

The Dhammapada: The Way of the Buddha, Vol 1

Talks given from 21/06/79 am to 30/04/80 am

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Chapter #1

Chapter title: We are what we think

21 June 1979 am in Buddha Hall

WE ARE WHAT WE THINK.
ALL THAT WE ARE ARISES WITH OUR THOUGHTS.
WITH OUR THOUGHTS WE MAKE THE WORLD.
SPEAK OR ACT WITH AN IMPURE MIND
AND TROUBLE WILL FOLLOW YOU
AS THE WHEEL FOLLOWS THE OX THAT DRAWS THE CART.

WE ARE WHAT WE THINK.
ALL THAT WE ARE ARISES WITH OUR THOUGHTS.
WITH OUR THOUGHTS WE MAKE THE WORLD.
SPEAK OR ACT WITH A PURE MIND
AND HAPPINESS WILL FOLLOW YOU
AS YOUR SHADOW, UNSHAKABLE.

"LOOK HOW HE ABUSED ME AND BEAT ME,
HOW HE THREW ME DOWN AND ROBBED ME."
LIVE WITH SUCH THOUGHTS AND YOU LIVE IN HATE.

"LOOK HOW HE ABUSED ME AND BEAT ME,
HOW HE THREW ME DOWN AND ROBBED ME."
ABANDON SUCH THOUGHTS, AND LIVE IN LOVE.

IN THIS WORLD
HATE NEVER YET DISPELLED HATE.
ONLY LOVE DISPELS HATE.
THIS IS THE LAW,
ANCIENT AND INEXHAUSTIBLE.

YOU TOO SHALL PASS AWAY.
KNOWING THIS, HOW CAN YOU QUARREL?

HOW EASILY THE WIND OVERTURNS A FRAIL TREE.

SEEK HAPPINESS IN THE SENSES,
INDULGE IN FOOD AND SLEEP,
AND YOU TOO WILL BE UPROOTED.

THE WIND CANNOT OVERTURN A MOUNTAIN.
TEMPTATION CANNOT TOUCH THE MAN
WHO IS AWAKE, STRONG AND HUMBLE,
WHO MASTERS HIMSELF AND MINDS THE LAW.

IF A MAN'S THOUGHTS ARE MUDDY,
IF HE IS RECKLESS AND FULL OF DECEIT,
HOW CAN HE WEAR THE YELLOW ROBE?

WHOEVER IS MASTER OF HIS OWN NATURE,
BRIGHT, CLEAR AND TRUE,
HE MAY INDEED WEAR THE YELLOW ROBE.

My beloved bodhisattvas.... Yes, that's how I look at you. That's how you have to start looking at yourselves. Bodhisattva means a buddha in essence, a buddha in seed, a buddha asleep, but with all the potential to be awake. In that sense everybody is a bodhisattva, but not everybody can be called a bodhisattva -- only those who have started groping for the light, who have started longing for the dawn, in whose hearts the seed is no longer a seed but has become a sprout, has started growing.

You are bodhisattvas because of your longing to be conscious, to be alert, because of your quest for the truth. The truth is not far away, but there are very few fortunate ones in the world who long for it. It is not far away but it is arduous, it is hard to achieve. It is hard to achieve, not because of its nature, but because of our investment in lies.

We have invested for lives and lives in lies. Our investment is so much that the very idea of truth makes us frightened. We want to avoid it, we want to escape from the truth. Lies are beautiful escapes -- convenient, comfortable dreams. But dreams are dreams. They can enchant you for the moment, they can enslave you for the moment, but only for the moment. And each dream is followed by tremendous frustration, and each desire is followed by deep failure.

But we go on rushing into new lies; if old lies are known, we immediately invent new lies. Remember that only lies can be invented; truth cannot be invented. Truth already is! Truth has to be discovered, not invented. Lies cannot be discovered, they have to be invented.

Mind feels very good with lies because the mind becomes the inventor, the doer. And as the mind becomes the doer, ego is created. With truth, you have nothing to do...and because you have nothing to do, mind ceases, and with the mind the ego disappears, evaporates. That's the risk, the ultimate risk.

You have moved towards that risk. You have taken a few steps -- staggering, stumbling, groping, haltingly, with many doubts, but still you have taken a few steps; hence I call you bodhisattvas.

And THE DHAMMAPADA, the teaching of Gautama the Buddha, can only be taught to the bodhisattvas. It cannot be taught to the ordinary, mediocre humanity, because it cannot be understood by them.

These words of Buddha come from eternal silence. They can reach you only if you receive them in silence. These words of Buddha come from immense purity. Unless you become a vehicle, a receptacle, humble, egoless, alert, aware, you will not be able to understand them. Intellectually you will understand them -- they are very simple words, the simplest possible. But their very simplicity is a problem, because you are not simple. To understand simplicity you need simplicity of the heart, because only the simple heart can understand the simple truth. Only the pure can understand that which has come out of purity.

