AWAKENING
THE END OF DUKKHA

Guy Eugène DUBOIS

Dhamma
books

Spiritual wisdom is a gift to be shared with insight and compassion, never exploited for personal gain. The moment wisdom is commercialized—marketed—it ceases to be a gift and becomes a commodity.
Once profound insight is assigned a price,
its transformative power is inevitably diminished.

(Guy E. Dubois)

For this reason, this book may be freely copied, reproduced, used, and shared in any medium or format, provided that appropriate credit is given and the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) are respected.

This book is a contemplative English edition of the original Dutch work *Ontwaken – Het Einde van Dukkha*. It has been faithfully rendered and thoughtfully adapted for an international readership. The published Dutch edition of *Ontwaken – Het Einde van Dukkha* is the definitive source text for this English edition.

D/2026/Guy Eugène Dubois, Publisher
Zomerlaan 8/101 - 2580 Beerzel, Belgium
gdubois.dhammabooks@gmail.com
https://yatha-bhuta.com

Layout, prepress, design & cover: GD
Typesetting in Helvetica Neue
Paper: Wood-free white FSC
Printing: Brave New Books, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
ISBN: 9789465469720 | NUR-Code: 718

‘Vayadhammā saṅkhārā, appamādena sampādetha —
All conditioned things are subject to dissolution.
Strive on with heedfulness.’

Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 16

FOREWORD

This book has been written from a perspective grounded in freedom of inquiry: the freedom to return, again and again, without being bound by doctrines, schools, structures, or institutional forms, to what can be directly investigated and seen.

This does not imply a rejection of the richness of the various Buddhist traditions. Each of these approaches has, in its own way, sought to express insights that arose from the Buddha's awakening. Provided that we remember that no formulation, no organization, and no interpretation can ultimately do more than point to what must be investigated and seen for oneself.

Here, freedom of inquiry refers to the willingness not to accept anything solely on the basis of authority, tradition, social or institutional recognition, or conviction, but to approach human experience again and again with openness, attentiveness, and a spirit of investigation. In this sense, it accords closely with the spirit of the Dhamma itself: not to believe, but to investigate; not to accept, but to look; not to speculate, but to see.

Ultimately, my concern is not to defend Buddhism as a religious identity or to uphold a particular interpretation of the teaching, but to explore the simple yet radical question that Siddhattha Gotama himself investigated: How does dukkha arise, and how can it come to an end?

This book is an invitation to inquiry. To looking. To direct seeing. To exploring, again and again, human

experience and the possibility that liberation from dukkha may still unfold today.

Guy Eugène Dubois
Beerzel, July 2026

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, I have written many texts on the Dhamma. On meditation. On the *jhānas*. On insight. On the various Buddhist traditions and their approaches. All of these subjects have their value. They can inspire, clarify, and offer direction.

Yet, over time, a question kept returning: What is the true heart of the Dhamma?

Not its interpretations. Not its commentaries. Not its traditions. Not the various schools that have emerged over the centuries. Not the doctrines that have sometimes become so elaborate that they risk obscuring the simplicity of the original message.

But its essence. For this reason, awakening cannot be reduced to a particular experience. Experiences arise and pass away. They belong to the domain of the conditioned *(saṅkhata; saṃskṛta).*

What the Buddha understood was not an extraordinary experience that had to be preserved or held onto, but the conditioned nature of all experience and the way identification with it arises and falls away.

What did the Buddha truly discover beneath the Bodhi tree?

What did he see that was so profound that it brought his search to an end?

And what did he consider so important that he devoted the rest of his life to speaking about it?

These questions formed the basis of a series of three Dhamma talks that I gave in the spring of 2026: one for the teachers and facilitators of *Sangha Metta* in the Netherlands, and another for a group of experienced practitioners and facilitators of *Boeddha in de Stad*, the independent Buddhist saṅgha in Antwerp.

These talks did not arise in isolation. They grew out of many years of dialogue, investigation, and friendship with people who take the Dhamma deeply to heart. I am especially grateful for the friendship of Paul Van Hooydonck, at whose invitation this series was shared within *Boeddha in de Stad*, and for the many conversations and exchanges with Jotika Hermsen, whose trust and encouragement helped give rise to this cycle of talks.

They were not intended to establish a new system, nor to defend a particular tradition or interpretation.

Quite the opposite.

The intention was to set aside, as far as possible, everything that is secondary and to return to what, in my view, constitutes the essence of the Buddha's teaching.

When one reads the early Buddhist texts attentively, something remarkable becomes apparent. The Buddha spoke about many subjects, yet again and again he returns to one and the same reality: the ending of dukkha.

