

~ Virtuous Path Series ~



BUDDHADASA
SERVANT OF THE BUDDHA

By Santidhammo Bhikkhu

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Buddhapanyanuntarama Buddhist Monastery (BBM)

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Virtuous Path Series

BUDDHADASA

SERVANT OF THE BUDDHA

By Santidhammo Bhikkhu

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Preface

Sakyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment in India about 2,557 years ago, and spent forty five years teaching the way that leads to enlightenment. The Lord Buddha said his teaching is very simple: "Never do what is evil. Always do what is good. Purify the mind."

The purpose of the Buddha's teaching is to attain happiness, both happiness for the individual and happiness for the whole society. The Buddhist way of life is the way of selfless generosity, morality, wisdom and compassion.

I am so pleased to offer this little book to the English-speaking public as a gift on behalf of Buddhapanyanuntarama Buddhist Monastery. Buddhapanyanuntarama is a center serving the Thai Buddhist community and friends, in British Columbia, Canada.

I would like to express gratitude to Venerable Santidhammo, of Atammayatarama Buddhist Monastery, for writing this booklet. I would also like to express gratitude to the many generous benefactors of Buddhapanyanuntarama who offered funds for the printing of this book. May they share in the rich benefits of happiness as a result of this effort.

Yours in Dhamma,

Venerable Phra Maha Tawatchai Khunakaro

Abbot, Wat Buddhapanyanuntarama

Foreword

Namo Buddhaya Sidthani.

Homage to the Buddha, Success!

The genius of the Buddha's teaching is that inner peace is a transformative power in the world. We need inner peace to create social peace, and we must use Buddhist meditation to reach this inner peace. Personal transformation is the key for social transformation. Inner peace is the key to world peace.

Buddha's teachings are very easy. There is no need to make them complicated. You must do three things only: to refrain from evil; to do what is good; and to purify the mind. That is all.

We must silence our minds, and listen inwardly until we can hear our own peaceful nature. When we hear our own inner peace, we will hear the peaceful nature of others as well. Wisdom comes from listening.

The Dharma teaches us to know, shape, and free the mind. When the mind is mastered, all the dharma is mastered. What is the key for mastering the mind? It is mindfulness.

All proceeds from mind, all we are arises from the mind. We are what we think. With the mind we create the world. Disorder and confusion in the world follows disorder and confusion in individual minds.

Only with a change of within will there be a change without. Even if it is slow in following, it will never fail to arrive.

Consciousness is the source of ethics. Our mind generates thoughts, speech, and actions. When we have a peaceful mind, we have peaceful words and deeds. We unfailingly start and return to one's mental states. Some people see meditation as opposed to action, but the Buddha said meditation is the source of action.

If you are mindful, you are a Buddha.

Peace is like water flowing everywhere. Peace making the proper response to violence. Non-violence brings peace. Peace is the highest happiness.

Peace will triumph over war when people can walk down the streets with peace in their minds. That is the only step-by-step process that will bring an end to the great suffering of the people of the world.

We must develop personal compassion as a gift to share, a gift of peace, a gift of healing.

The act of walking itself must be made peaceful, then we will peacefully affect those we encounter.

The Buddha called mindfulness 'the only way.' Always in the present. At this very moment. From moment to moment. In all activity. In this very step.

Slowly, slowly, step by step. Each step is a meditation. Each step is a prayer. Each step builds a bridge to peace.

It is the contemplative state of beings that we offer as a gift to the world. Our peace-offering can take the form of meditation, having tea with a refugee, being a peaceful person during business meetings, establishing an altruistic organization, or walking together in a peace vigil. The line between activism and other activities is erased with the correct mind-state.

Responding to the present moment with loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and serenity is making peace. We must live in the present moment. This. Here. Now. Every moment is a special moment. The present moment is the mother of the future. If we take care of the mother, the mother will take care of the child.

So we must develop the right mind state, and respond to the present circumstances of our lives. We change the world primarily by our presence and our example.

We are non-confrontational, non partisan. We simply tell the people to take care, be careful, be caring, be mindful and aware. It is difficult for people to see the harm they cause if they are not mindful.

