

# LIVING

IN THE



# PRESENT

BUDDHADASA BHIKKHU



# Living in the Present

without past, without future

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*by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu*

Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles

Series - No. 3

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## Living in the Present without past, without future

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Translated from the Thai by Dhammavidū Bhikkhu

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## Anumodanā

To all Dhamma Comrades, those helping to spread Dhamma:

Break out the funds to spread Dhamma to let Faithful Trust flow,  
Broadcast majestic Dhamma to radiate long-living joy.

Release unexcelled Dhamma to tap the spring of Virtue,  
Let safely peaceful delight flow like a cool mountain stream.

Dhamma leaves of many years sprouting anew, reaching out,  
To unfold and bloom in the Dhamma Centers of all towns.

To spread lustrous Dhamma and in hearts glorified plant it,  
Before long, weeds of sorrow, pain, and affliction will flee.

As Virtue revives and resounds throughout Thai society,  
All hearts feel certain love toward those born, aging, and dying.

Congratulations and Blessings to all Dhamma Comrades,  
You who share Dhamma to widen the people's prosperous joy.

Heartiest appreciation from Buddhadāsa Indapañño,  
Buddhist Science ever shines beams of Bodhi long-lasting.

In grateful service, fruits of merit and wholesome successes,  
Are all devoted in honor to Lord Father Buddha.

Thus may the Thai people be renowned for their Virtue,  
May perfect success through Buddhist Science awaken their hearts.

May the King and His Family live long in triumphant strength,  
May joy long endure throughout this our word upon earth.

from

*Buddha dāsa Indapañño*

Mokkhabalārāma

Chaiya, 2 November 2530

(translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu)

## Anumodanā

Dhammavidū (Kenneth Croston) is an Englishman, who, after ordaining as a Buddhist monk, lived for, altogether, seventeen years in the Dhammadūta Hermitage of Suan Mokkh Nanachat (International). He became interested in and subsequently studied the Thai language until able to read it well enough. In particular he devoted his time to the study of Buddhādāsa's work, of which the Dhammaghosana (Dhamma Proclamation) series of books particularly attracted his attention. Having read extensively from the series, he realized the value of the Dhamma revealed by Ajahn Buddhādāsa as something not often met with and of real benefit. Anyone willing to read the Ajahn's work and put into practice what they read will be able to solve their problems, that is, to practice for the ending of *dukkha*. Dhammavidū thus decided to translate what he could of Buddhādāsa's work into the English language. At this time several translations have been completed, some of which have been published, while others are awaiting publication. The Buddhādāsa Foundation considers this Dhammaghosana series of books (*Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles*) ought to be speedily printed, containing, as they do, discourses on many important topics, such as *idappaccayatā*, *suññatā* and so on.

I, as President of The Buddhādāsa Foundation thus would like to thank and *anumodanā* Dhammavidū, who is, with faith and diligence, working to translate these books into the English language.

I hope that these publications will be enduring of use, of value, and of benefit to the readers.

Dhamma, Blessings, and Mettā

Buddhadhammo Bhikkhu

21 April 2558 (2015)

## Translator's Foreword

Buddhadāsa refers to the *Bhaddekaratta Suttas* quite often here, all four of which texts stress the importance of being mindful enough to be aware of life as it happens moment by moment by moment.

Given the way we tend to live, we find ourselves spending quite a lot of our time delving into the past, living in memories, or projecting off into the future, into the 'what might be.' We, without any real ease of mind, find it difficult to look life squarely in the eye, as it were. So, develop *sati*, develop mindfulness, and develop proper knowledge – knowledge of how *dukkha* arises – so that mindfulness can bring that proper knowledge to any potentially meaningful sense experience and defend against it, that is, make sure that it's dealt with in the right way; otherwise there will be *dukkha*, at the least a lack of mental ease, and perhaps something much heavier.

