

# **Buddhism and the Business World**



Ven. P.A. Payutto

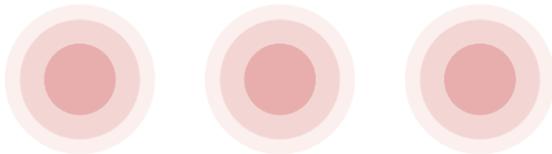


# **Buddhism and the Business World**

The Buddhist Way  
to Deal with Business

Ven. P.A. Payutto

Compiled by Soamwasee Namtip  
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to Deal with Business

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## In Appreciation

- Four years ago, in a meeting at Wat Nyanavesakavan with Mr. Laurens van den Muysenberg, who came to ask me some questions on Buddhism and Business, I spoke on some Buddhist principles that can be applied to solving current business problems.
- A year later, the talk was translated into Thai and published for free distribution. A positive response was reported. There was a request for an English version to give as a souvenir to the participants in the World Buddhist Conference on Visakha Day of B.E. 2550 (2007). However, because of time constraints, the English version was not finished.
- With his goodwill to the public, Khun Soamwasee Namtip has endeavored to make Buddhist books in the Thai language accessible to a wider international circle and this book is his first choice. As a completion of the work, Mr. Robin Moore (formerly Bhikkhu Suriyo) has rendered his cooperation in reading the whole manuscript within only a short time.
- The endeavor of both Khun Soamwasee Namtip and Mr. Robin Moore is a meritorious act in following the teaching of the Buddha to "act for the welfare and happiness of the many out of compassion for the world".

Phra Brahmaganabhorn  
(P.A. Payutto)

February 10, B.E. 2551 (2008)

## Foreword

□ On June 9, B. E. 2547 (2004) an international management consultant Laurens van den Muyzenberg paid a visit to Venerable Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P. A. Payutto) in Thailand while researching for a book in collaboration with His Holiness the Dalai Lama called *Business and Buddhism* (The book has since been renamed *The Leader's Way*). Everyone, including myself, who was fortunate to be present at the meeting, believed that the far-ranging subjects of the conversation would have benefits beyond business communities.

□ In B. E. 2548 (2005), Khun Panita Ungchandpen transcribed recordings of the conversation into a book in Thai titled *Buddhism and the Business World*. With kindness, Venerable P. A. Payutto looked through the book before publication. This book is widely distributed and in constant demand in Thailand; in addition it is being used for graduate studies in business. There have been several requests for this book in English and therefore this version is long overdue.

□ In the age of Globalization it is unavoidable that all of us are being looked upon by the business world as consumers. At the same time both human beings and the structure of business cannot escape the laws of nature. Therefore, the principles of nature that the Buddha discovered have real relevancies to the business world and to mankind in general. The challenge is how to apply the Buddhist teachings.

□ This book presents the discussion of applying Buddhist principles to the business world in a context accessible to the widest audience. Although Mr. Muyzenberg is a Westerner who has read and studied a considerable amount of Buddhism, Venerable P. A. Payutto has guided him through the system of Buddhist principles and related them to many aspects of life such that anyone can follow. Several finer points of misconceptions about Buddhism are clarified as well.

□ Venerable P. A. Payutto has kindly given guidance for this book, and looked through the manuscript after proof reading by Mr. Robin Moore. The venerable also provided a description of Dependent Origination for the appendix from his 1976 lecture note for students in at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, in the U.S.

□ The knowledge of Buddhism should not be detached from human life and activities. This book is neither a business cookbook nor a comprehensive academic text. May this book be a bridge of knowledge: linking Buddhism to secular disciplines, crossing national borders, and connecting schools of thought separated by history. And may those who seek the betterment of life traverse this bridge freely to more knowledge, and beyond, towards the path of wisdom.

**Soamwasee Namtip**  
**January, B.E. 2551 (2008)**

*The wealthy and the impoverished  
have passed through the good and the bad.*

*The crude and the wise  
also have such experience.*

*The crude, by ignorance, is perturbed.*

*The wise is unperturbed.*

*Hence, wisdom is worthy beyond wealth,  
for wisdom leads to the final goal,  
a really good life.*

*[M II.73]*

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# Buddhism and the Business World

## The Buddhist Way to Deal with Business

### Crossing Borders

This visit is part of research for a book in collaboration with the Dalai Lama called *Business and Buddhism: Universal Responsibility*. The objective of the book is to influence the behavior of leaders of large businesses to behave in a better way. Originally, the Dalai Lama was hesitant to get involved because he has no personal experience in business, but at the same time, like you, he has recognized that business is an important part of society and the way businessmen and women behave affects the welfare of society. I am researching Buddhist solutions to moral dilemmas pertaining to business. Later I will discuss these with the Dalai Lama.

I also have little knowledge of business, but we may speak on general principles and their application to business.

I have read the books that you have written: *Buddhist Economics: A Middle Way for the Marketplace*, which shows why ethics are integral to economics, and *A Constitution for Living*, which is relevant not only for monks but also for householders and people in everyday life. They have been an enormous help for this project.

We can start from this foundation and apply Buddhist principles and practices to business.

You have thought greatly about the economy in the book *Buddhist Economics* and I have taken to heart your analysis of the problem that people see no ethics in economics. I also look at political science, sociology and psychology. However, from the religious point of view I have studied Buddhism and its relevancy. Your book has been one of the key inputs into that analysis. My first question is what are your perceptions of business?

As I mentioned earlier, I do not know much about business, but we can discuss it when we speak on economics.



## The Goal of Economics

□ The knowledge of economics seems to have separated itself from other fields of human activities and become reductionistic. The current trend, however, has turned towards a holistic view, emphasizing that any human activity should be conducive to the well-being of mankind. Essentially, economics first existed for this goal but throughout its development economics was alienated from the original objective.

□ Economics speaks often of how to satisfy the desires of people. We should go beyond satisfaction to examine the relationship between desire and the well-being of human beings, both individual and social. Economics should realize this true objective. Although the emphasis may be on the satisfaction of desire, in the long run economics must act for the benefit of people and society. Any goal that is not conducive to such peaceful benefits should not be the objective of economics.