The most important action of a peacemaker is to be peaceful. We cannot be angry peacemakers. We pray for peace all over the world.

Ajahn Tawatchai, my friend, asked me to write this little book to share the Buddha's teachings with English speaker audiences. I respectfully wrote these ideas to share with all, free of charge, without any expectations, in order to share peace and happiness with all. Please excuse any mistakes I have made in this publication.

Venerable Santidhammo

Seattle, U.S.A.

Note on Romanization and Translation

1. The translations of Thai names and Pali words in this book uses mixed method between the Romanization standard of the Royal Institute of Thailand and popular spelling - with the former system considered first. Some examples are: Buddhadasa (the standard spelling), Panyananda (the popular spelling, instead of Pannananda). The main consideration is to provide the actual pronunciation with the common lettering, thus avoiding the use of special letterings which are not accustomed to common readers - unless where necessary.
2. The first time a Pali or Thai term is mentioned, it appears in italics; after that, it is in plain type.
3. This book uses the Pali words such as: Dhamma, nibbana, Tipitaka, and arahant instead of their Sanskrit equivalents; Dharma, nirvana, Tripitaka, and arhat.

BUDDHADASA

SERVANT OF THE BUDDHA

"I hold on to the fact that I am speaking one kind of truth, and I speak with the aim to drag all of us back to the good, special and excellent old values of the old days of our forefathers.

"We are about to step out of our path and get crazy over things that are demonic - things which can make mankind destroy and lose their humanity rendering this world with no peace in sight."

Buddhadasa

Introduction

Buddhadasa Bhikku (1906-1993) is one of the most important Buddhist teachers of the twentieth century. As the meditation master of Suan Mokkh Meditation Center in Chaiya, southern Thailand, he propagated Buddhist philosophy and meditation practice among tens of thousands of western visitors from North America, Europe and Australia.

When he passed away in 1993, he left behind a massive body of literary works in Thai language, explaining how traditional Buddhist teachings are relevant to the modern world. He inspired generations of teachers, intellectuals, and activists who have spread out across the world, to translate his teachings into practice. He is one of the founders of modern socially engaged Buddhism, and was a key person in the reformation of 20th century Thai Buddhism.

Buddhadasa was interested in -

- 1) Demythologized Buddhism, and used European rationalist standards emphasizing the rational dimensions of Buddhism; ignoring the metaphysical, cosmological elements of traditional Buddhism. He rejected superstition, magical rituals and ceremonies.



Ajahn Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

2) Focused on life in this world, action in the present material world, therefore saying Buddhism contributed to personal and social happiness in the present lifetime. This pointed out that Buddhism had economic and political value as part of the struggle for liberation from suffering.

3) He pointed out the centrality of nibbana in Buddha's teaching - nibbana is available to all people, - in the present, everyday life.

4) He applied Buddhist teaching, not only for personal happiness and liberation, but also for social harmony and peace. Buddha's teaching applied to structural violence.

Buddhadasa explained how the Buddha's traditional tenets are compatible with the modern world, and accessible to everyday people, who can attain the highest goals of Buddhist teachings.

During his single-minded career over the course of his long life, he developed a thorough reinterpretation of the entire body of Buddhist doctrine, both for personal liberation and social liberation.

During the first half of his life, Buddhadasa worked to reform Buddhism, strip away the superstitious practices, and make Buddha's teaching intellectually comprehensible by rational and scientific standards of modern scholarship. During the second half of his life, he turned his attention to reform of the decadent modern world according to the standards of Buddhist wisdom and compassion - as the world faced rapid social, economic, and cultural change.

He was interested in making Buddhism relevant and accessible to modern concerns, and to save Buddhism from the attacks of modern educated people who increasingly regarded Buddhism as irrelevant to modern concerns.

Before Buddhadasa, monks in Thailand were often preoccupied with ritual and ceremony that led to widespread alienation of the emerging masses of Thai people, who had been educated according to modern methods of western scholarship.