Dhammavidū Bhikkhu  
*14 Oct. 2558 (2015)*



# Living in the Present

## without past, without future

*A Dhamma lecture presented on 31 July 2525 (1982)  
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma\**

Today's subject is about staying with the present moment and not letting the past or future come to disturb us. This goes against the grain with ordinary people because it's understood that we learn from past experience and need the future as the repository of our hopes and dreams. Currently, we live with a certain longing for past times while entertaining expectations about the future, and this, they say, is the way it must be. But the Buddha is on record as saying:

*“One ought not to long for what has passed away,  
Nor be anxious over things which are yet to come.  
The past has left us, the future has not arrived.”*

In other words, paying attention to the present is the way to live. But some say that's not possible, that they can survive today because they have expectations regarding, for instance, work, and that they delve into the past in order to learn from previous experience. Although there must be anxieties connected with such an attitude, they are satisfied with that.

Now, the Buddha had a particular aim: that people be able to live without any suffering at all. So how then should they behave when dealing with the past, present, and future?

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\* The original *Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles* Dhamma discourses were delivered to the monks, *maechis*, and laypeople at Suan Mokkh during the three months of the 1982 rains retreat. [note by the publisher]

Well, consider a lesson that Buddhists chant regularly called the Bhaddekaratta Gāthā,\* which begins: “*Atītaṃ nānvāgameyya nappaṭikaṅkhe anāgataṃ,*” “*One ought not to long for what has passed away, nor be anxious over things that are yet to come,*” or in other words, one should stay steadily in the present, experiencing the present moment clearly and attempting to do this increasingly as time goes on. Obeying this instruction can, and will be, troublesome, but if being happy, cool and peaceful is what we want, then this is the way we will need to live.

*Bhaddekaratta* – ‘*bhadda*’ means ‘auspicious’ and ‘*ekaratta*’ means ‘one night.’ When counting days in the Pāli language, they prefer to use ‘night’ as the measure. We use ‘day,’ as when we say that we will be away ‘for three days,’ but in the language of Buddhism, they would say ‘for three nights.’ Thus *ekaratta* (one night) actually means the whole twenty-four hours. ‘Bhaddekaratta’ would be ‘a prosperous or auspicious single night.’ The Bhaddekaratta Gāthā was a particular teaching taught by the Buddha for people who wished to live the ‘noble’ life for just one day, so if we want to have the very best kind of life for even one day, then this is how we do it. Now, this could be practised for one or for many days. However, here and now we probably won’t be able to achieve one or many days, so we do the best we can. We practise for some time – for a little while, for an hour, or perhaps even for a day. If we could live auspiciously and live the ‘*bhadda*-life’ for a day, it would indeed be a praiseworthy achievement.

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\* See page 20 and Bhaddekaratta Sutta (MN 131), Ānandabhaddekaratta Sutta (MN 132), Mahākaccānabhaddekaratta Sutta (MN 133), and Lomasakangiya-bhaddekaratta Sutta (MN 134). [note by the publisher]

Think about it and consider: the whole time that we have been alive, has there been even one day when our life could be said to have been ‘auspicious,’ when we could have called our life ‘bhadda?’ If so, then we don’t need to read on, but if not, then we do.

The matter we will need to understand is time itself – the past, present, and future times. Why is it taught that dwelling in the present and avoiding past and future entanglements is the best way to live? Well, it’s because entertaining the past means that memories – matters from the past – will come to disturb us and to break up our peace of mind. It will be the same with the future: anyone who entertains unwise expectations or who ‘builds castles in the air’ won’t be able to experience a truly peaceful state of mind. Hopes and expectations are troublesome things.

However, at present education systems encourage people to live with expectation – we are taught to live this way, to live in hope, to build up our expectations, and to expect more and more. Life becomes a life lived in hope. But take a look, observe and see how such a life is – is it cool, or is it hot? For as long as we haven’t got the thing we want, there is the feeling of expectancy, and how does that feel? Is that an easy, comfortable experience, or is it disturbing to live in expectation? Some people develop nervous diseases because of this kind of thing; it can torture the mind. Not doing as well as we hoped to or as we expected to, can, over a period of time, lead to a nervous disease. Hence, if we are looking forward to getting something, then we are living in hope. So just let that kind of thinking come to a stop and get on with life without allowing expectation to disturb the mind because when we hope to get anything, we are courting

disappointment straight away. Whenever we expect to get something or other, then we are prone to disappointment immediately because what we want has yet to arrive, and disappointment, on any level, disturbs the mind – it bites.