□ There are now developments in business concerning stakeholders and corporate responsibility. The stakeholders' issue considers the influences of business on operators, employees, suppliers, customers, communities, governments and so on; all of them are interconnecting spheres and influence each other. The second issue is corporate responsibility, which looks at the impacts of businesses on three bottom lines: Profits, social, and environmental impact. Businesses must consider these three dimensions. However, some economists object to these issues due to difficulties in measuring non-monetary variables. The Dalai Lama believes that if people move in the right direction, though the efforts are far from perfect, they should be encouraged.

## Incongruity of Objectives

□ I have heard of some of these ideas, but not in great detail. Although they are an improvement, their aims are still confined to a materialistic outlook. While some think of other human beings or the environment, many still think in a materialistic way. This materialism causes conflict between the objectives of these new ideas and the old objective of highest monetary profit. The conflict is internal, it is in our mind, and as long as the conflict exists, the peaceful and harmonious goal cannot be realized.

□ A company executive once said to me that a company must look at all objectives simultaneously; if one looks only at profits and ignores other issues, one will end up in trouble while making profits. For example when an oil company wanted to sink an oil rig into the sea, it encountered resistance from environmentalists who objected to using the sea as a garbage can. The situation made the company realize how vulnerable they are when both their bottom line and reputation are at stake.

□ This is why we have to resolve the conflict, and it must be resolved within the mind. The goals, both personal and social, should be harmonious in order to solve the problem. First we should define the term well-being of mankind.

## Well-being of Mankind

□ Goals of life can be classified into several levels. In Buddhism life is a matter of development towards higher and more sublime objectives. These objectives are associated with happiness. The happier people are the more harmonious they will be with the environment. If the external and internal goals are in conflict people will suffer from stress. There is a way to create harmony and make people, especially in the business world, learn to be happy. This learning experience, however, differs from the way people have normally learned.

## Levels of Happiness

□ In Buddhism there are many ways to make people happy, but true happiness is always connected to freedom. Without freedom, genuine happiness cannot be realized. Happiness itself is divided into levels: Dependent happiness and independent happiness.

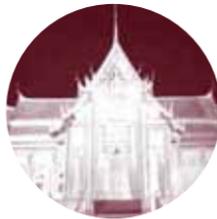
□ Dependent happiness requires external stimuli or materials that condition our happiness. In a consumer society, people think of happiness mainly as the satisfaction of desire of our senses by way of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. Materials are essential for this kind of happiness, and the wish to be happier requires ever more external materials. Such demand brings us into conflict with other people, and these conflicts will range from inside our own mind to society and the environment. Dependent happiness therefore cannot solve problems for mankind.

□ The solution is to make people happy and live in peaceful harmony with themselves and the environment, and it is achievable through independent happiness. Dependent happiness seeks out sensual pleasures from external objects and always manifests problems internally as well as externally. The desire for sensual pleasures cannot be really fulfilled and people always crave more, thus people become more difficult to be happy. The process is contrary to creating peace and happiness.



## The Harder to be Happy, the Easier to be Suffering

- Humans should not merely live and grow old to find ourselves more difficult to be happy and easier to suffer, but it is such in a consumer society. We should strive to develop ourselves to become easily happy and less prone to suffering. Human development is crucial, particularly inner development. Society has unconsciously taught people to be ever proficient in seeking external materials for self-satisfaction; in doing so we are losing an ability to be happy.
- Buddhism teaches us to develop both skills at the same time. On the one hand we develop our skills in acquiring external materials to meet the necessities of life, while on the other hand we develop our skill to be happy. As people lose the ability to be happy, they compensate their unfulfilled desires with endless quantity and degrees of external stimuli and materials. In order to solve these problems we have to understand their root causes.



## Levels in Human Development

□ Buddhism views human beings as having vast potential for development, markedly different from animals that have limited potential. Human development is at the heart of solutions to every problem. Every human being is considered to be at different stages of development. Buddhism accepts the world of diversity in terms of human developmental stages. With varying potentials, it is not possible to make every human live the same way on the same level. Communism attempted to force people to live in uniformity and found this goal impossible, while capitalism sees every human equally as a consumer. Buddhism, however, sees people at different steps of development and urges us to create an economic system that suits such diversity.

□ In terms of happiness, the majority of people are at the level that relies on dependent happiness and their need for sensual pleasures determines their behavior. People should never rest at that stage, but they should rather learn to acquire independent happiness. Such happiness does not require external objects, and Buddhist practices provide means to attain this independent happiness.



## Five Precepts: a Foundation for Society

□ Buddhism's Five Precepts are a foundation for peace in society to some extent. However, they are neither absolute criteria nor an assurance for the happiness of humanity. The Five Precepts emphasize human relationship and help people live together peacefully without harming each other or themselves. The Five Precepts are:

- Refraining from killing or harming one another.
- Refraining from stealing or violating property rights.
- Refraining from sexual misconduct.
- Refraining from speaking falsely or deceiving.
- Refraining from drinking alcohol or taking addictive substances.

□ When people live in peaceful harmony, the conditions become favorable to the development of every individual in that society.

## Eight Precepts: towards Real Freedom

□ The Eight Precepts focuses on independent happiness, although they are an extension of the Five Precepts. They help people gradually learn to rely less on dependent happiness and begin to acquire independent happiness. The additional three precepts beyond the Five Precepts do not concern living with other people but rather aid personal development. One difference between the two teachings is the injunction to refrain from sexual intercourse in the Eight Precepts, while the third precept of the Five Precepts is to refrain from sexual misconduct.

□ The additional three precepts are to refrain from eating past noon, to refrain from entertainment and personal adornment, and to refrain from sleeping on an extravagant bed. The Eight Precepts let us train ourselves to refrain from excess or dependency on external materials or stimuli. As we are free from relying on external sense pleasures, we can devote time to develop our mind, our wisdom, to help other people and engage in beneficial activities for society. Those who practice the Eight Precepts, even for a few days a month like the Buddhist teaching encourages, have a chance to realize a freedom from external dependencies and gain new insight.