Through his center at Suan Mokkh, through his talks and his books, Buddhadasa strove to practice a regenerated form of Buddhism that was closer to the spirit of its original source. He once wrote, "People... have become attached to, and regard, Buddha as a god, instead of seeing him as a human being who attained enlightenment and had great compassion for others. They are not aware that Buddha teaches that anyone can follow his path and find the way out of suffering by and for themselves."

Buddhadasa's teachings, and especially his emphasis on interdependence, inspired a generation of Thai social activists and artists. His teachings also helped launch the environmental movement in Southeast Asia.

Ajahn Buddhadasa lived in a time of great change in Thai society, as aggressive western civilization spread throughout the world. Some of the changes were improvements, but many of the changes were destructive to traditional society, and the natural environment - along with spiritual destruction of inner peace and spiritual values. With modernization, mass communications and transportation, and craze for money and development, the spiritual values of Buddhism were challenged.

Buddhist people were bewildered by these profound changes. "Many in Thailand responded to the pressure to westernize by embracing and profiting from it. Others took the opposite approach, resisting and refusing what the West had to offer. Ajahn Buddhadasa sought the middle way between these opposing alternatives," recounted Santikaro, a protege of Buddhadasa.

In the old days, Buddhadasa said, "People would gather around to help, nurse and care for others, to feed them and share what they had. Even a stranger who wasn't a relative did not need to be afraid if some accident occurred .. a traveller who fell sick and finally died in a shelter at the dock had all kinds of help because of the belief that one would earn a lot of merit. Now nobody is interested in helping or making merit."

In Buddhadasa's youth the sangha was the moral force in the local community. Buddhism was integrated into daily life.

It was customary for boys to live in the temples, and eventually receive temporary ordain as monks, before marrying. Now, the young are too busy pursuing education, and professional careers, to be distracted by Buddhist practice.

Most people lived simply. Everyone practiced generosity, giving daily food alms to the monks.

Buddhadasa considered the traditional Thai Buddhist ways to be healthy, balanced, wise and compassionate. "People at that time coexisted peacefully. Natural resources were abundant. There was plenty of fish and other food to eat without worry. There were monasteries and religion to support hearts and minds."

"I hold on to the fact that I am speaking one kind of truth, and I speak with the aim to drag all of us back to the good, special and excellent old values of the old days of our forefathers," he said. "We are about to step out of our path and get crazy over things that are demonic - things which can make mankind destroy and lose their humanity rendering this world with no peace in sight."

He sought to purify Buddhism by returning to the original teachings and instructions of the Buddha. He did not want to "modernize" the Sangha, but purge of corruptions and superstitions, so that the universal relevance would be apparent and obvious and clear to all.

He said he hoped his teachings would demonstrate the relevance of Buddhism to "today's students" who must find their way in contemporary life.

Buddhadasa showed that material well being is not in opposition to spiritual values, and that our spiritual practice and ideals must have some bearing on worldly affairs. He said that material well-being is a religious value in itself, while affirming the spiritual ideals of the Dhamma.

If the spiritual values become irrelevant to the society, the society will lose its spiritual values. Buddhadasa's life work was to preserve, and transmit, the essence of Buddhist teaching, the heritage of Thailand, to the modern world.

The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun, the moon, and the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees and soil. Our bodily parts function as a cooperative. When we realize that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise, that human beings are all mutual friends in the process of birth, old age, suffering and death, then we can build a noble, even heavenly environment. If our lives are not based in this truth, then we shall all perish.



Map of Thailand with provincial/state boundaries

Part 1

Buddhadasa's Youth

Ajahn Buddhadasa was born in southern Thailand in 1906, and given the name Ngueam Panich. He was the eldest of three children of Xiang Panich, a middle class merchant of Chinese ancestry, and a Thai mother named Kluean. His family ran a small grocery store in Phum Rieng, near the ancient Kingdom of Chaiya, in southern Thailand.

Father Xiang Panich, was a merchant from an ethnic Chinese family who had immigrated to Phum Rieng so long ago that they were fully assimilated into the local culture. His father was a kind man, industrious and gentle. He loved to write poetry. He neither drank alcohol nor smoked, nor gambled. He practiced the Buddhist non-violent precepts.