The Dhamma may also be understood in another way. Not as a collection of beliefs, doctrines, or theories, but as an invitation to inquiry.

Ultimately, the Buddha's teaching is not primarily about believing, but about investigating; not about accepting, but about looking; not about thinking, but about seeing; not about speculating, but about seeing through and understanding.

The Dhamma is not something to believe, but something to investigate until dukkha comes to an end.

What follows is not a canonical framework drawn from the early Buddhist texts, but a personal and contemplative summary of what, for me, characterizes the spirit of the Dhamma. [1]

Four simple movements that, in their dynamic interplay, resonate with the Four Noble Truths:

Investigating.
Looking.
Seeing.
Seeing through.

Investigating, in the spirit of *dhammavicaya (dharmavicaya)* and *yoniso manasikāra (yoniśo manaskāra),* means bringing careful, discerning attention to experience. Such inquiry opens the possibility of understanding.

Looking, in the spirit of *anupassanā (anupaśyanā):* attentively observing body, feelings, mind, and phenomena as they present themselves. Looking reveals what nourishes *dukkha (duḥkha)*.

Seeing things as they truly are—*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana (yathābhūta-jñānadarśana).* Seeing opens the possibility of cessation.

Seeing through, in the spirit of *pariññā (parijñā):* [2] fully comprehending the nature of experience, whereby identification and attachment gradually fall away. Seeing through unfolds when reality reveals itself as it actually presents itself, moment after moment.

These four movements do not describe successive stages, but a living dynamic.

For me, no formulation captures the spirit of the early Dhamma more fully than these four simple movements.

Just as all rivers eventually flow into the ocean, so the Buddha's teaching continually flows toward a single reality: the ending of *dukkha*.

The Dhamma has many entrances, but only one taste: the taste of liberation.

This is also why this book does not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of Buddhism.

It is not an encyclopedia.
It is not a historical study.
It is not a systematic or analytical exposition of Buddhist doctrines.

Many subjects that are explored in depth in my other books are mentioned here only in passing, or are not discussed at all.

Not because they are unimportant, but because this book serves a different purpose.

Its aim is to return to the essence.

When one carefully examines the earliest teachings, it becomes apparent that the Buddha was not primarily concerned with describing a metaphysical reality, but with uncovering a process. He investigated how *dukkha* arises, what sustains it, and how it comes to an end. Understanding that process forms the central thread running throughout the Buddha's teaching.

The concern with the arising of *dukkha* is already evident in the earliest texts. In the opening verses of the *Dhammapada,* [3] the decisive role of the mind in the arising of suffering and well-being is clearly emphasized. The focus is not primarily on circumstances themselves, but on the way the mind relates to them.

The three talks from which this book emerged follow a simple movement.

First, we turn to the awakening of the Buddha himself. Not as a historical narrative, but as an affirmation that liberation is possible.

Next, we examine what he taught in his first discourse: the Four Noble Truths, in which the structure of *dukkha* and its cessation are laid bare.

Finally, we explore the teaching of not-self, which exposes the root of identification and appropriation, thereby opening the door to liberation.

This explains why the different parts of this book each have their own distinctive character.

The first part is narrative in nature. It follows the life of Siddhattha Gotama, not in order to reconstruct the

past, but to make visible that liberation from *dukkha* is possible.

The second part is analytical and investigative. It examines the structure of *dukkha,* its arising, and its cessation as set forth by the Buddha in the Four Noble Truths.

The third part deepens this investigation further. It focuses on the assumption of a lasting self and unfolds as an inquiry into identification, appropriation, and not-self *(anattā; anātman).*

The fourth and final part is quite different. It no longer attempts to explain or analyze. Instead, it follows the gradual unfolding that takes place when searching grows quiet, illusions lose their enchantment, the fire of desire begins to fade, and the mind comes to rest.

As a result, the language itself gradually becomes simpler and quieter, as though the words are slowly giving way to that toward which they have always pointed: liberation and direct seeing.

Awakening, dukkha, and not-self are not, in reality, separate subjects. They are different perspectives on the same reality.

This becomes especially clear when we investigate what *dukkha* actually entails.

Dukkha arises through grasping and identification. *Anattā (anātman)* reveals the assumption of an owner or an independent entity to be unfounded. *Awakening* is the ending of that grasping and therefore the ending of *dukkha*.

Ordinarily, it is assumed that there is someone who suffers, someone who wishes to be liberated, and ultimately someone who awakens. The teaching of not-self *(anattā; anātman)* is directed precisely at that assumption.

The inquiry concerns not only how *dukkha* arises and comes to an end, but also whether any enduring entity can truly be found that owns or governs that process.