I have waited long...now the time is ripe, you are ready. The seeds can be sown. These tremendously important words can be uttered again. For twenty-five centuries, such a gathering has not existed at all. Yes, there have been a few enlightened masters with a few disciples -- half a dozen at the most -- and in small gatherings THE DHAMMAPADA has been taught. But those small gatherings cannot transform such a huge humanity. It is like throwing sugar in the ocean with spoons: it cannot make it sweet -- your sugar is simply wasted.

A great, unheard-of experiment has to be done, on such a large scale that at least the most substantial part of humanity is touched by it -- at least the soul of humanity, the center of humanity, can be awakened by it. On the periphery, the mediocre minds will go on sleeping -- let them sleep -- but at the center where intelligence exists a light can be kindled.

The time is ripe, the time has come for it. My whole work here consists in creating a buddhafiield, an energy field where these eternal truths can be uttered again. It is a rare opportunity. Only once in a while, after centuries, does such an opportunity exist. Don't miss it. Be very alert, mindful. Listen to these words not only with the head but with your heart, with every fiber of your being. Let your totality be stirred by them.

And after these ten days of silence, it is exactly the right moment to bring Buddha back, to make him alive again amongst you, to let him move amongst you, to let the winds of Buddha pass through you. Yes, he can be called back again, because nobody ever disappears. Buddha is no longer an embodied person; certainly he does not exist as an individual anywhere -- but his essence, his soul, is part of the cosmic soul now.

If many many people -- with deep longing, with immense longing, with prayerful hearts -- desire it, passionately desire it, then the soul that has disappeared into the cosmic soul can again become manifest in millions of ways.

No true master ever dies, he cannot die. Death does not appear for the masters, does not exist for them. Hence they are masters. They have known the eternity of life. They have seen that the body disappears but that the body is not all: the body is only the periphery, the body is only the garments. The body is the house, the abode, but the

guest never disappears. The guest only moves from one abode to another. One day, ultimately, the guest starts living under the sky, with no shelter...but the guest continues. Only bodies, houses, come and go, are born and then die. But there is an inner continuum, an inner continuity -- that is eternal, timeless, deathless.

Whenever you can love a master -- a master like Jesus, Buddha, Zarathustra, Lao Tzu -- if your passion is total, immediately you are bridged.

My talking on Buddha is not just a commentary: it is creating a bridge. Buddha is one of the most important masters who has ever existed on the earth -- incomparable, unique. And if you can have a taste of his being, you will be infinitely benefited, blessed.

I am immensely glad, because after these ten days of silence I can say to you that many of you are now ready to commune with me in silence. That is the ultimate in communication. Words are inadequate; words say, but only partially. Silence communes totally.

And to use words is a dangerous game too, because the meaning will remain with me, only the word will reach you; and you will give it your own meaning, your own color. It will not contain the same truth that it was meant to contain. It will contain something else, something far poorer. It will contain your meaning, not my meaning. You can distort language -- in fact it is almost impossible to avoid distortion -- but you cannot distort silence. Either you understand or you don't understand.

And for these ten days there were only two categories of people here: those who understood and those who did not. But there was not a single person who misunderstood. You cannot misunderstand silence -- that's the beauty of silence. The demarcation is absolute: either you understand or, simply, you don't understand -- there is nothing to misunderstand.

With words the case is just the opposite: it is very difficult to understand, it is very difficult to understand that you don't understand; these two are almost impossibilities. And the third is the only possibility: misunderstanding.

These ten days have been of strange beauty, and of a mysterious majesty too. I no longer really belong to this shore. My ship has been waiting for me for a long time -- I should have gone. It is a miracle that I am still in the body. The whole credit goes to you: to your love, to your prayers, to your longing. You would like me to linger a little while longer on this shore, hence the impossible has become possible.

These ten days, I was not feeling together with my body. I was feeling very uprooted, dislocated. It is strange to be in the body when you don't feel that you are in the body. And it is also strange to go on living in a place which no longer belongs to you -- my home is on the other shore. And the call comes persistently. But because you need me, it is the compassion of the universe -- you can call it God's compassion -- that is allowing me to be in the body a little more.

It was strange, it was beautiful, it was mysterious, it was majestic, it was magical. And many of you have felt it. Many of you have felt it in different ways. A few have felt it as a very frightening phenomenon, as if death is knocking on the door. A few have felt it as a great confusion. A few have felt shocked, utterly shocked. But everybody has been touched in some way or other.

Only the newcomers were a little at a loss -- they could not comprehend what was going on. But I feel thankful to them too. Although they could not understand what was going on, they waited -- they were waiting for me to speak, they were waiting for me to say something, they were hoping. Many were afraid that I might not speak ever again...that was also a possibility. I was not certain myself.