The Phanich family was reasonably well off, and their family store functioned as the local meeting place and as the police station before the district center was moved to Chaiya, just before the Second World War.

Chinese immigrants had arrived in Thailand in great numbers during the 19th century, when King Mongkut abolished slavery and began hiring low-wage Chinese immigrants to do the public works. They were mostly men, and often married Thai women. These families became the business class in Thailand, and embraced the modern reforms of King Mongkut. With their business skills, they became the backbone of the new modern, urbanized middle class, mostly centered in Bangkok, and were in close cooperation with western enterprise in Thailand. As a shopkeeper's son, Buddhadasa was born into this new emerging middle class.



Map of Surat Thani.

Father Xiang was a devoted Buddhist, had served as a "temple-boy" in his youth, and had studied at the temple school. As a youth, father Xiang was temporarily ordained as a Buddhist monk, according to Thai custom. He spoke little Chinese. He married Kluean Panich, the daughter of a Thai official, who became Buddhadasa's mother, so Buddhadasa's family was solidly middle class and comfortable. Father Xiang died quite young in 1923 when Buddhadasa was only 17 years old.

Buddhadasa's mother, Kluean Panich, was a modest, thrifty extremely devout Buddhist, according to Thai traditions. Her family even meditated at home, when she was a child. When she married, she moved to Phum Rieng to live with her husband. She carried out the Buddhist religious rituals, went to

Temple every Buddhist Sabbath day, and listened to sermons. She had three children, and her religious beliefs made a profound impression on her children. She later became a strong patron of Buddhadasa's work.

Phum Riang, at that time was a small town. People of Phum Riang were fishermen and rice farmers. Fishing was small scale. The people led simple lives.

Thai society was very hierarchical, and the people felt they lived on different levels. Officials had much higher status than regular village farmers and fishermen. But the different strata of society cooperated with one another for the common good. The people were earnest in merit making. Buddhism played a profound role in the daily lives of the people, both high and low.



Ngueam (left), later Buddhadasa, sat with father and brother.

The local monastery was the center of the community. Every house had a table set up with alms ready to be offered to monks every morning. Once a week, people would go to a nearby temple and listen to sermons and prayers. Life was peaceful and rather care free. There was no need to shut the doors or windows. The villagers didn't have to worry about burglars. They knew each other well, like relatives.

Kamala Tiyanich described the world of Buddhadasa's youth in Southern Thailand in her book **Sons of the Buddha**. "People ... found a great deal of their food in the natural environment. Siam, as Thailand was called before 1939, was mostly rural and blessed with what appeared to be unlimited natural resources. The lives of people then were deeply connected with nature; most people lived off farmland, forests, rivers, and the sea. Villagers spent a lot of time outdoors; people went around barefoot; boys and girls knew how to cook, clean house, tend gardens, take care of livestock, haul water, and help their parents with the world of obtaining food for their family."

Growing up in Phum Riang, Buddhadasa was a regular mischievous child. He was often spanked by his mother for getting into squabbles or playing pranks on his two siblings. And he was afraid of ghosts. Buddhadasa told a story on himself. One day, the cattle he was tending ventured out into a graveyard. It was dusk already. He was very scared but then a thought came to him: "I am afraid of ghosts, but look, those cattle just stalked there to nibble grass." The fear melted away and Buddhadasa said he was grateful to the cattle for teaching him a valuable lesson."

Buddhadasa's mother was a strict disciplinarian, and very thrifty and industrious, and transmitted these values to her children. He learned the art of Thai cooking from his mother. "My father wasn't at home much. Mother was there all the time. I was much closer to mother, and because I had to help her in the kitchen, I learned to do everything in the kitchen just the way mother did. Father was a good cook, too, better than most women. His mother sold many kinds of sweets and was really talented."

"Preparing good food is an art. My father could cook like a woman because his mother made him. He was forced to learn by circumstances. I could cook because mother had me helping her in the kitchen when I was still quite young."

