



**A Brief  
Introduction  
to the  
BUDDHA-DHAMMA**

— *by* —  
**Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto**

*translated and edited by*  
**Bhikkhu Nirodho and Martin Seeger**

A Brief Introduction to the  
**Buddha-Dhamma**

Wat Nyanavesakavan  
Visakha Puja 2554

## **A Brief Introduction to the Buddha-Dhamma**

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Translated and edited by  
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# อนุโมทนา

Dr. Martin Seeger มีกุศลจิตอันทะ และด้วยความร่วมมือใจของ Bhikkhu Nirodho ได้แปลหนังสือ *ธรรมะฉบับเรียนลัด* เป็น ภาษาอังกฤษเสร็จตั้งแต่เมื่อ ๒-๓ ปีล่วงแล้ว โดยให้ชื่อพากย์ภาษาอังกฤษว่า *A Brief Introduction to the Buddha-Dhamma* ต่อมา ได้ถวายต้นฉบับงานแปลนั้นไว้ แต่อาตมภาพมัวยุ่งกับงานอื่น และ ปัญหาการอาหารได้เผลอปล่่อยเวลาล่วงมานานมากจนถึงบัดนี้จึงได้ โอกาสที่จะพิมพ์เผยแพร่เป็นธรรมทาน

หวังว่างานแปลนี้ จะช่วยให้ชาวต่างประเทศที่ยังไม่คุ้นกับพระพุทธศาสนา ได้รู้เข้าใจหลักธรรมที่เป็นสาระสำคัญ และแม้ผู้ที่รู้จักอยู่บ้างแล้ว ก็จะได้รู้จักชัดเจนขึ้น พร้อมกันนั้น ชาวพุทธไทยก็จะได้ประโยชน์ในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นเครื่องมือสื่อสารพระพุทธศาสนา

ได้คิดว่า จะพิมพ์พากย์ภาษาไทยไว้ในเล่มเดียวกันด้วย เพื่อสะดวกในการศึกษาแบบเทียบเคียง แต่ในที่สุด ตกกลางว่า พิมพ์เฉพาะพากย์ภาษาอังกฤษก่อน ให้เป็นหนังสือที่สมบูรณ์ในตัว แล้วจึงจะพิมพ์ฉบับมีสองพากย์ในโอกาสต่อไป

ขออนุโมทนา Bhikkhu Nirodho และ Dr. Martin Seeger ที่ได้แสดงน้ำใจปรารถนาดีต่อประชาชน ด้วยการมอบสื่อในการศึกษาธรรมให้ในวาระนี้ หวังว่า หนังสือนี้จะมีส่วนร่วมในการสร้างสรรคประโยชน์สุขด้วยความเจริญธรรมเจริญปัญญาของมหาชนสืบต่อไป

พระพรหมคุณาภรณ์ (ป. อ. ปยุตฺโต)

๑๔ พฤษภาคม ๒๕๕๔



## IN APPRECIATION

The present book is an English translation of my book “*Thamma chabap rian lat*”, which was first published in 1992 and has since been reprinted over ten times. Ven. Bhikkhu Nirodho and Dr Martin Seeger completed this translation two to three years ago, rendering the original Thai title of the book as “*A Brief Introduction to the Buddha-Dhamma*”. Having completed their task, the two translators then asked me to check the translation and prepare it for publication. However, due to other commitments and poor health, I was not able to do this for a rather long time. It is for this reason that the publication and free distribution of this book as a ‘gift of Dhamma’ (*dhammadānam*) was delayed until this time.

I hope that this book will help foreigners who are not familiar with the Buddha’s teaching gain understanding of important Buddhist principles. Even those who have already studied the Buddha’s teaching to some extent may find it useful in developing their knowledge further. In addition, Thai Buddhists may also derive benefit from this book, as it allows them to study how Buddhist principles can be expressed in English.

I initially had the intention to publish this text as part of a bilingual book that would also include the original Thai text. However, it was then decided to first publish the English translation on its own, with a bilingual version being produced when a suitable opportunity to do arises. I would like to express my thanks to Ven. Bhikkhu Nirodho and Dr Martin Seeger for their efforts and altruistic intentions in helping to make this book available in the English language.

May this book be conducive to the creation of happiness and wisdom in the world.

Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P. A. Payutto)

*May 2554/2011*

# CONTENTS

อนุโมทนา	iii
<b>A Brief Introduction to the Buddha-Dhamma</b>	<b>1</b>
1. True happiness means realizing Dhamma	1
(1) The level of sensual pleasures.	2
(2) The level of mind-development.	8
(3) The level of liberation.	12
2. How is Dhamma practised?	15
3. The general principles of Dhamma practice: the first set	19
4. The general principles of Dhamma practice: the second set	26
<i>Endnotes</i>	32





# A Brief Introduction to the **Buddha-Dhamma**

## **1. True happiness means realizing Dhamma**

Every human being wants a good life and genuine happiness, and so we live our lives persevering in doing everything we can in order to achieve these things. But because we act with perseverance without knowing and understanding what a good life and genuine happiness really are, we human beings face problems.

To put it directly, the principle in building a good life and real happiness is not something out of the ordinary, it simply means to reach the Dhamma: they are one and the same thing. When we have achieved a good life and genuine happiness, it means we have reached the Dhamma. To put it briefly, true happiness means realizing Dhamma. When we

have clarified the situation thus, no one will have any anxiety, since we see that to progress towards the Dhamma is exactly the same thing as the goal of life, which is something we are already pursuing.

If you are able to assure yourself that you have already attained a good life and genuine happiness, it is the same as if you would say to yourself that you have reached true Dhamma. But are you able to confirm this for yourself? If not, you have to admit, “I still have to endeavour to reach a good and happy life”, and that means “I still have to reach the Dhamma”. These two things are one and the same. That means that when there is true happiness we have reached real Dhamma and when we have reached real Dhamma there is true happiness.

Buddhism teaches that to achieve a good and happy life, or in other words to reach real Dhamma, is done through development at many levels. These levels can be reduced in summary to three, namely:

### **(1) The level of sensual pleasures.**

This is a life that is confused and that continually whirls around searching for forms, sounds, smells, tastes and tangible things that are beautiful, pleasing, sweet smelling,

exciting and palatable, and that are consumed to cherish the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue and the body. This is to enjoy and to be enraptured by all these things. The life and happiness of this level can be divided further into two levels, namely:

a) The level that lacks studying and training, that is, is still not developed.

The cherishing of eye, ear, nose, tongue and body through forms, sounds, smells, tastes and tangible things is something we all provide for ourselves, and having once started to consume there is no end to this consumption: there is never enough; and this leads to the search for the ultimate consumption and then for even more, continuously. The things that are then consumed are outside ourselves, which means we have to search for them. Thus the happiness on the level of sensual pleasure is a happiness that comes about from getting and taking things.

When every individual being is looking for this level of happiness, it is only for him- or herself, and must be maximized in a process that cannot end. This must consequently result in struggling, competition, oppression, suppression, taking advantage of each other and finally in destroying each other. This will lead to the point where everyone is struggling with everyone else in order to possess

and to obtain, until either all have to do without or only the stronger ones, who will constitute a very small number of people indeed, will get everything while all the others get nothing at all.

To sum up, humans will be without peace and happiness.

The life and happiness of people on the level of sensual pleasure that is still undeveloped is in its quality not different from that of animals, beings that people look down upon. Indeed it is even much worse than that of animals, because of the much greater violence of human beings, since they have hands, brains, and tools which they use to struggle with and to destroy each other.

b) The level that is directed towards studying and training and at which development begins.

Though everyone is looking for wealth, money, rank and status in order to get and consume things, and all have a tendency to consume as much as possible, the Buddha does not condemn this. Rather he wishes there to be a means of restraint and for human sense desires to remain within limits so that they do not cause too many problems for life and for society. Further, the Buddha directs us to knowing how to develop our life towards higher goals in order to create ever more benefit and happiness for society. The above

mentioned means of restraint or imposing limits is nothing other than *sīla* (morality, precepts), especially on the basic level of the Five Precepts [1], which may manifest in the form of the laws or other regulations of society. *Sīla* is the device that restrains, and is a frame that prevents the search for sensual pleasures from exceeding the limits beyond which there is too much struggling with and oppressing of each other. *Sīla* allows humans to live together in an appropriate way and allows society to have some peace and happiness, with every individual having enough goods to provide her- and himself with some happiness. Each person therefore has the opportunity to consume things that cherish the five senses in an appropriate way.

On this level the Buddha recommends generosity (*dāna*), which helps to support the stability and security, peace and happiness of the society, since human beings know how to share amongst each other and how to be helpful, including the helping of those who suffer hardship.

As soon as there is morality (*sīla*) as a foundation and generosity (*dāna*) to provide it with support, humans can live together increasingly well. There is the readiness to help each other, and society has peace and happiness to a reasonable extent.