So why hope and get bitten? Don't bother with hope. When we need something, then we think, and then we stop thinking about it and act – act with energy, mindfulness, and wisdom. If we act with mindfulness and proper knowledge, there is no biting, but if we act with hope and expectation there is. Live on hopes and expectations and they will bite; they will bite all the time like some predator, like some ferocious animal. Thus we try to avoid living in hope and instead try to dwell with mindfulness and wisdom, remembering to act without letting expectations in to bite us.

Concerning this, the Buddha once took the example of a hen laying and then incubating her eggs. The hen lays the eggs and then she just sits on them. She doesn't entertain any expectation that the chicks will emerge from the eggs – no hen would be mad enough to do that; she just sits on the eggs. She occasionally scratches and scrapes, occasionally turns the eggs over, and generally does whatever is necessary and right, so that when the time comes, the chicks emerge. Be the same. Don't do anything with expectation. Allow expectation to arise, and it will bite – it will bite and then there can be nervous disease, madness, or even death. Brooding over what might happen in the future can produce results like that. Thus we need to know how to maintain the mind correctly so that whenever we think, then we do it carefully, fully, and correctly. We sum up whatever we have to do, and then act with mindfulness and wisdom (*sati-paññā*), not with hope and expectation. If we act in expectation, then we act

with hunger, and hunger isn't happiness, it's suffering. This was taught by the Buddha, but people in the world now don't teach in this way. They teach children to live in hope and expectation and to get bitten. Hopes and expectations are bound up with disappointment because if we don't get what we expect quickly, then it means experiencing disappointment. When we begin with expectation, there is bound to be disappointment, and if we can't bear with that, then we might steal or do bad things because we haven't had our expectations fulfilled. Thus, we practise to make the mind normal, and we don't allow the future to come and torture us.

The first section of the Bhaddekaratta Gāthā runs thus: “*Aññam nānvāgameyya,*” “*One ought not to long for what has passed away.*” That is, don't dwell in the past; it's finished, gone. Why bring the *dukkha* (dis-ease, distress, suffering) of longing into life? Don't bring things from the past to torment the mind. If we have made a mistake don't allow it to be a nuisance; stop thinking about it and try to avoid making the same mistake again. Anything of the sort occurring in the future can be dealt with in the same way.

Now, concerning the present, how should we act? If we were students, for instance, then we would study what we need to study without bringing up things from the past that disturb or expectations of the future – that have no immediate relevance – to trouble our minds. There is no benefit in that. Thus we could be at ease and feel comfortable with ourselves. If we allow the past or future to disturb us, we won't feel at ease; we will be easily distracted and won't accomplish as much as we would like. This is fundamentally true for everyone; if we haven't seen this yet, then we should,

from now on, try to see it. We should try not to let thoughts about the past or the future come to torment the mind. Instead we do our best to stay with the present, with whatever is happening here and now. If we can do this, then it's said that time doesn't bite us; we turn around and eat time instead.

It says in the Pāli texts that time devours all living things. Time passes – day-time and night-time – and devours all living things, that is, it allows creatures to age and die, to pass away. Time bites us when we hope. When we expect to get something and what we are hoping for hasn't arrived yet, time bites us because we don't get the thing we want quickly enough. How do we stop time from biting us? Well, we know how time operates, so we don't do anything with expectation. We act with clear mind, with smart mind. We act with clarity and don't allow time to interfere or to have meaning for us. Time has no meaning for us if we avoid thinking too much about past or future events, because then there is no foolish desire arising towards such things. There can of course be desire for things we will need at some future time, but if we don't think about them unnecessarily, there won't be the sort of unwise desire that causes problems, and when there's no unwise desire, there is really no time either.