□ The new insight after practicing the Eight Precepts alters people's attitude and makes them happy easier. Their old attitude might be: "I must have this, I must have that; if I do not have these things I will never be happy." After gaining an insight into independent happiness, their new outlook might be: "It's fine if I do not have that, but I can still live well and be happy".

## Freedom from Desire

□ From the example of practicing the Eight Precepts, we can see people in three stages of development:

□ A majority of people who say that they cannot live without external objects.

□ A smaller group of people who are comfortable with or without some external objects.

□ People who feel free not to accumulate external objects, and realize that too much possession can cause problems and make them less happy. Material excess can cause suffering, and they are better off without them. These people are truly free from external objects to feed their desire and have gained independent happiness. This kind of happiness should be cultivated in the mind of everyone.

□ Nonetheless, freedom from material objects and external dependencies does not mean we are free from desire. Our mind still nurtures selfish desire such as for status or personal achievement. Only when we have developed wisdom, an ability to see nature as it is, are we at ease with the world and our minds genuinely free.

□ The application to economics of the Buddhist principle of diversity in human development enables us to handle people's various goals harmoniously. Lacking this knowledge, on the other hand, forces us to live in conflict forever. Happiness, therefore, is related to wisdom.

□ The reason I first came to Thailand was to meet Thai business people and find out what Buddhism meant for them. I have met some responsible and active Buddhist businessmen and women who told me that Buddhism is important in the way they manage their business. They also recommended that I learn Buddhism by practicing meditation. I have found some happiness from meditation, although it was a slow process. I don't think we can wait for all business people to become enlightened and we have to find some way to make progress. I would like to know how to convince business people of this teaching?

□ It is not only to convince business people but also to educate people in general in the way of developing themselves. But first let us look at an example in Thailand.

## Producer and Consumer Nations

□ In the world of competition, countries are divided into developed and developing countries, but they can be categorized in another way. There are producer and consumer countries, while the producers sell and the consumers buy. We tend to say that in Thailand people do not have a producer's habit. There are many problems in a consumer society because business breeds and feeds on consumerism. Buyers are merely slaves to such business, as the businesses always lead and dictate behavior of the consumers through advertisements and newer products. The domination of the business brings about social values which are unfavorable to individual and social development. With these undesirable social values clouding people's judgment, people are unable to recognize real well-being.

## Developing Happiness Skills

□ Many would say education is the cure, but modern education systems have unconsciously taught people only skills to acquire external materials to satisfy desire. People should see education as a real development of human beings, including the development of an ability to be happy. Therefore education itself is in need of changes.

□ I like the idea of educating people to become happy. In your book: *Freedom, Individual and Social*, you discussed four levels of freedom: Physical freedom, social freedom, emotional freedom and intellectual freedom. I have used this framework for thinking. One of the questions is: what is the limit of freedom? In consumerism, consumers are taught

that they can buy anything, in any quantity and from anywhere. Without limits it would be disastrous. In communism it is the other extreme. Is it acceptable to place limits on consumerism?

## Balancing Freedoms

□ There should be some limits, but there must also be a balance. The issue is related to the four levels of freedom. Physical freedom, social freedom, emotional freedom and intellectual freedom must be in balance because they are interrelated. But we should not confine ourselves to the basic levels of physical and social freedom. We should teach people to develop themselves to reach for the higher levels of emotional in effect create a balance in physical and social freedom.

□ For instance, people believe that they should have the social freedom to do whatever they want. But when they have developed emotional and intellectual freedom, they will transcend the destructive behavior of unconstrained social freedom because they have developed wisdom. Their knowledge of other people as well as of their own mind will keep them clear from the negative sides of social freedom. It is a way of balancing different aspects of freedom. Moreover, these aspects are interdependent. In relation to the earlier discussion on Buddhist levels of human development and precepts, basic physical and social freedom is conducive to realizing emotional and intellectual freedom. We can describe the system as an automatic process

□ I think that an interest in spiritual matters increases with one's standard of living. Consumerism is a problem in wealthy countries as well as poor countries. If we know how to be happy it will not be a problem. How much can the business community

and governments contribute to solving the problems? For example, with a crisis of high petroleum prices, governments may put a tax on cars with high fuel consumption while businesses would generally oppose the tax. So establishing the right rules by governments will have an effect on the behavior of companies.



## Intellectual Freedom for Consumers

□ Conflicts of interests always exist, and in a competitive world we should expand the meaning of the word competition. We think of competition only in economic and business terms. Normally, the definition covers competition among business people and organizations, but the expanded meaning should cover consumers and the wider population. The term must also cover intellectual competition. In reality intellectual competition is at the core of the business and economic world. Furthermore, it should reach to cover spiritual competition. With the view of levels of development in which people have emotional and intellectual freedom, consumers are ready to compete with businesses.

□ Competing in what way?

□ In intellectual and spiritual ways, meaning they have some power to influence the business community.

□ Of course, consumers have enormous power and choosing not to buy is an ultimate power.



## Power of the Consumers

□ This is where freedom plays a role, and human development is at the heart of a solution to problems. There is no reason to confine meaning of competition among business circles. Consumers must realize that they can compete with businesses, as people with politicians.

□ Businesses can do more to provide people with an informed choice. Consumers have been manipulated through advertisements; businesses can inform consumers of the consequences of what they choose.

□ With spiritual freedom, consumers have the freedom to choose to buy, and that determines what kind of products will be produced.

□ Businesses always try to sell more, but they should be more responsible with what they sell. Many "fast food" companies are now offering healthier menus.

## From Desire to Need

□ Businesses have used advertisement to turn many unnecessary things into necessities. They have transformed human desires into human needs; this is why we have to develop people. Then they may even lessen their desires. It is very difficult to teach everyone, but a small group of people which has such wisdom can make a difference. And do not forget to educate business people as well how to be happy.

## A Real Business Success

□ People in business should also know what real success is. Success in business or economics is not merely satisfying the desires of people but to bring about well-being of mankind. The issue is a challenge to the business community. Highest gain in profits does not equate to a success; true success is the increase of well-being of humanity.