When humanity has reached this level of development, which provides the opportunity to obtain happiness from sensual

pleasures in material things all of which provide for fun, and are sweet and good tasting, this should be a life and society that are perfect. But actually this is not so because of problems that inevitably arise in regard to taking sensual pleasure in material things. Apart from consumption that never knows “enough” or “full” and therefore causes oppression and struggle amongst people, there is yet another problematic point.

The happiness that comes from sensual pleasure in material things has to depend on things outside ourselves, for example the various consumer goods, and is therefore a dependent happiness that comes from outside and consequently allows us no liberty. Apart from that, both all of the external things and we ourselves, the ones who consume, fall under an unavoidable aspect of the law of nature, that of impermanence or change, which is to say birth, decay, death.

When we add all these unfavourable conditions to the characteristic of searching, consuming, and not knowing “full” and “enough”, problems will increase.

Though having reduced the problem of mutual oppression, we still have to encounter the problems of the life of the mind, these arising from unknowingly tying the characteristics of suffering to the happiness of consuming sensual pleasure in material things. For example, the fear

that accompanies hope, the worries, mistrust, and apprehension that are hidden in and overlap the acts of getting and having, the numb habit and boredom that are the consequences of repeated consumption, the falling into a state of slavery or helplessness whenever one is deluded or infatuated with something, the being disheartened whenever enduring hardship or disappointment and saddened whenever compelled to encounter loss or separation.

Even behaving in a moral way (*sīla*) and cultivating order, discipline and generosity go against our deep desires. We have to compel our heart, because the keeping of precepts does not allow the search for and consumption of goods to the extent our mind desires. Being generous forces us to give up, to sacrifice, and therefore causes regret.

For this reason the Buddha said that to have reached this level is still not enough: we are humans, therefore we have the potential to develop ourselves further. If we develop ourselves only to this level, there is still no way to escape from suffering: we must still encounter suffering, both externally and internally. This is because this kind of happiness is based on things which are suffering. Thus the foundation is not firm. Therefore we have to develop our life further.

Those who have studied and trained themselves (in the right



way) will proceed towards development on the level of the mind and on the level of freedom through wisdom. They will then bring the results from development on the mind-level and on the wisdom-level to help to solve problems on the level of sensual pleasure in material things, and this means that they can relate to sensual pleasure in material things in a manner that poses the smallest danger and suffering but provides the greatest benefit. And at the same time there will be happiness on a higher level as well.

## **(2) The level of mind-development.**

When we have developed the mind so that it becomes virtuous, *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion) will come into existence. This means we have love and goodwill towards others, we want others to be happy, and we wish to work for their happiness. And eventually, when we give, share and help, and see that others are happy, we ourselves will be happy.

Thus generosity (*dāna*), instead of creating a sense of loss, will create happiness. Previously, we have known only the happiness that comes from getting and taking, but now in addition we have a new form of happiness, that is, the happiness that comes from giving and sacrifice. The giving and relinquishing can become happiness when the mind has

been developed and has changed. At the same time, mind-development brings about faith, the confidence in things that are right and beautiful and in the establishing of those things. This means that we use our money for the benefit of others and at the same time we feel happy, our hearts are full of joy because of that giving and sacrifice.

Before this change we regarded wealth, money, rank, status and authority only as tools and opportunities to seek for sensual pleasure in the various material things, which we had used to indulge ourselves to the fullest extent. But when we have developed our minds and wisdom up to a certain level, we see a new meaning in all those things; our wealth, money, rank and authority have become tools that provide an enhanced opportunity to establish good and right things, benefit and happiness in a broader and more successful way.

Even though we have good, constructive ideas, without wealth, rank and followers our ideas will not be successful or will be realized only to a small extent. But when we have wealth, authority and followers, these good ideas will finally be of great and extensive benefit. This means that now wealth and authority, which once were tools in the service of craving and selfishness, have become implements of the Dhamma.

People who haven't developed, or haven't studied and trained correctly, have the understanding that a society able

to establish technology and invent a seemingly infinite range of goods for consumption is a society that is already developed and has a high level of civilization. But when we have studied and trained correctly and have developed ourselves to some extent, we will consequently understand that on no account are these things the characteristics of civilization or of development. On the contrary, being developed or possessing civilization implies a change inside human beings, which then allows them to deal with technology and other aspects of modern society in the right way.

Development on the mind-level will allow the individual to have a mind that contains virtues like loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), faith (*saddhā*), gratitude (*kataññūkataveditā*) and so on. It is a mind with efficiency, strength, stability, diligence and patience, a mind that has mindfulness (*satī*) and knows its responsibilities, and so is in good health because it is peaceful, relaxed, clear, fresh, joyful and happy.