Perhaps the purpose of this book can be expressed even more simply.

This is not a book about Buddhist philosophy. It is not an attempt to defend a doctrine, nor to expound a particular system of thought.

At its heart, it is an investigation into how *dukkha* arises and how liberation becomes possible.

The purpose of this book may be summarized even more simply: to re-examine what an extraordinary human being *(mahāpurisa; mahāpuruṣa)* [4] investigated down to the very roots of *dukkha*. [5]

How does *dukkha* arise?
How does *dukkha* sustain itself?

And what happens when the mechanisms that nourish *dukkha* are directly seen and fully understood?

The chapters that follow approach these questions from different angles, yet continually return to the same reality: the ending of *dukkha*.

Where ignorance is seen through, *awakening* unfolds. Where grasping falls away, *dukkha* comes to an end and liberation appears.

This is the central thread running through this book.

Readers will notice that certain viewpoints that have arisen around Buddhism throughout history receive little attention here.

This is a deliberate choice.

My primary interest lies not in what people have said about the Dhamma, but in that to which the Dhamma itself points.

The Buddha did not invite his listeners to believe him. He invited them to look carefully. To look for themselves.

Not to collect doctrines.
Not to defend convictions.
Not to cling to systems.
But to see directly.

This book seeks to extend that same invitation once again.
Not to learn something new.
Not to construct a new identity.
Not to become a Buddhist.

This calls for one final clarification.

Although this book is fully rooted in the early Buddhist Dhamma, it is not concerned with adopting a religious identity.

The Pāli Canon presents the Dhamma not as the possession of a religious community, but as something that can be seen, investigated, and verified.

Precisely for that reason, it cannot be appropriated and transcends every form of exclusivity. Any attempt to claim it exclusively for a particular tradition fails to do justice to its universal character.

The question that the Buddha investigated—the possibility of awakening and the ending of *dukkha*—does not belong to any particular tradition, religion, or culture. It is a human, existential, and universal question.

It arises wherever desire, aversion, grasping, identification, and becoming *(bhava; id.)* give rise to *dukkha,* and wherever the question emerges whether liberation is possible.

Over the years, the religious, institutional, and identity-based forms that have historically developed around the Dhamma have gradually receded into the background for me. Increasingly, what came to the foreground was Siddhattha Gotama's human quest: his original investigation into dukkha, its arising, and its cessation.

The more everything secondary fades into the background, the more clearly the figure of the Buddha himself appears before me: an extraordinary human being *(mahāpurisa; mahāpuruṣa)* who investigated the roots of *dukkha* and devoted his life to sharing what he discovered.

The fact that the insights the Buddha articulated with such exceptional clarity continue to inspire people,

more than two millennia later, to look and investigate for themselves reveals the depth of his inquiry into *dukkha,* its arising, and its cessation.

In these pages, the terms “Buddha,” “Dhamma,” and “Path” do not refer to a system of beliefs, structures, organizations, or a religion, but to an investigation of human experience itself and to the possibility that *dukkha* can be seen through and brought to an end.

In this sense, this book is not about Buddhism as an identity, but about the universal possibility of *awakening* and the ending of *dukkha*. That is the reality to which the Buddha’s teaching continually points.

When a book returns to the heart of the Dhamma, the question naturally arises why it should be written at all. Why add more words to the many words that already exist?

That question accompanied me more than once during the writing of this book. For what is being investigated here ultimately cannot be captured in words. Words can only point. They can never replace what each person must see for themselves.

This book was not written to defend a position, nor to add something new to the many words that have already been spoken about the Dhamma.

It is offered as a form of *dāna (id.):* the free sharing of an inquiry into the nature of *dukkha* and the possibility of liberation. It is the fruit of a long process of *dhammavicaya (dharmavicaya)* [6] that has guided both my practice and the questions explored in these pages.

Not with the intention of convincing others.
Not to be followed.
Not to provide answers.

But in the hope that these pages may encourage some readers to investigate for themselves what becomes visible when they are willing to see things as they truly are, rather than as they think, hope, or wish them to be.

Attentive readers will notice that this book deliberately leaves a great deal of white space. This is not merely to enhance readability, but above all to support attention.

Some insights cannot be deepened by adding ever more words.

At times, a sentence or a single idea asks for space to resonate before the next one appears. White space invites a slowing down, a moment of reflection, and an opportunity to let what has been read settle more deeply. White space often deepens understanding more effectively than further commentary.

Here too, the same invitation that runs throughout the Dhamma can be heard: to look attentively.

The Buddha called this *yathābhūta (id.):* seeing things as they truly are. [7]
Not as we hope they are.
Not as we fear they are.
Not as we have been taught they should be.