□ To begin with business people should learn to separate right from wrong, and what is real from what is artificial. They should learn the real benefit of life, both for themselves and for the consumers, which includes happiness. They should not strive solely for material things and sensual pleasures, but for independent happiness. Then they can reexamine how they conduct their business

□ Some of the largest businesses in the world produce annual reports stating their contribution to society along the line of corporate social and environmental responsibilities. But it sounds more like public relations.

□ It is because they think in a narrow sense. Had they learned the nature of and potential for human development, they would have changed their view and mission.

□ I do believe that Buddhist ideas are very helpful, but people in the West were surprised when I said that Buddhism can contribute to business practices and ethics. I would like to turn back to consumerism. Throughout history, conspicuous consumption is not new. The Buddha also recognized that life is more than mere subsistence.

## Endless Consumerism

□ Consumerism comes from human nature, and we have to recognize this basic nature. The Buddha stated that humans' desire is unlimited, it cannot be really satisfied. The desire always grows in degree and quantity. This is why we have to educate people to create a quality to counterbalance the desire. However, most educations do not instill this quality in people.

□ People think that an ability to be happy is integral to their life but they often take happiness for granted. At the same time they always seek for ever more happiness, and that by itself indicates that they are not truly happy. People must learn to distinguish between the search for happiness and being happy. The Buddha stated that he is happy and never has to seek happiness elsewhere. We have to awaken people to this truth.

□ Consumerism is a symptom of people seeking dependent happiness. We all know that desire is boundless, that people demand ever more. Social values in a consumeristic world are led by desire. Businesses exploit the social values of consumerism. Therefore education is necessary to recognize the danger.

□ Do you think such education is possible without substantial meditation since the consumeristic attitude is already engrained in people?



## Meditation in Form vs. Meditation in Substance

□ When we think of meditation we have to distinguish between meditation in form and meditation in substance. Meditation should be in the mind and is not dependent on external circumstances. Many people still associate meditation with going to a monastery or a retreat. Such intensive courses are beneficial, but it's possible to meditate in every moment of life. We can meditate while working or doing any activity. Concentrating on the work one is doing or on subjects one is learning is also considered meditation.

□ Some people must go to meditation retreats because they need a favorable environment. Beginners will find it difficult to achieve meditation in everyday life. To fully succeed in meditation, however, it must be accomplished anywhere, at any moment. No matter how much practice people have in meditation sessions, if they cannot meditate in daily life, the purpose of meditation has not been fulfilled.

□ The Buddha and those who have attained enlightenment are always in the state of perfect meditation; such examples reveal the ultimate success of meditation. The Buddha stated that the enlightened ones can peacefully reside on top of a mountain or by the sea, in the forest or amidst the crowd. It should not be compulsory to attend meditation courses, but an opportunity to learn to meditate whether in a group or as an individual can be beneficial to anyone.

□ I am concerned that many people have negative attitudes engrained in them, and it may take shock treatment, or writings like yours or the Dalai Lama's, or even a major catastrophe to bring about a major change in them.

## Impacts of Social Values

□ How people in the world behave depends largely on degrees of development of human beings. Highly developed human beings are less likely to be a slave of negative social values because they can take refuge in themselves. The Buddha emphasized that the way of human development is to become self-reliant in one's own developed capabilities. Most people nowadays have no such refuge and thus tend to rely on other people or external materials

□ In your books you have talked about competition and cooperation. If we have a reasonable freedom of choices to buy as well-informed customers, competition is still unavoidable. Consumers still buy from any suppliers they prefer, so I see no system of society without competition.

## Proper Competition

□ Competition is a part of reality, but as mentioned earlier, we cannot expect every human to be the same. To counter negative aspects of competition we should encourage cooperation. The business world may compete amongst itself, but consumers should cooperate with each other in order to compete intellectually and spiritually with business to bring about changes in the right direction.

□ I have asked business operators of their view on competition. They say that they observe markets closely to find out how to satisfy customers, but the ideas or products must correspond to customers' values. It is a common answer and I see nothing wrong with that view.

## Heedful Path

□ Competition on the one hand acts to better satisfy the desire of customers, on the other hand it is an instigation to be earnest. The Buddhist term for this quality is *appamāda*, meaning to be heedful and not to be negligent. Competition in worldly activities makes people diligent. Most people are inactive unless they are forced to act, and competition is the catalyst. The obvious example is in Western society where competition brings out people's diligence; people endlessly attempt their best to get ahead of one another.

□ Although worldly people cannot manage without competition, they should not rely on competition alone. Competition is beneficial but it also causes many problems in the world. Human development therefore results from creating people with diligent qualities. Earnest people never need external stress as a motivation, but their actions, in Buddhist terms, will be guided by *sati*, and *paññā*.

□ *Sati* means mindfulness: an awareness of events and one's environment.

□ *Paññā* means wisdom: an insight into the nature of all things.

□ People with this mindful knowledge have the ability to determine the correct path of action while avoiding wrongful conduct that leads to damage. This is the quality we should strive for in human development.

□ The well-being and quality of life from a Buddhist perspective, as you have written, is highest for people without mental defilement and who are free from attachment. Their number will always be small, so what is the well-being attainable for people who have not reached that stage?

## Considerations for Economic Activities

At the basic level, well-being is essential for human development. Economic activity should be considerate of this fact. There are three considerations we should heed:

Economic activities and products should not be detrimental to oneself, society and the environment.

Economic activities should improve wholesome and skillful conditions for human and society.

Economic activities should be favorable to human development. This last consideration is very crucial since human should strive for higher and more sublime objectives in life.

Every human activity and every system should also observe similar rules in accordance with the principle of human development.

Do you mean particularly the development in terms of emotional and intellectual freedom as well?