When there is already some development on the mind-level, wisdom will come into existence, and then the search for happiness on the level of sensual pleasure in material things changes in a positive direction, both for the life of the individual as well as for the peace of society; and in addition, the happiness will become more and more refined, which at

the same time enhances the quality of life.

The development on the mind-level will provide the mind with other important characteristics as well:

- a) with a lot of power (like directing a flow of water down a tube or channel instead of allowing it to scatter);
- b) with a clarity that is conducive to the applying of wisdom (like a pool of water that is so still that the dirt sinks down and leaves the water unclouded, so that everything in the pool can be seen clearly);
- c) and with peacefulness and happiness (because the mind is undisturbed, unclouded, and does not worry).

The mind with these characteristics is called *kammanīya*, meaning “suitable for work”, ready for the establishing of the various virtues. It is in a condition where it can be used for reflection, investigation and contemplation through wisdom, which is the characteristic of a mind that has *samādhi* (concentration). Thus the development on the mind-level has concentration (*samādhi*) as axis or as agent. If we develop *samādhi* so that it becomes more resolute, it deepens until it reaches the different *jhānas*, which exist at the level of material dhammas (*rūpāvacara*) as well as at the level of non-material dhammas (*arūpāvacara*).

The happiness on this mind-level is much more subtle and pure, because there are no symptoms of suffering, unlike those concealed ones when, seeking pleasure in material

things, we experience fear, mistrust, boredom, being disheartened and so forth. But even having reached this level, the Buddha says, is still not enough.

Although we reach a really deep level inside our mind, there is still the danger of becoming attached to *samādhi* and its corresponding results. Such attachment would make us escape from the society and not face reality. It is a temporary escape from suffering and problems. But as soon as we emerge from *samādhi* we will encounter the same old conditions, which means that we still have attachment and are still subject to the law of nature that oppresses us. That means there has been no solution of the problems at all. For this reason, we still have to go on in order to reach the perfect extinction of our problems, so that we are happy without the slightest residue of suffering. Therefore the Buddha teaches yet another level.

### **(3) The level of liberation.**

Liberation means the life that is free or transcends the condition of being oppressed and overwhelmed by any problems at all. Even the natural law of change, impermanence and decay will not trouble us anymore. There is a pure and light happiness without a disturbing shadow of suffering. Then we are called “Buddha”, which can be simply

translated as “awakened” or “enlightened”.

The individual who has a life and happiness on this level has one important characteristic: one has done everything that needs to be done, one has achieved the highest benefit for oneself. Thus that individual can work for others to the fullest extent possible through the highest positive emotion, which is called *kāruṇṇadhamma*, pure and perfect compassion.

Life and happiness on this level is achieved through the wisdom of insight (*paññā*). One who conducts his or her life on this level is living through wisdom, the knowing of the truth of all things, which accord with the natural law of cause and effect. In other words, one knows the law of nature, which includes the natural law of change. Suffering cannot overwhelm one anymore. There is nothing that could cause one problems because one’s wisdom knows and is therefore able to solve problems in accordance with the law of nature of cause and effect. It doesn’t matter what one may encounter: there will be no suffering.

When the mind has developed to the point where life and happiness have reached this level, which already contains a natural freshness and joyfulness, we can also experience the happiness that comes from the mind (level 2), as well as the happiness experienced through the five senses, and all this will be without any danger or harm. Everything is in a

condition of perfect balance because of the stressless wisdom that supervises all.

Therefore we can say that having reached the happiness of this last level, which is free from suffering because of wisdom, there is nothing beyond it.

All this can be summarized as life and happiness on three levels, namely:

- 1) The level of pleasure in material things (called in brief the level of sense-desire (*kāma*), or more fully *kāmāvacara*: to roam about in sense-desires); we have to use *sīla* (morality) as the device that supervises, with generosity (*dāna*) as support.
- 2) The level of mind-development (called the level of *rūpāvacara* (to roam about in form) and *arūpāvacara* (to roam about in the formless)); here *samādhi* (concentration) is that which leads in the development.
- 3) The level of liberation (called the *lokuttara* (beyond the world) level or *paramattha* (the highest) level); here the wisdom of insight is the leader that takes one to the goal.

We can conclude that Buddhism has explained the principles needed in order to have a good life, one with happiness, and has divided them into different steps and levels, which have been described above. This is a very easy thing, and not out of the ordinary, because its real essence simply concerns how

to have a life with genuine happiness. Just that. As I mentioned at the beginning, when there is true happiness we have reached real Dhamma and when we reach real Dhamma there is true happiness. That is, to reach a good life with happiness means to reach the Dhamma. And in order to reach the Dhamma, we have to practise it. The practice of Dhamma is not as difficult as many people might think. Therefore let us now see what Dhamma-practice is like.