Children will probably know time by the things that indicate it – that tell the time – like a clock, or a day, a night, a month, a year, and so on. These are indicators of the passage of time, things that fix time. These things never bite us because they are just things that indicate time. But time itself, what is it? Where is it? Time? Some people say that it doesn't really exist, but that isn't true; we don't agree with that. Time does exist – but only for foolish people, for ignorant human beings. If someone is clever enough, then it

won't exist for them. But foolish people, with their wanting this, wanting that, and hoping for this, hoping for that, will have to bear the passage of time because of their desiring. Time's starting point is desire, and it continues to exist until we get what we desire – that is where time 'is.' We desire – this is the starting point – and then, when we get what we desire, that is the end-point. Beware of time: it will only have meaning because we have desire. If we don't desire, there won't be any time. It won't have a beginning and an end. Thus time exists, but only for ignorant people who have ignorant desires, who have hopes and expectations.

Now, the Dhamma teaches non-desire, that we should avoid foolish wanting so that anything we do, no matter where or when, should be done without desire as its starting point. Then we will get what we need to get, but we won't be bothered by the passage of time, and we won't have the associated suffering. Then we will be above time, above its meaning; it won't exist for us, and we will experience some degree of mental ease. Those who aren't bitten by time live their lives above it – desire-less and without the foolish expectations that torment the mind. They become calm, peaceful, attractive human beings. Living that way for even one day would be a praiseworthy achievement.

We are sorry to have to say that, although we chant the Bhaddekaratta Sutta, although we – monks, novices and laypeople – chant it together regularly, we still don't get the point, and some people, even though they chant this *sutta* every day, still entertain doubts about how we can live at all if we don't take an interest in the past and future. So pay attention to what the Buddha had to say: he said that if we want to live auspiciously and with elevated mind for

just one day, then this is the way we do it – by not thinking about the past, and by avoiding foolish hope and expectation concerning things that haven't happened yet. By dwelling in the present moment without the meanings of 'past' or 'future' coming to disturb us, we dwell with a mind that is peaceful, resolute, and strong – mind which has energy and the power to do things well here and now, and what's better, a mind which is happy and contented. Therefore, if there is work for us to do, we will be able to do it well and contentedly, and if there's nothing that needs to be done, we will do nothing well and contentedly too. This is called '*bhaddekaratto*' (having one auspicious night).

Supposing someone lives the 'bhadda-life' for one day; then even if their whole life span should amount to just that one day, their life would have more value than that of someone who had never lived auspiciously, even though they might live for a thousand years. The Buddha taught this way. Now, can we live like this? Because if we live under the power of time, it means that we are enslaved by it, and that we get bitten, get eaten up by it. Longing for the past and hoping for something in the future bites, so then how can we ever be truly happy?

Time exists only for people who desire in ignorance. They experience foolish desire and the meaning of time is immediately 'born' for them. If they don't desire foolishly, then time doesn't exist for them; time isn't 'born' either. So because ordinary people have desires, they have time too – time exists for them. Hence, everybody in this world has to deal with time. When one desires, in the moment that there is desire, there will be time; when there isn't desire, there isn't time either – time loses its meaning. Thus time will exist only

when we desire, when we want something in ignorance. So if we live minus desire, without foolish wanting, then time won't devour us; rather, we will do the devouring – we will be someone who 'eats' time.

The Buddha is recorded as saying that anyone who gets rid of *taṇhā* (ignorant desire) is someone who eats time. Usually it's time that devours; it devours people and all other living things. But anyone who puts an end to desire, that one turns around and eats time, which means that time becomes a small matter, something to smile at, an inconsequential matter that can't eat or bite us. If there is desire, there will be time too, and then time will bite. If desire is ended, there's no time, and one turns and eats it, which means one makes time pass away by not giving it meaning. Then it's as if there's no time, as if we live above it.