But as they actually unfold in each moment and from moment to moment. For ultimately, the Dhamma is not concerned with knowledge.

It is concerned with liberation.
And liberation means nothing other than the ending of *dukkha*. [8]

That was the Buddha's discovery.
That is the heart of his teaching.
And that is the subject of this book:
Awakening — The End of Dukkha.

¶

CHAPTER I — AWAKENING OF THE BUDDHA

There are events that change the course of history. And there are events that transform forever the way we see ourselves and the nature of existence.

The awakening of the Buddha belongs to the latter.

The life of Siddhattha Gotama is not presented here merely as a sequence of historical events. The events themselves matter only insofar as they reveal the gradual unfolding of insight into the nature of *dukkha* and its ending.

They are not the heart of this part of the book, but the transparent medium through which the Dhamma gradually reveals itself. The life of the Buddha is therefore not offered as a biography to be admired, but as an invitation to see how the ending of *dukkha* gradually became visible through direct investigation.

This part is not primarily the story of a prince who left his palace, studied under teachers, practised asceticism, and eventually attained insight beneath a tree.

Rather, it explores what these events reveal. The value of the Buddha's life story lies not in the historical facts themselves, but in what they point to.

What was truly seen on the night of awakening?
What came to an end?
What fell away?
What began?

And why did this discovery become the starting point of a teaching that, for forty-five years, returned tire-

lessly to one and the same reality: the possibility of liberation from *dukkha*?

The pages that follow invite the reader to approach these questions not merely as the history of a distant past, but as an inquiry that remains relevant today. For as long as there is *dukkha,* the question of awakening remains alive.

¶

I. TOWARD THE HEART OF THE DHAMMA

In conversations with yogis, both in the East and the West, and through various international forums, the same theme keeps returning.

What continually strikes me—and at times surprises me—are the questions and reflections that arise.

They reveal not only a sincere search, but also the extent to which the original teaching often appears filtered, interpreted, or even distorted through dogmatic views, systems, and beliefs. Yet the Buddha's message points again and again to liberation, not to clinging to viewpoints or defending what is regarded as “correct."

The Buddha was not a dreamer. He was someone who looked and saw.

He grounded himself in reality as it truly is. In the law of nature. In Dhamma. [9]

Not in:
traditions;
rumours;
assumptions;
speculations;
axioms;
views accepted after reflection;
probabilities;
or what others had said. [10]

What the Buddha taught arose from direct experience—something to be known individually by the wise *(paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi).* [11]

What he later summarized for his followers in the Four Noble Truths was not a doctrine to be believed, but a description of reality that can be investigated and seen through.

In the *Uposatha Sutta* of the *Udāna*, [12] the Buddha says:

❛ *Just as the great ocean has but one taste—the taste of salt—so this Dhamma and Discipline has but one taste: the taste of liberation.* ❜

The Dhamma may be expressed in many ways, yet its direction remains the same. It may appear in many forms, yet its taste remains one.

What the Buddha points to always refers to the same reality: Dhamma.

The words may differ.
The approaches may differ.
The formulations may vary.

Different concepts may be used.
Different emphases may be given.
Different images may be employed.

Yet wherever the end of *dukkha* is truly being pointed to, the direction remains the same.

Just as all rivers ultimately flow into the ocean, every authentic practice flows toward liberation *(vimutti; vimukti).*

This suggests that the various Buddhist schools are, in the end, different approaches to the same search

for liberation. They may be regarded as skillful means *(upāya; upāyaḥ),* [13] as different vehicles *(yāna; id.),* [14] each pointing in its own way toward the same goal.

Over the centuries, Buddhism has given rise to a rich diversity of traditions, rituals, philosophical systems, commentaries, and institutional forms. Many of these have supported, inspired, and guided countless practitioners. Yet there is always the possibility that attention gradually shifts from that to which these forms point to the forms themselves.

When this happens, the central question quietly recedes into the background: How does *dukkha* arise, and how does it come to an end? Everything else has value only insofar as it supports that investigation.

When we begin to cling to forms, views, or traditions, however, attention can shift away from what they are meant to reveal. Then differences in interpretation risk becoming more important than insight itself, and identification takes the place of liberation.

Where attachment to views arises, division follows. And where division arises, the simple question of the ending of *dukkha* recedes into the background.

The Dhamma has many gateways, but its direction remains the same. It never points toward division, but toward liberation *(vimutti; vimukti).*

Perhaps this is one of the great challenges for every practitioner: not to remain preoccupied with what distinguishes us, but to investigate carefully what all these approaches are ultimately trying to uncover.