## **2. How is Dhamma practised?**

What is the meaning of practising Dhamma? To practise Dhamma means to apply the Dhamma, to use the Dhamma in conducting your life and work. This means to apply the Dhamma in a way that brings about benefit in your daily life so that your life becomes better and happier.

Thus whenever we practise Dhamma it means we apply the Dhamma in our actual life; in other words, we use the Dhamma to bring about happiness for our life. If the Dhamma is not applied, we cannot speak of “practice” at all.

In Pali, the word used for practice, “*paṭipatti*”, means “to travel”, “to voyage”, “to walk a certain path”. Usually, “to travel” means to travel externally, which means to travel in



terms of material things: that is, we use our feet to walk or a vehicle to move us. Regarding our life it is just the same: to live is one kind of “voyage” or “travelling”. Our being is comparable to a path. If we live in the right way, we say “our voyage in life” is right, which means we conduct our life in the right way. If our “voyage in life” is not right, we say that we conduct our life in the wrong way.

Translating the word for practice, *paṭipatti*, in this way, we can say that to practise Dhamma means to apply the Dhamma in our voyage through life, or in other words to apply the Dhamma in order to conduct our life in the right way.

Thus we can say that if we do not apply the Dhamma, our voyage through life might be wrong or incorrect, so that we get lost and stumble onto the way that leads to decline or ruin but not to happiness and progress. Thus we use the Dhamma as a help, and practise Dhamma so that we get the good results we want from our voyage through life.

To put it simply, to practise Dhamma means to apply the Dhamma for the benefit of our life. Therefore Dhamma practice is a very broad matter indeed, not merely separating oneself from society, going to a monastery or a forest and sitting there to train ourselves in concentration. This is only one aspect of Dhamma practice, namely the endeavor to

apply the Dhamma on a deep level of resolute mind-training. We can call this kind of practice, where we separate ourselves from society, intensive practice or specific training.

Actually, Dhamma practice has to be done the whole time. As we are sitting here we have to practise Dhamma, meaning to apply the Dhamma. When we do things the right way we are practising Dhamma. Whenever we work or perform our duties in the right way, when we intend to do good things that bring about benefit and success, we are practising Dhamma.

Consequently, when it is our duty to study, and we study the right way, have diligence, are committed to our study, and investigate and experiment in order to get ever better results, this is called practising Dhamma. For example, studying by applying the four *iddhipādas* (bases of success) - that is, to have “*chanda*”, the aspiration to study, “*viriyā*”, effort and energy, “*citta*”, commitment and dedication, and “*vīmaṇisā*”, investigation and experimentation in order to get ever better results - this is called practising Dhamma.

It is the same when we work. Whenever we include the four *iddhipādas* in our work we practise Dhamma.

Even when we are driving a car, if we drive observing traffic regulations, drive in a flawless and heedful way, and are

polite or, to go deeper, are able to relax our mind and are contented and stress-free while driving the car, we practise Dhamma on various levels.

Every time we are able to apply the Dhamma in conducting our life, in working or performing our duties, and are successful to some extent, we can call this Dhamma practice.

For this reason, the real Dhamma practice has to be done all the time, because every individual has the duty to conduct his or her life in a right and good way.

Even listening to this lecture here and now is Dhamma practice if we listen with mindfulness, know how to listen and to use our intelligence to investigate and examine the things we hear. This facilitates the arising of wisdom.

We can thus conclude that Dhamma practice is a very broad matter indeed. It means applying the Dhamma for the benefit of our life, for performing our work and duties in the right way in order to make everything we do good and correct, for producing beneficial results that promote a good and beautiful life with genuine happiness. We create the correct conditions that are effective in bringing about beneficial results: this is Dhamma practice.

### **3. The general principles of Dhamma practice: the first set**

The essence of the practice established by the Buddha as Dhamma-principles arranged in different categories can be summed up very briefly as “*sikkhā*” (study and training), which is divided into *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom): this is called the “threefold training” (*sikkhāttaya*).

Being divided in a simple way in order to emphasize the outer aspect for the layperson, the training is designated as *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (morality) and *bhāvanā* (development): this is called “the training of meritorious action” or “the training in goodness” (*puññasikkhā*).

I would now like to review the principles of the threefold training, both *sikkhāttaya* and *puññasikkhā*, beginning with *sikkhāttaya*.