We should understand that as soon as time loses its meaning, then there isn't a past or a future – they don't have meaning either. Thus it's known as 'not having time.' Devices like clocks, for instance, are devices for fixing time, for telling the time. The seasons of the year, like the yearly rainy season, are devices for fixing the time, and the rising of the sun each day is a device for fixing the time. But time itself is really just the interval between ignorant desire and the acquisition of the desired. Therefore, devices for telling the time just tell, for instance, what time to eat; but for one who doesn't have desire, who doesn't have time, like Arahant, they don't have the same meaning. Days, nights, months, and years don't have the same meaning for them, and clocks don't have the same meaning. It's as if they are given up, relinquished, because Arahants aren't concerned with time in the ordinary sense, or with the problems associated with

it. If, however, it's a matter of someone needing to work for a living, they will still need to be aware of time in the usual way. The more someone is bound to society and the work connected with it, the more timepieces become necessary.

So we know that there is the passage of time for people who desire in ignorance, and clocks are for such people. For people who don't have that same problem, there's no such dependency; for the desire-less, the passage of days and nights as well as months and years isn't a concern. Now, to be without the pressure of passing time, how good would that feel?

Suppose that we did experience a single auspicious day – it would mean that we had tried to be Arahant for that one day. The true Arahant doesn't live the 'bhadda-life' for just one day, however, they do it all of the time; they have a life that is cool and peaceful, one that is auspicious all of the time. Thus, if anyone wants to be like Arahant for just one day, then they do it by living above time, above the meaning and value of time, by living without desire, without *taṇhā* (craving), without *upādāna* (clinging), without the defilements of greed, anger, and delusion influencing their lives. They dwell above and beyond time.

Suppose that we were always Arahant, not just for one day but always; what would we have done to have achieved that? Well, it would mean that we had given up the present as well as the past and future, that there wouldn't be a past, a present, or a future for us – because there wouldn't be a 'me.' There wouldn't be a 'me' to dwell in the present, and when there's no 'me,' there's no past, present, or future either. Let the 'me' go completely and one is Arahant full and complete, dwelling above time. But if we're not yet fully Arahant and

only bhaddekaratto, there will still be the present remaining; there will still be the passage of time because there will still be a ‘me’ to experience it. Even so, if while still selfish we dwell in the best possible way, then we will only have present time to deal with, only the here and now, not the past or the future. The Buddha said that living for one auspicious night by staying in the present and avoiding the past and future, is something we can do. When we calm the mind, the past and future don’t disturb it, and it stays focused on the present. One is then someone who experiences contentment while still having the ‘self’ delusion. This is known as having one auspicious night. The meaning of time isn’t completely rescinded, in that there is still the present, but not in such a way that it disturbs.

How many years do we live? How many tens of years do we live, and yet we never have true peace and happiness? So we try to live one night peacefully by not allowing the past and future to interfere, and by being mindfully aware of whatever we need to think or do in such a way that the feeling of desire doesn’t arise. Ultimately this means acting without the feeling of ‘self’ too; but we still have the feeling of being ‘me,’ so we have to stop the past and future from troubling the mind and make them leave the mind alone so that it can do what needs to be done, and then there’s no dukkha.

The best present abiding is *samādhi*, that is, mind paying attention so securely on its object that mind will remain there. With successful *samādhi* its fruits naturally follow, namely *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha*, *ekaggatā*. *Vitakka* and *vicāra* (applied and sustained thought), *pīti* (satisfaction), *sukha* (happiness), and *ekaggatā* (one-pointedness) are the fruit of

samādhi. *Ekaggatā* (one-pointedness) is single mind, focused on one object, free from the meanings of past or future. Mind that is stilled in samādhi is said to dwell in the present only.

If that still feels low, then raise it up a level until *vitakka* and *vicāra* (applied and sustained thought) are gone, which would be the second jhāna, a more intense experience of being in the present; move it up until *pīti* and *sukha* (satisfaction and happiness) are gone too, until there is only *upekkhā* (equanimity) and *ekaggatā* (one-pointedness). Upekkhā is the ultimate experience of the present, the purest experience of being in the present minus any suffering or any reaction of the suffering kind whatsoever. Mind dwelling in upekkhā, mind which is equanimous towards all things, dwells only in the present, so the past and future cannot come to interfere.