## Freedom through Wisdom

□ Indeed, when people have the basic levels of physical and social development, the condition will be favorable for emotional and intellectual development. People can attain independent happiness or even achieve happiness independent of desire itself. This stage is the real success of human beings: the ultimate goal of spiritual freedom. In other words, we can say "freedom through wisdom" or "freedom through insight". We should also regard the goal as a social value because this principle can bring about changes in society. Nowadays the world is in need of positive social values to counterbalance extreme views.

□ Should all business decisions have criteria to see if they are making a contribution to society?

□ Business people should realize and accept positive social values in their mind, not merely saying beautiful words for face value. They should be really convinced and willing to contribute to society.

## A Perspective on Desire

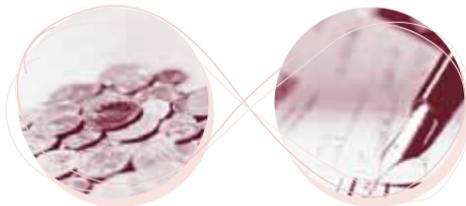
□ Another way to happiness is by way of developing desire, though it is still a step below the happiness independent of desire. We could introduce a new aspect of desire to business people by teaching them to accept well-being of mankind as an objective of their desire. This is a re-directing of values and goals. Attaining this new goal will result in a fulfillment of business people's desire; they will be happy and call their work a success.

□ If business people have no such desire, there will be conflicts because their desire for highest profit continues to create internal stress. Any happiness they have is not genuine. Only when business people learn to desire the well-being of mankind and society and take pleasure in accomplishing this goal, will there be harmony as no conflict will exist in the mind of business people.

□ A similar problem is found in politics where rulers and governments still desire wealth and power but overlook the well-being of their people. Rulers who desire wealth and power seek for happiness externally. A government which associates the happiness and well-being of the people as its own happiness will strive for the benefit of the people. A noble ruler is the one who finds happiness by realizing the well-being of the people.

□ We should notice that although this happiness still depends on desire, it does not rely on external forms of pleasure. This type of happiness transcends sensual pleasure. In the long run we should not be content with this new perspective of desire, but we should develop ourselves further to transcend desire towards wisdom, the ultimate goal in Buddhism.

□ Your description sounds like a concept of compassion. Is it the same or not?



## Wholesome Desire

□ Compassion is an integral part of this topic. It is an attitude of mind though it will transform itself according to the situation. Buddhism distinguishes two kinds of desire:

□ *Taṇhā* or unskillful desire is the desire for sensual pleasures: the desire for external objects or stimuli for the satisfaction of the senses. Unskillful desire is not conducive to wisdom.

□ *Chanda* or skillful desire is the desire for goodness and it is wholesome in itself. Skillful desire is not self-centered. For example if we see a tree we desire its well-being and wish for its growth and blossoming. Skillful desire will also make us wish for health and well-being of mankind.

□ Skillful desire changes with different conditions. For a person in a normal situation our skillful desire for the person's well-being is *mettā*, or loving kindness. If that person is in trouble or suffering, our desire changes to helping and aiding as *karuṇā*, or compassion. On the other hand when a person is successful, our desire will transform to *muditā*, meaning sympathetic joy or altruistic joy. They are part of the Sublime States of Mind.

□ I am interested in the topic of Dependent Origination; I have read the books of the Dalai Lama, Buddhadasa, and your book. I find this Dhamma interesting and I would like to know how to distinguish causes from conditions. I also want to present the Dependent Origination in a simplified form based on the 12 steps. I plan to present it to business people to learn.

I think it is difficult to simplify.

I am also interested in the different interpretations found in Buddhadasa's and your books on one and three life cycles. At the same time your texts and references of the Buddha's teaching in your books *Buddhist Economics* and *A Constitution for Living* are not familiar to the Tibetan Buddhists I have met. Are they likely to be found in Tibetan Buddhism and how to find them?

Are you referring to the Tibetan Buddhist sources?

Yes, because in your books, you have indicated all the scriptural references, but it is surprising that the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan monks are not familiar with these teachings. I thought the basic knowledge of the Buddha's teaching should be the same.

## Scriptures in Buddhism

As far as sources are concerned, the scripture of Theravada Buddhism is based on the Tipitaka or Pali Canon. The Buddhist teachings of Mahayana and Vajrayana come from the Chinese or Tibetan Tipitaka. Furthermore, they are divided into sections called *āgama*, some of which are very similar to the Pali scriptures. Additional parts of Chinese and Tibetan scriptures were written by teachers or *ācārya* of later generations. This is the reason Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism are called *Ācāryavāda*: teaching of the teachers. The latter parts have become the principal scriptures in China and Tibet; they have no equivalent in the original Pali scriptures.

□ At the same time many parts of the Pali Tipitaka cannot be found in the Chinese or Tibetan Tipitaka, mainly because of the way the scriptures were transferred from the Indian subcontinent to China and Tibet nearly two thousand years ago. The manuscripts were a secondary generation of scriptures written in Sanskrit language. After the Sanskrit translation into Chinese and Tibetan had been completed, the scriptures were lost or sealed inside pagodas and they were eventually lost forever. The process was likely to cause mistakes in translation or a deviation from meanings in the original scriptures. Without the manuscripts that first came from India, later generations had no means of verifying the texts.

□ I have learned that Thailand has a different history from Tibet. Thailand is full of natural wealth and resources while Tibet is not. In Tibetan Buddhism it is very difficult to find Buddha's teachings concerning householders or wealth. Could you give an explanation?



## Buddhist Teachings for Householders

□ Throughout history, Buddhism in Tibet has been preserved only inside monasteries by monks and it is normal that they paid more attention to the texts concerning monks. In Theravada Buddhist countries, on the other hand, there is a tradition that monks must preserve the original Pali texts in its entirety. Sometimes there is a tendency to emphasize the teachings for monks such as in the Visuddhimagga. The book was written by Buddhaghosa almost sixteen hundred years ago, and stresses the path of purity for monks and had very few teachings for householders. However, if we examine the original Pali Tipitaka carefully we can see a large amount of teachings for householders to follow such as the views on acquisition, safe guarding and spending of wealth.