1) *Sīla* means to be orderly and circumspect in the conduct of one’s life and participation in society. Put another way, it means to have discipline and to behave according to rules and regulations in living with others so that there is concord in society; a life and a society that are organized, smooth,

undisturbed, not in disunity, are conducive to all undertakings and practices and guarantee success and continuous development.

*Sīla* exists on many levels, or is divided into many categories to suit various life conditions and societies or assemblies, in order to support the practices that will achieve one's goal.

The Five Precepts [1] provide the foundation for relationships in society to develop with good cooperation and without oppression of others. A society that is undisturbed and unified guarantees the foundation for the peace and happiness of that society.

For this reason the five *sīlas* stipulate behaviour that is free from exploiting, oppressing or harming others: not violating another's life and body, not violating another's ownership of property, not indulging in sexual conduct with the partner of another. Further, the Five Precepts also stipulate refraining from using malicious and deceitful speech and refraining from posing a threat to others by the diminishing of one's awareness and control that comes from taking drugs and intoxicants, which cause heedlessness and give rise to mistrust.

We can see that the Five Precepts are the most fundamental standard for organizing human life and society in a way that

allows for conditions that provide a basic opportunity for the creation of good and right things and also for development, both of the mind and of material things.

The precepts adopted by special groups or communities, precepts on higher levels, are established according to various practices with the aim of training and improving individual behaviour and developing the quality of life and cooperation in the community in accordance with the highest goal of that community with respect to both the life of the individual and of the society.

For example, the Eight Precepts **[2]** aim at a training that facilitates a life that is conducive to the development of the mind. The additional precepts limit the time when food can be consumed, exclude seeking happiness from entertainment, and restrict activities aimed at deriving sensual pleasure, even including restricting the use of sumptuous seating and sleeping accommodations. This is a training that gives rise to experience of a way of life that has more freedom and enables us to live well and be happy without overdependence on external things.

The Eight Precepts promote greater productivity with regard to time as well as energy when developing one's mind and wisdom. Or in other words, they facilitate the practice of mind-development and wisdom-development.

There are many other kinds of precepts, for example the precepts for training the sense faculties (*indriya*), that is, the training of how to use the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind wisely. In the case of the first five faculties, this means to train how to see and listen, for example, in a way that is beneficial and does not cause harm or trouble, confusion or addiction.

Furthermore, there are precepts, guiding the use and consumption of things, that train us to see the true value of these things and to not be deluded by false or conventional values.

Having a well-organized life and cooperation with others, as well as a correct relationship with our material surroundings and (natural) environment, is called *sīla*. Having a code for living an orderly life, both individually and as a community, and living according to that code, is called *vinaya*. The various practices by which one arranges one's life and society to be well-organized and harmonious are called *sikkhāpada* (rules of training). The various practices for the training and improvement of one's behaviour in order to execute a life harmonious with and conducive to the practice that leads to the highest goal is called *vatta* (daily routine, daily duties or undertakings, rules of etiquette, proprieties).

All that we have mentioned here is covered by the term “*sīla*”: the adjusting of our life to bring about the firm foundation and readiness to develop.

2) *Samādhi* (concentration) means training to attain a tranquil, firm and stable mind, which then allows the mind to have the capacity to work or to be used in a good way. This is of particular importance for contemplation that is to bring about wisdom and for using wisdom effectively. Furthermore, the mind that is concentrated is in a condition conducive to and fit for the development of wholesome conditions, all the virtues that are to be developed and enhanced in the mind. When the mind is tranquil and firm, and thus concentrated, its condition is one free from disturbances like sadness, gloom, agitation and confusion, and it is consequently a mind that is clear, light, relaxed, joyful, fresh, unclouded and happy. In short, it is the training of mind-development that gives the individual a mind that is full of potential, quality and health.

3) *Paññā* (wisdom) means to have insight into all things in accordance with actuality, and it also means the training and development to attain this knowledge and understanding. Wisdom has many levels. For example, the initial step is comprehension of many of the things we have learned and



heard and the information and things experienced through eye, ear, nose, tongue and body; this ultimately extends to include memories, impressions and thoughts that appear and are stored in the mind. Wisdom allows the right acknowledgment and consideration of those experiences in accordance with reality and in a pure way, not distorted by like and dislike, happiness and sadness, or any other bias. The next step is right and clear investigation and contemplation, undisturbed by *kilesas* (defilements of mind) like greed, hatred, ill-will and anger, which overwhelm and lead astray. Another aspect of wisdom is the penetrative insight into the cause and effect of things and the ability to use this knowledge to solve problems and to be constructive and creative. Wisdom on the highest level is really knowing the truth of this world and this life, and thus brings detachment from all things, which in turn changes the mind, bringing about freedom and liberation with genuine clarity, release and joyfulness.