Here, upekkhā can be increased until it reaches the ultimate for the still ignorant – the meditative attainment of the *arūpa-jhānas* (the formless meditations) – which are a yet more equanimous experience, a more refined experience of being in the thorough-going present. This can then be refined more and more until it reaches the highest, the most rarified level where there is no possibility of the past or future arising. At such time, the ‘self’ sense is also absent, as with the Arahant who, having nothing more to do with clinging, doesn’t have a ‘self’ at all. For us it’s absent only for the time that we remain concentrated in this way. When concentration drops, ‘self’ comes back again.

Being someone who lives the highest way for one day, for half a day, or for one hour may be done in this way – mind pays attention only in the present so that the past and future can’t disturb it. Whatever mind takes as an object is its present. When there is complete equanimity and non-

reactivity the present is supreme. *Upekkhā* (equanimity) has many levels, increasing accordingly as mind is increasingly *samādhi*. Mind focused in *upekkhā* as its only object is *ekaggatā* (one-pointed), and represents the ultimate present without the defilements of craving and attachment, dwelling above time and dwelling defeating time.

For Arahant, all have been dropped – past, present, and future. If only *bhaddekaratta* as described above – only dwelling in the present – past and future don't exist. If this is continually practised it will develop and bloom in the direction of completely eliminating the defilements, which culminates in being Arahant. Currently, we're incapable of being Arahant but can live as Arahant for a day or a night. This is the condition of *bhaddekaratto*, living in the present. *Bhaddekaratto* lives with full equanimity. Arahant is living with *Nibbāna*, which is present more profoundly than anything.

If it should be asked what the ultimate meaning of the 'present' is, it would have to be 'Nibbāna.' *Nibbāna*, being without any form of concocting, doesn't display the characteristics of arising, persisting, and ceasing; nor of birth, ageing, and death. Thus it has the nature of being present continuously. Having *Nibbāna* as the object of awareness, an Arahant lives always in the present moment. Hence, those capable of dwelling in the present can be divided into two groups: Arahants who dwell quite naturally with *Nibbāna*, which is the same as the present, and not-yet Arahants who dwell in *upekkhā* (equanimity) by focusing mind on an object of concentration.

This isn't a matter of anyone being damaged or harmed in some way, and it's not because of ignorance or madness

that Arahants don't know the past, present, or the future. These people, if they want to, can get involved with time because they aren't foolish or subnormal. If, for instance, they want to recall past events in order to learn from them, then they can, but in such a manner that it won't bring them any dukkha. When worldly people think about the past or when they recall past matters, they make dukkha because they make mistakes, and even though some past event was a happy one, it disturbs them, makes them not-peaceful. Someone who is a bhaddekaratto type is still able to work out some future thing if they should wish to, but in such a way that there wouldn't be dukkha because they wouldn't get caught up in hope and expectation – they would think about how something should be done, but they would arrange matters so that only the necessary thinking would happen. Don't forget that such people avoid hope as well as the defilements of *taṇhā* (craving) and *upādāna* (clinging). Even though they might think or make plans for the future, there is no dukkha involved because there is no hope or expectation that could come and bite.

Therefore, we, as ordinary people, can live in the present without the kind of past and future that would be dangerous for mind. The past then is only a record – memories that we can use whenever we need them, while the future consists of just planning the things that we should do without the sort of hope and expectation that would involve the defilement of desire (*taṇhā*). For that reason, we wouldn't have enough ignorance for there to be a 'me,' or for mind to take anything as being 'mine,' so we could know all things as being 'just like that.'

'Just like that' – *tathātā* (just like that) – we have

mentioned this many times already, but remember it and it will help us to prevent the arising of foolish expectations of the dukkha kind, of the sort of time that bites. Whatever we experience, we know it as ‘just like that’ so that we aren’t fooled by it and don’t fall into love, hate, anger, or fear, or into being led astray in any way. Tathātā will help us to dwell with normal mind so that the past, present and future cease to be dangerous.

Thus, preserve the knowledge of tathātā; keep it well and then we can avoid falling into longing for the past or into harbouring foolish hopes and expectations about the future. We won’t ‘build castles in the air,’ as they say, because we know that whatever we experience is really ‘just like that.’ One who sees anything as ‘just like that’ won’t have foolish desires towards it. If they can see the ‘thusness’ of all things, they won’t entertain foolish desire, and when they don’t desire, they don’t have time. Hence, they don’t have the dukkha concerned with time, because they don’t have a past or a future in the ordinary sense. This is the seeing of ‘just like that’ that is most useful.