□ I find the concept of causes and conditions from Dependent Origination very useful. A simplified example is a mango, where the seed is a cause and water is a condition for the resultant fruit. In the West we can understand causes and effects, but the Buddhist concepts are slightly different. I have problems distinguishing or trying to apply these concepts in many cases. Could you clarify them?



## Causes and Conditions in Buddhism

□ We have this problem in part because of the differences in language. In the original text *hetu* is translated to English as "cause" and *paccaya* as "condition". However, *hetu*, cause, is itself a condition. Cause is a subset of conditions in Buddhism. The Tipitaka classifies 24 conditions, *hetu* or "cause" being just one of the categories. Most people consider only a direct condition and "cause" as the principal condition. As in the example of a mango seed, without soil, water, sunlight, oxygen, and proper temperature, a mango tree cannot grow.

□ One of the applications of this concept is that if you want to prevent something from happening we can either remove the causes or prevent the conditions.

□ The knowledge of causes and conditions makes us more careful. Heedfulness and diligence are important Buddhist principles. Many people hold to the doctrine that a single cause brings about a single effect, which in Buddhism is considered a wrong view.

## Multiple Conditions Bring Multiple Effects

□ Buddhism points out that an effect can be the result of various conditions, where all the conditions are required to lead to this effect. A single condition itself can yield multiple effects. Modern science still has shortcomings and is unable to have a complete knowledge of nature. Scientific experiments cannot account for every effect from a single condition. At the same time, an effect observed by scientists comes from multiple conditions, though a vast amount of them are unknown or unable to be observed by modern science. Experiments are conducted with too many restrictive assumptions or controlled conditions so that the effects may never be like natural conditions.

□ I believe that is the major difference in exact science and social science. The biggest mistake economists make is treating economics as exact science. There are so many conditions causing many effects, and many economic predictions turn out incorrect. My concern is that it is difficult to predict what will happen in the future because there are so many causes and conditions to consider. The challenge is how to make decisions in business, economic, or social situations. We may act with the best intention but it cannot guarantee the best result. I don't think even in Buddhism the people without defilements can predict the outcome with certainty.

## Differentiating Conditions

□ That is a special ability; not every person with a clear mind or without defilements has such ability. Nonetheless, Buddhist principles are important to the development of our lives. Take the Buddhist concept of *kamma* for example; were we to believe in only a single cause bringing about a single effect, we would have the doubt: "Why after a good action do we end up reaping a bad effect?" It is because most people lack an analytical skill to understand *pariyāya*: the differentiation of conditions.

□ Applying the perspective of single cause and single effect to the Buddhist concept of *kamma* is a wrong view because the single cause in question may not be the determining factor for the effect concerned. We cannot improve our lives with that attitude, but those who truly comprehend causes and conditions can develop their conducts.

□ People who can differentiate what conditions bring out beneficial effects, and what conditions will give undesirable effects, can act accordingly to condition the favorable result. This is the correct view of the Buddhist teaching of *kamma*. The better people understand, the better their conducts will be, and this teaching also makes us live more carefully and diligently.

□ I think it has to do with the basic capability of a person to see many conditions. The cleverness is related to the capability of one's brain; many people are not capable of seeing any conditions.

## Community of Good Friends

□ It has to do with training as well; we should always be learning. The Buddha emphasized the importance of *kalyāṇamitta*, or good friends. At the beginning of any learning process we may not be able to follow the teaching easily, but we can consult good friends for guidance.

□ You emphasize listening to advice in your book *A Constitution for Living*. I found two different teachings of the Buddha: One is to listen very carefully and the other is not to believe just because a teacher says so.

□ The Buddha stated in one passage from the Tipitaka that to have good friends is not only more than half of the holy life, it is the whole of the holy life. The reason the *Saṅgha*, the community of monks, exists is to provide good friends and favorable conditions for the development of life.

□ Why are the words friend and adviser found interchangeably in the texts?

## Faith and Wisdom

□ It is a difference in translation. The Pali texts use the word *mitta*, "friend", but the meaning can encompass parents, teachers, advisers or any persons who give guidance. This favorable social environment is an external condition aiding the development of human beings. The process requires internal as well as external factors. People cannot plant wisdom in our minds; wisdom is an internal attainment. Therefore, there is no obligation to believe others. Blind faith is depicted in the teachings as an extreme view. In Buddhism, faith and wisdom are not in competition with each other. Faith is a useful step towards wisdom; the more wisdom attained, the less faith become necessary.

□ The Dependent Origination teaching is very appealing to sophisticated business people in several ways. People whose minds are full of defilements, whether anger, jealousy or worrying about competitors, are likely to make wrong decisions. If we can teach business people to clearly see their train of thought through the process of Dependent Origination, they can make better decisions. The teaching has 12 steps of the process, but I would like to present it in a simplified form. I combine several steps together and propose a four-step model: Contact, reaction, planning and action.



## Dependent Origination Made Simple

□ Dependent Origination is a key teaching in Buddhism showing how suffering arises; by understanding this principle we can learn to halt the cycle of suffering. The Buddha taught simpler versions on several occasions.

□ As we come into contact with the environment through our senses, whether by sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch, we naturally receive sensations as pleasant or painful. If we develop like or dislike to sensations, we are subjected to mental conditionality. This conditioning of our mind is not a pure process, and it is the way towards suffering. On the other hand, if we are not subjected to this impurity when things come into contact with us, the cycle will not continue.

□ By fully understanding the nature of the world as well as of our own mind, we can move on to the right path: the path of wisdom. This path is an escape from the cycles of suffering. When we have obtained wisdom, our actions will spring from a pure process. These actions will likely be wise, harmonious and beneficial to mankind. We should notice that the principle of Dependent Origination always has ethical implications for living one's life, and in a wider sense has relevancy to mankind and the world.

□ Tibetan Buddhism places much emphasis on motivation. It is essential that intentions and actions are positive. Negative motivation leads to negative results. Is it the same view in Theravada Buddhism?

## Skillful and Unskillful Actions

Theravada Buddhism looks at the point of contact we have with our environment, where there are sensations of pleasure or pain. This stage is considered a passive process. The active process begins when our mind attaches like or dislike to the sensations. This action can then be classified as skillful/wholesome or unskillful/unwholesome.