*Sikkhā* means training, practice or the study for knowledge and capability. The principle of this Threefold Training is the development of life in three aspects: firstly one's relationship to one's environment through material things as well as through society; secondly one's mind; and eventually one's wisdom.

In everything we do at all times, no matter what our actions

or undertakings, we are able to train, develop, observe and watch ourselves according to this Threefold Training (*sikkhāttaya*). This means to train ourselves simultaneously in all three aspects, in morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*), at the same time and all the time.

This means that whatever we are doing we investigate as follows: does our current action and behaviour cause trouble or problems for others or is it beneficial, helpful and constructive (*sīla*)?

At the same time, what is the state of mind with which we are acting? Is it selfish, intending harm, motivated by greed, hatred or ignorance? Or are we acting with kindness (*mettā*), goodwill, trust, mindfulness, perseverance, responsibility? And at the moment of acting, what is the condition of the mind: hot-tempered, restless, clouded, sorrowful, or is our mind peaceful, joyful, happy, contented, unclouded (*samādhi*)?

In this moment of action, are we acting guided by knowledge and comprehension? Are we seeing reasonably: do we understand the principles and rules and the goals, do we see both advantages and disadvantages and the way to improvement (*paññā*)?

Therefore the intelligent person will be diligent in this

training, will train and develop, will investigate and evaluate her or his progress all the time. At any time, at all times, there is the application of the Threefold Training on the “small scale”, that is, all three are practised in the same action or activity. At the same time, there is the development of the Threefold Training on the “large scale”, that is, gradual development step by step, appearing from the outside like a dedicated training of each level, in order one by one. The application of the Threefold Training on the small scale supports its strong development on the large scale; and conversely, the development of the Threefold Training on the large scale supports its application on the small scale, until eventually there is a growing stability and perfection that leads to the highest stage.

#### **4. The general principles of Dhamma practice: the second set**

*Puññasikkhā* (training in meritorious action and goodness), which consists of generosity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*) and development (*bhāvanā*), has the same substance as the Threefold Training (*sikkhāttaya*).

1) *Dāna* (generosity) means giving and sharing and aims at mutual help, social stability and the support and creation of

goodness. *Dāna* is a practice for promoting good cooperation within society, and this leads to increase in social order. At the same time, it is a means for training and improving one's outer behaviour, that is, one's action through body and speech, and also a means for training one's mind to become increasingly virtuous, joyful and clear.

2) *Sīla* (morality) has the same meaning as depicted in the section above.

3) *Bhāvanā* is divided into the development of concentration (*samādhi*) and the development of wisdom (*paññā*), which have been discussed above.

The general understanding and popular image of Dhamma practice nowadays is limited to the level of *bhāvanā*. This understanding of the practice of *bhāvanā*, moreover, emphasizes external form, as for example to go to a remote monastery or into the forest in order to sit in concentration. Insofar as the popular imagination sees Dhamma practice as being the formal practice of concentration, we first have to know the meaning of *bhāvanā* (development).

The term “*bhāvanā*” translates as “to bring into existence”, “to cause to exist”. Therefore, “*bhāvanā*” refers to a practice, a training by which things that have not existed before are brought into existence. Moreover, when these things have

been created and now exist, they have to be developed and enhanced to their fullest extent. Therefore “*bhāvanā*” as a term can be translated most simply as “to grow”, “to develop”. In the Thai language, the preferred translation from ancient times has been “to develop”. For example, “to develop concentration” is called “*samādhībhāvanā*”, “to develop loving-kindness” is called “*mettābhāvanā*”, “to develop insight” is called “*vipassanābhāvanā*”.

We can therefore say that *bhāvanā* means training and development, bringing things into existence and developing them until they reach their perfect state.

“*Bhāvanā*”, on the level that we want to discuss here, is divided in two kinds, namely “*cittabhāvanā*”, the training of the mind, and “*paññābhāvanā*”, the training of wisdom.

“*Cittabhāvanā*” can simply be called “*samatha*” (tranquillity) or else “*samathabhāvanā*”. The real heart of *samatha* is concentration (*samādhi*), for *samatha* translated means tranquillity and the heart of tranquillity is concentration: that is, a mind that is firm. *Samatha* aims for concentration, so we can say that concentration is the essence of *samatha* (tranquillity). Consequently, we can also call it “*samādhībhāvanā*”. The words “*cittabhāvanā*”, “*samathabhāvanā*” and “*samādhībhāvanā*” can be used interchangeably. The second part is “*paññābhāvanā*”, which is also called

“*vipassanābhāvanā*”. The development of insight aims to bring about the wisdom that understands the truth of all things. The wisdom on the level that knows the world and life according to reality, to actuality, is called “*vipassanā*”, that is, “insight”. That means not just to know how to practise one’s profession but refers to knowing the condition of the reality of all things: this is called “*vipassanā*”, which is wisdom on one level. For this reason “*vipassanābhāvanā*” in a broad sense is called “*paññābhāvanā*”.