‘Voidness’ is another way of describing the utmost present. There isn’t anything that is more in the present moment than void mind because it doesn’t display the usual concocting. There is nothing changeable about voidness. As Nibbāna is the ultimate voidness and the void is changeless, then voidness is the ultimate present. If mind is void, it doesn’t give rise to desire, and thus doesn’t have the problems associated with time – that is, the past and future don’t disturb it.

Modern education systems don’t teach this kind of thing. They teach in another way, so we don’t get the opportunity to

make use of this knowledge. We can have the ability to live above time, but modern education systems don't teach this; they teach people to rush around, to hurry up, get finished in time, to be quick – so we get nervous diseases all over the place. Worldly education at the present time isn't elevated enough and doesn't give people the necessary understanding of how to live above the power of time. Buddhist knowledge, however, is elevated enough and does. Present worldly knowledge probably can't explain time. Modern science, because it's physically based, can't tell us what time actually is, but Dhamma knowledge can and does: time is the interval between desire and the acquisition of the desired. That, in the Buddhist sense, is time, and for so long as there is an unfulfilled desire, time will have meaning. If there's no desire, then there is no time; it has no meaning. For time to have a value, to have any power, then people need to display foolish desires.

It's an odd thing that, although we live in the same world, some people live under the power of time and some live above it. Worldly people the world over live under its power and are subject to its pressure; an Arahant lives above it, above the pressure and biting. Well, we can, if we choose to make the effort, live above time too, and for perhaps one day and night, we can be bhaddekaratto – we can have the best kind of life for just a short time. Dwelling above time in the same way as an Arahant for just one day and night, or even for just one hour, would still be commendable and would certainly be better than nothing.

To get the benefit of experiencing true happiness, we need to understand that we can live above the pressure of

time by not allowing foolish desire to arise towards anything we experience. By dwelling above the pressure of time, we would be without suffering, and if we could do this continually, eventually, time would have no power over us; or failing that, if we could be aware enough to practise this some of the time so that it protected us to some degree and allowed us to live to some extent contentedly, we wouldn't have to feel too embarrassed when we meet with the cat population, for instance. We have said this many times, and while some will appreciate it, some won't according to their tastes. We ought to feel some degree of embarrassment when considering cats: we suffer from nerves and can't sleep because time pressures us too much, yet animals, because they don't desire in the same way, don't feel pressured by time. Animals don't have nervous diseases, but people do, so we should feel some shame when we consider cats and dogs because we don't see them suffering from the nervous problems associated with time.

Consequently, I hope that we will fully understand the meaning of the Buddha's words: "*We can have an excellent life through not longing after the past and not wishing about the future.*" Modern intellectuals don't like this because they don't understand and so they revile me. They don't criticize the Buddha because they don't know that the Buddha spoke these words himself. They think that Venerable Buddhādāsa of Suan Mokkh said them, so they trash me in newspapers and magazines. I'm not mentioning this to get revenge. I'm just pointing out that modern intellectuals don't know about our potential to live outside the power of past and future. Such living doesn't lose out in any way, doesn't go into debt,

doesn't stop development, doesn't do any harm or damage. It simply leaves us at peace.

Please become familiar with and endeavor to practise this Dhamma of the Bhaddekaratta Gāthā that we chant together every day. It's something we need and therefore need to practise. For one day or for one night, we can live properly and auspiciously, while growing in Dhamma. Practising to do this for just one day and one night, even if not all the time, will mean that we haven't wasted the opportunity afforded by human birth and meeting with the Buddha's teaching.

Through our own exploration and practice, we will know for ourselves whether this is genuinely auspicious and beneficial. Please give it your full attention.



## Bhaddekaratta Gāthā (Verses on the Single Night)

[*Handa mayam bhaddekarattagāthāyo bhaṇāma se*]  
[Let us recite the verses on the Single Night.]