It is a very helpful distinction between passive and active processes.

If one's mind reaches the stage of like or dislike, the process of suffering has begun. If we are not subjected to like and dislike, the path of knowledge can be pursued.

Do you mean "pleasure and pain" and "like and dislike" are not the same?

For example, when we touch something we will feel the heat or cold, and the hardness and softness. If it is too hot, we will naturally feel pain. This stage is neither positive or negative; it is neither wholesome nor unwholesome. When you have a reaction of like or dislike, it is a mental action. The sensations of pleasure and pain are passive, but the reactions of like and dislike are active. From the first mental action, the process continues under influences of like or dislike

I found different interpretations of Dependent Origination; some show its effects only in one life while others show them in three lives. Both Buddhadasa and your books have both interpretations. Buddhadasa seemed to agree more with the single life principle and considered it as the original version.

## Simultaneous Dependent Origination

□ Those who agree with the three lives process are referring to the Visudhimagga text by Buddhaghosa, which is not the direct explanation of the Pali Canon. The Sammohavinodani text has a direct explanation of Dependent Origination from the Pali Canon. This book has the first part describing the three lives process, and the second part describes down to a moment of consciousness.

□ Dependent Origination is valid in a single moment. In an instant the cycle of suffering can be completed, but life is a continuity of these cycles. Therefore, Dependent Origination encompasses the long run as well. The many lives process is a sum of single life processes, which eventually is a sum of moment to moment cycles. All explanations, whether the moment to moment teaching or the many lives teachings, therefore have their validity.

## Teaching for Every Level of Intellect

□ The Buddha taught Dependent Origination to all kinds of people. For highly intelligent people, who could comprehend subtle ideas, the teaching would be of the moment to moment process. The teaching outlining a longer period of time might be preferable for ordinary people. This teaching would give an example of a cause in the past and a result in the future while mentioning only the significant intermediate events. The mental process or any subtle details would be omitted. These teaching methods also conform to the view of levels of human development.

□ You have covered much more than I had hoped for, and I thank you very much for your time and generosity. It has been very helpful for my research

- I am pleased that the knowledge will be useful to you. Actually you are the one who has spent a lot of time in traveling to Thailand; it is only a small amount of time on my part.
- I really want to do a good job. I appreciate any help I can get, and now I have a better understanding of the subject.
- You have goodwill in trying to explain the Dhamma, which will be beneficial to people. I am glad to have helped you.



## References

□ The books concerning discussed topics, written by Venerable P.A. Payutto:

1. *A Constitution for Living*
2. *Buddhist Economics*
3. *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*
4. *Freedom, Individual & Social*
5. *Good, Evil and Beyond: Kamma in the Buddha's Teaching*
6. *Dictionary of Buddhism*
7. *Toward Sustainable Science: A Buddhist Look at Trends in Scientific Development*
8. *The Vision of Dhamma*

## Appendix I

### Dependent Origination; *Paṭicca-samuppāda*:

1. *Avijjā*: ignorance; un-knowing; lack of knowledge
2. *Saṅkhāra*: mental formation; volitional activities
3. *Vīññāna*: consciousness
4. *Nāma-rūpa*: mind and matter
5. *Saḷāyatana*: six sense-bases
6. *Phassa*: contact
7. *Vedanā*: feeling
8. *Taṇhā*: craving
9. *Upādāna*: clinging; attachment
10. *Bhava*: becoming
11. *Jāti*: birth
12. *Jarā-maraṇa*: decay and death

□ The cycle of suffering may begin at other steps, not necessarily from the beginning of the list.

[Vin.I.1; S.II.1; Vbh.135; Vism.517; Comp.188]

### Happiness; *Sukha*:

*Sāmisa-sukha*: dependent happiness

*Nirāmisa-sukha*: independent happiness;  
spiritual happiness

[A.I.80]

### The Five Precepts; rules of morality; *Pañca-sīla*:

Abstention from taking life

Abstention from taking what is not given

Abstention from sexual misconduct

Abstention from false speech

Abstention from intoxicants causing heedlessness

[D.III.235; A.III.203, 275; Vbh.285]

### The Eight Precepts; training rules; *Aṭṭha-sīla*:

Abstention from taking life

Abstention from taking what is not given

Abstention from unchaste conduct

Abstention from false speech

Abstention from intoxicants causing heedlessness

Abstention from untimely eating

Abstention from unseemly entertainments and bodily adornments

Abstention from the use of a high and luxurious bed

[A.IV.248]

### Four Sublime States of Mind; *Brahmavihāra*:

*Mettā*: loving kindness, friendliness, goodwill

*Karuṇā*: compassion

*Muditā*: sympathetic joy, altruistic joy

*Upekkhā*: equanimity, neutrality, poise

□ The first three qualities are emotional-based; the last quality is wisdom-based.

[AIII.226; Dhs.262; Vism.320]

## Appendix II

### Dependent Origination; *Paṭicca-samuppāda*

□ A simplified version of the Momentary Twelve-Conditioned Vicious-Cycle Process:

□ 1. Ignorance (*avijjā*): Lack of knowledge or understanding; non-application of wisdom or intelligence in a particular case at a particular moment.

□ 2. Formations (*saṅkhāra*): Being subject to the habitual self-oriented way of thinking, one develops good or evil thoughts and emotions out of one's accumulated tendencies, dispositions, attitudes, aptitudes, beliefs, interests and prejudices.

□ 3. Consciousness (*viññāna*): To perceive something is to be conscious of some of its aspects so as to get some specific meanings that are relevant, whether positively or negatively, to the current train of thought and emotions.

□ 4. Psycho-physical qualities (*nāma-rūpa*): The states of mind and body that accord with the state of consciousness.

□ 5. Six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana*): The senses involved in the situation become alert and/or function in accord with other mental and physical conditions to supply the process with new relevant data.