Consequently we can divide “*bhāvanā*” into two kinds.

a) The first kind is sometimes called “*cittabhāvanā*”, “*samathabhāvanā*” or “*samādhibhāvanā*”.

b) The second kind is sometimes called “*paññābhāvanā*”, or in a specific, more limited sense “*vipassanābhāvanā*”.

All right. This is an easy way to understand what “*bhāvanā*” implies.

Anyway, as already stated above, *dāna*, *sīla* and *bhāvanā* are intended for the layperson. For this reason *puññasikkhā* emphasizes the practice on an initial or basic level; generosity emphasizes the giving of material things (*āmisadāna*); morality (*sīla*) emphasizes the Five Precepts or at a higher level the Eight Precepts; concerning “*bhāvanā*”,

the Buddha mainly emphasizes “*mettābhāvanā*”, that is, the development of loving-kindness and friendliness, which are the foundation of peace and happiness for the society. If we are able to do more than this, it is extended towards the fullness of “*cittabhāvanā*” and “*paññābhāvanā*” as already discussed.

Both sets, that is, *dāna*, *sīla*, *bhāvanā* and *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, are actually one and the same thing. The first set emphasizes mainly the external, the relatively coarse. We can see this in the discriminating of two external aspects, namely *dāna* and *sīla*, whereas *samādhi* and *paññā*, referring to the internal, are merged together in *bhāvanā*. The second set, *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, divides the internal aspect of *bhāvanā* into mind (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). But the external aspects, namely *dāna* and *sīla*, are counted as one thing. The reason for this is that the principle of *sīla* is good cooperation with others in society, while *dāna*, too, is a factor for good cooperation with others in society: therefore both are gathered together under the term *sīla*.

Therefore when you hear the terms *dāna*, *sīla*, *bhāvanā* and *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, you should know that these are actually one and the same system. But we divide the one system into two because we want to emphasize different aspects. For laypeople, we emphasize external aspects and thus speak of *dāna*, *sīla*, *bhāvanā*, while for monks we emphasize internal aspects and arrange them as *sīla*,

*samādhī* and *paññā*.

Furthermore, their names are very similar. As you already know very well, the set of *sīla*, *samādhī* and *paññā* is called the threefold study (*sikkhāttaya*).

The set of *dāna*, *sīla* and *bhāvanā* has a slightly different name, namely *puññasikkhā*: that is the training in goodness or the training in performing good acts. “*Puñña*” means goodness, while “*sikkhā*” means training. Thus it means the practice and study of goodness and to make progress in a variety of good things.

To sum up, both sets are one and the same thing, different only in emphasis as just shown.

When we practise Dhamma according to the principle of the Threefold Training or the three *puññasikkhā* correctly we will achieve a life that is good and right and has genuine happiness, because we reach Dhamma and happiness on the three levels, culminating in the final goal, as has been shown above.

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[translation of พระธรรมปิฎก (ป.อ. ปยุตฺโต) , ๒๕๔๐, ธรรมะฉบับเรียนสด, พิมพ์ครั้งที่ ๕, พิมพ์ที่ บริษัท สหธรรมิก จำกัด]



**[1]** The Five Precepts are:

1. “to abstain from taking life”
2. “to abstain from stealing”
3. “to abstain from sexual misconduct”
4. “to abstain from false speech”
5. “to abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness”

Observing these five training rules is the absolute minimum required if one is to be able to practise Dhamma.

**[2]** The Eight Precepts are:

1. “to abstain from taking life”
2. “to abstain from taking what is not given”
3. “to abstain from unchastity”
4. “to abstain from false speech”
5. “to abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness”
6. “to abstain from untimely eating”
7. “to abstain from dancing, singing, music and unseemly shows, from wearing garlands, smartening with scents, and embellishment with unguents”
8. “to abstain from the use of high and large luxurious couches”

These expanded training rules are effective in supporting further spiritual development and are practised either on the Observance Day, when they are called “*uposatha*” (the Observances), or, motivated by faith and confidence, are practised permanently, as in the case of the Thai “*Mae Chis*”.