*Atītaṃ nānvāgameyya nappatikaṅkhe anāgataṃ  
Yadatītaṃ pahīnaṃ taṃ appattañca anāgataṃ*  
One ought not to long for what has passed away,  
Nor be anxious over things which are yet to come.  
The past has left us, the future has not arrived.

*Paccuppannāñca yo dhammaṃ tattha tattha vipassati  
Asaṃhiraṃ asaṃkappaṃ taṃ viddhā manubrūhaye*  
Whoever sees the present dhammas direct and clear just as  
they are,  
Is unshakeable, immovable, secure. One should accumulate  
such moments.

*Ajjeva kiccāmātappaṃ ko jaññā maraṇaṃ suve  
Na hi no saṅgaramaṃ tena mahāsenena maccunā*  
Effort is the duty of today, even tomorrow death may come,  
We are powerless to fend off Death and his great armies.

*Evaṃ vihārimātāpiṃ ahorattamatanditaṃ  
Taṃ ve bhaddekarattoti santo ācikkhate munī*  
The Sages of Peace speak of that one who strives  
Never lazy throughout the entire day and night:

“Praise the one who truly lives even a single night.”

*Source: Suan Mokkh Chanting Book*

## About the Author

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was born in 1906, the son of a southern Thai mother and an ethnic Chinese father. He followed Thai custom by entering a local monastery in 1926, studied for a couple years in Bangkok, and then founded his own refuge for study and practice in 1932. Since then, he has had a profound influence on not only Thai Buddhism but other religions in Siam and Buddhism in the West. Among his more important accomplishments, he:

- Challenged the hegemony of later commentarial texts with the primacy of the Buddha's original discourses.
- Integrated serious Dhamma study, intellectual creativity, and rigorous practice.
- Explained Buddha-Dhamma with an emphasis on this life, including the possibility of experiencing Nibbāna ourselves.
- Softened the dichotomy between householder and monastic practice, stressing that the noble eightfold path is available to everyone.
- Offered doctrinal support for addressing social and environmental issues, helping to foster socially engaged Buddhism in Siam.
- Shaped his forest monastery as an innovative teaching environment and Garden of Liberation.

After a series of illnesses, including strokes, he died in 1993. He was cremated without the usual pomp and expense.

## About the Translator

Dhammavidū Bhikkhu, originally from England, ordained as a monk in 1995 and has lived at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, in South Thailand since then. He has helped to teach meditation to foreign retreatants at Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage and Dipabhāvan Meditation Center at Samui Island. As a translator, he has been particularly interested in *The Dhamma Proclamation Series*, a multivolume collection of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's major teachings.

### Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles Series

- 1. *Idappaccayatā - The Buddhist Law of Nature*
- 2. *Void Mind*
- 3. *Living in the Present*
- 4. *Concerning Birth* \*
- 5. *Concerning God* \*
- 6. *Nibbāna from Every Angle* \*
- 7. *The Whirlpool of Saṃsāra* \*
- 8. *The World and Dhamma* \*

\* forthcoming

## Recommended Reading (Books)

- *Mindfulness With Breathing: A Manual for Serious Beginners*
- *Handbook for Mankind*
- *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh*
- *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*
- *Keys to Natural Truth*
- *Void Mind*
- *The Prison of Life*
- *It All Depends \**

\* forthcoming

## Online Resources

- [www.suanmokkh.org](http://www.suanmokkh.org)
- [www.suanmokkh-idh.org](http://www.suanmokkh-idh.org)
- [www.bia.or.th](http://www.bia.or.th)

## **Buddhadāsa Foundation**

Established in 1994, the Buddhadāsa Foundation aims to promote the study and practice of Buddha-Dhamma according to Ven. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s teachings. It encourages compilation and translation of his works from Thai into foreign languages, as well as supports publication of translated teachings for free distribution.



## **Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives**

Established in 2010, the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives collect, maintain, and present the original works of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. Also known as Suan Mokkh Bangkok, it is an innovative place for fostering mutual understanding between traditions, studying and practicing Dhamma.