□ 6. Contact or impression (*phassa*): Mental contact with (the experiencing of) concepts, ideas or images derived from or formed around the obtained data such as a beautiful hand, an ugly face, a harsh manner, a vulgar word, and a sweet voice.

□ 7. Feeling (*vedanā*): The feeling of pleasure, displeasure or indifference that arises on experiencing agreeable or disagreeable objects.

□ 8. Craving (*taṇhā*): Being for one kind of feeling and against another, craving ensues manifesting itself under three aspects:

□ a. Craving for sensual pleasures: the desire to enjoy the pleasures of the senses.

□ b. Craving for existence: the desire for a state of existence in which the self can enjoy itself, be satisfied, be asserted or be preserved.

□ c. Craving for non-existence: the desire to escape from things, states, conditions or situations which are disagreeable; or the desire for the passing away or annihilation of unpleasant states or things in the presence of oneself.

□ 9. Clinging or attachment (*upādāna*): Becoming pre-occupied with the object of craving, fixing it as the target to which to direct one's activities, either positively, to associate oneself with it, or negatively, to separate oneself from it, one becomes attached or clings to the objects of pleasure, the views and theories, the means to get and avoid, and the concepts of the self, that are to be in favor of oneself. (These attachments

will influence, set the direction of, impose limitations on, or even distort one's further interpretations, decisions and activities in general).

□ 10. Becoming (*bhava*): A specific state of being or existence that comes to be as the totality of one's behavioral process going on under the influence or direction of one's attachments.

□ 11. Birth (*jāti*): The springing up or appearance of the individual into that state of existence; the assumed self enters into conscious possession of that state of existence. There comes to be the "I" who is in, or is possessed of, that state of existence.

□ 12. Decay and death (*jarā-maraṇa*): The springing of the individuality of "I" renders it subject to the experience of decay (receding from perfection) and final perishing (being deprived of the perfection), and thus to the pressure of threatening separation, unpleasant association, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair, frustrated desires and all kinds of unwelcome states of insecurity. These symptomatic states become accumulated as a suffering complex which influences one's personality and further behavior. They themselves condition ignorance which runs on the vicious cycle. All human problems, both individual and social, can be traced to, or have much to do with, this suffering complex. Not finding a right outlet or a way to root it out, one accumulates it to the detriment of oneself or bursts it out into problematic behavior affecting both oneself and others. For example, a man who is jealous

of his power, for fear of losing the power, may become suspicious of all others and can do anything no matter how disastrous only to keep his power.

□ In order to cure personal suffering and prevent problematic behavior, one must cut apart the vicious cycle, not letting the suffering complex develop or accumulate. This can be achieved by dealing with the cycle at various links, especially at Nos.6 and 7. What are needed to destroy the vicious cycle are only mindfulness (*sati* for stopping the turbid or poisoned process) and understanding or insight (for rooting out the suffering complex and starting a purified process). It should be noted that the process goes on rapidly and the whole cycle can be passed in the interval of a moment. Besides, strictly speaking, it is not a cycle as such; all conditions are interlinked.

[Part from Ven. P.A. Payutto's class handout at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, in 1976.]

## The Venerable P.A. Payutto

□ The Venerable Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto) was born on January 12, B.E. 2481 (1939) in Suphanburi Province in the central part of Thailand. The initial P.A. stands for his secular name: "Prayudh Aryankura". Entering a monastery as a novice at 12 and after completing the highest grade of Pali studies, in B.E. 2504 (1961) he was ordained as a monk under H.M. the King's patronage. He has the monastic name Payutto, meaning "He who applies knowledge". A year later he obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Buddhist Studies with top honors, from Mahachulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya Buddhist University

□ After graduation he became lecturer at his alma mater. Apart from teaching Buddhism at various universities in Thailand, he was invited to lecture at the University of Pennsylvania's University Museum in 1972 and at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania in 1976. In 1981 he was invited as a visiting scholar and subsequently appointed as a research fellow at the Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University.

□ A highly revered monk and eminent scholar, he is also widely respected as an eloquent preacher and authoritative writer, with thousands of Dhamma talk recordings and over three hundred books on Buddhism to his credit. The Venerable is especially renowned for his magnum opus on Theravada Buddhism entitled *Buddhadhamma*. In recognition of his outstanding scholarship and significant contribution to Buddhism, institutions in Thailand and abroad have conferred upon him honorary doctorates and other honorific titles. Among such accolades is the UNESCO's Prize for Peace Education in 1994. In his acceptance speech he made clear that the real prize is "a truly peaceful world for mankind", and the prize "will be won only when that goal has been realized".

□ On account of his dedicated services to Buddhism, he has been successively elevated with the royal sanction to the following ecclesiastical titles:

Phra Srivissuddhimoli

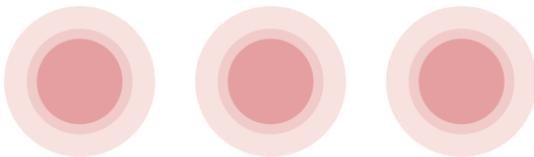
Phra Rajavaramuni

Phra Debvedi

Phra Dhammapitaka

Phra Brahmaganabhorn

□ Always a teacher, Venerable P.A. Payutto regularly teaches newly ordained monks at Wat Nyanavesakavan in the Province of Nakhon Pathom, the historic "first city" where Buddhism arrived to the present-day Kingdom of Thailand.



## About the Compiler

### Soamwasee Namtip

- Born in B.E. 2509 (1966) in Thailand and educated in the United States with degrees in Aerospace Engineering and MBA, his training was on the materialistic path. His careers in an aerospace company or in a newspaper as a sub-editor and a columnist for music and social commentary have shown him the restless world while a brief advisory function at a governmental level gave him an insight into human nature.
- Whether driving a race car, flying an airplane, or a helicopter, he found nothing as *ehipassiko* (challenging to investigate) as the Buddha's Dhamma. For three months while being ordained as a monk with Venerable P.A. Payutto as his preceptor, he discovered that all of his experience is a plus to learning Buddhism. The compilation of the Venerable P.A. Payutto's books into English is an invitation to others to experience the value of Dhamma.