Words are becoming more and more difficult for me. They are becoming more and more of an effort. I have to say something so I go on saying something to you. But I would like you to get ready as soon as possible so that we can simply sit in silence...listening to the birds and their songs...or listening just to your own heartbeat...just being here, doing nothing....

Get ready as soon as possible, because I may stop speaking any day. And let the news be spread to all the nooks and corners of the world: those who want to understand me only through the words, they should come soon, because I may stop speaking any day. Unpredictably, any day, it may happen -- it may happen even in the middle of a sentence. Then I am not going to complete the sentence! Then it will hang forever and forever...incomplete.

But this time you have pulled me back.

These sayings of Buddha are called THE DHAMMAPADA. This name has to be understood. Dhamma means many things. It means the ultimate law, logos. By "ultimate law" is meant that which keeps the whole universe together. Invisible it is, intangible it is -- but it is certainly; otherwise the universe would fall apart. Such a vast, infinite universe, running so smoothly, so harmoniously, is enough proof that there must be an undercurrent that connects everything, that joins everything, that bridges everything -- that we are not islands, that the smallest grass leaf is joined to the greatest star. Destroy a small grass leaf and you have destroyed something of immense value to the existence itself.

In existence there is no hierarchy, there is nothing small and nothing great. The greatest star and the smallest grass leaf, both exist as equals; hence the other meaning of the word 'dhamma'. The other meaning is justice, the equality, the nonhierarchic existence. Existence is absolutely communist; it knows no classes, it is all one. Hence the other meaning of the word 'dhamma' -- justice.

And the third meaning is righteousness, virtue. Existence is very virtuous. Even if you find something which you cannot call virtue, it must be because of your misunderstanding; otherwise the existence is absolutely virtuous. Whatsoever happens here, always happens rightly. The wrong never happens. It may appear wrong to you because you have a certain idea of what right is, but when you look without any prejudice, nothing is wrong, all is right. Birth is right, death is right. Beauty is right and ugliness is right.

But our minds are small, our comprehension is limited; we cannot see the whole, we always see only a small part. We are like a person who is hiding behind his door and looking through the keyhole into the street. He always sees things...yes, somebody is moving, a car suddenly passes by. One moment it was not there, one moment it is there, and another moment it is gone forever. That's how we are looking at existence. We say

something is in the future, then it comes into the present, and then it has gone into the past.

In fact, time is a human invention. It is always now! Existence knows no past, no future -- it knows only the present.

But we are sitting behind a keyhole and looking. A person is not there, then suddenly he appears; and then as suddenly as he appears he disappears too. Now you have to create time. Before the person appeared he was in the future; he was there, but for you he was in the future. Then he appeared; now he is in the present -- he is the same! And you cannot see him anymore through your small keyhole -- he has become past. Nothing is past, nothing is future -- all is always present. But our ways of seeing are very limited.

Hence we go on asking why there is misery in the world, why there is this and that...why? If we can look at the whole, all these whys disappear. And to look at the whole, you will have to come out of your room, you will have to open the door...you will have to drop this keyhole vision.

This is what mind is: a keyhole, and a very small keyhole it is. Compared to the vast universe, what are our eyes, ears, hands? What can we grasp? Nothing of much importance. And those tiny fragments of truth, we become too much attached to them.

If you see the whole, everything is as it should be -- that is the meaning of "everything is right." Wrong exists not. Only God exists; the Devil is man's creation.

The third meaning of 'dhamma' can be God -- but Buddha never uses the word 'God' because it has become wrongly associated with the idea of a person, and the law is a presence, not a person. Hence Buddha never uses the word 'God', but whenever he wants to convey something of God he uses the word 'dhamma'. His mind is that of a very profound scientist. Because of this, many have thought him to be an atheist -- he is not. He is the greatest theist the world has ever known or will ever know -- but he never talks about God. He never uses the word, that's all, but by 'dhamma' he means exactly the same. "That which is" is the meaning of the word 'God', and that's exactly the meaning of 'dhamma'. 'Dhamma' also means discipline -- different dimensions of the word. One who wants to know the truth will have to discipline himself in many ways. Don't forget the meaning of the word 'discipline' -- it simply means the capacity to learn, the availability to learn, the receptivity to learn. Hence the word 'disciple'. 'Disciple' means one who is ready to drop his old prejudices, to put his mind aside, and look into the matter without any prejudice, without any a priori conception.

And 'dhamma' also means the ultimate truth. When mind disappears, when the ego disappears, then what remains? Something certainly remains, but it cannot be called 'something' -- hence Buddha calls it 'nothing'. But let me remind you, otherwise you will misunderstand him: whenever he uses the word 'nothing' he means no-thing. Divide the word in two; don't use it as one word -- bring a hyphen between 'no' and 'thing', then you know exactly the meaning of 'nothing'.

The ultimate law is not a thing. It is not an object that you can observe. It is your interiority, it is subjectivity.