana.com) , [www.phrasuchart.com](http://www.phrasuchart.com)

Recorded Mp3 teachings of Ajaan Suchart Abhijato in English and Thai.

[www.accesstoinight.org](http://www.accesstoinight.org)

- English translation of Theravada tipitaka
- Some translation of the teachings from the Thai Forest Meditation Masters

[www.forestdhamma.org](http://www.forestdhamma.org)

Translation in various languages on the teachings by Luangta Mahā Boowa