Whatever we did, mother would remind us to do our best. We were warned regularly not to do things crudely." Buddhadasa remembered.



Mother Khluean

Buddhadasa learned frugality from his mother. "If you want (to know) what I received from my mother, that would be frugality; care and thriftiness in spending. We were taught to be thrifty. Even with water for washing our feet, we were forbidden to use a lot. If we wanted a drink of water, we weren't allowed to take just one sip from the dipper and throw the rest away. We had to use the appropriate amount of firewood. If any was incompletely burned, we had to quench the fire and save unburned wood for later use. Everything that could be conserved had to be conserved, and there was a lot. We were frugal in every way, so it became a habit. I consider this all the time; useful ways to save and how to do it."

"Mother conserved very carefully. She saved time, too; time had to be used beneficially. When resting she didn't waste time doing nothing. She had to have something useful to do."

In 1912, when Buddhadasa was six years old, the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, Venerable Vachirayan, a royal prince, came to visit his village, during an inspection tour of Buddhist temples. Buddhadasa's entire family came out to attend the ceremonies and sermons accompanying the visit. The event made a profound effect on the impressionable child.

Buddhadasa's father often travelled on business to buy goods for his shop, which was the only one in town at that time. His mother ran the business while he was away. Buddhadasa's early childhood was spent with his mother in the shop. As the eldest son, he was expected to someday inherit the business, so he was trained and engaged in the daily work of the family business. His mother was very strict with her children, especially teaching them thrift. They were also taught the Buddhist precepts never to kill animals or fish.

Buddhadasa was fascinated with the Siamese fighting fish in his father's store, and loved to breed them. "It was a habit I picked up while quite young. I enjoyed raising and playing with them, but never had them fight. I was more interested in breeding them. I like to put them in bottles to watch them. Watching them gave me extraordinary feeling."

He kept his fish in "a big earthenware basin that was empty in the middle, with edible morning glories growing round its edges. I'd tie string to some bait, like raw shrimp, then lower it into the middle of the basin. The fighting fish would pounce on it from all sides. It was the most beautiful sight; very hard to describe."

"My parents let me raise the fish at home for fun but forbid me to let them fight." He inherited this love of breeding fish from his father. "My father liked to raise them just to look at, never to fight them. He kept them on the counter of his shop where he sold things. Some of the wide-mouthed jars contained fighting fish. When I was little my job was to swat mosquitoes and feed them to the fish. I liked this... Those fish were spirited. If one looked at them too closely they would try to bite."

Education begins at age 8

From 1914-1917, Buddhadasa received a basic education when he became a temple boy at the age of 8, in the village temple, Wat Nok (also called Wat Ubon) in Phum Riang. He learned how to read and write and studied religious traditions and Thai culture. In exchange for his education, he served the temple by performing small chores for the teachers.

He was a temple-boy from age 8 until 11, when he ordained as a novice monk and began to wear the yellow robes.

"To enter, one had to make an offering of lowers, incense, and a candle to present one self as a student or apprentice of the monks. The abbot appointed one or two of the monks to look after us; to see to our food and behavior while eating, make sure we studied, and train us in things like bowing and chanting and serving the monks." Kamala recounted.

Boys learned boxing, medicine, reading and writing in local scripts, local history, moral discipline, Buddhist iconography, astronomy, mathematics, literature, law, arts and craftsmanship.

He also gained experience in living with other boys. There was little bullying, as the monks kept oversight of the youth. The temple boys experienced lots of camaraderie and friendship among themselves. He gained lots of practical knowledge like gardening, making bamboo utensils, preparing herbal medicines.

Temple boys led a disciplined and structured life. No lazy-bones sleeping late. "If anyone slept late, he'd be doused," Buddhadasa said. "We had the right to pour water all over the unfortunate snoozer if

he overslept...when the chickens hit the ground, anyone still sleeping could be drenched with water."

The boys were all assigned daily chores. "We took turns hauling water, which couldn't be skipped, and growing vegetables next to the pond. We did everything."

The boys also cooked lunch. "By the time (his)parents took him to stay at Wat Phum Riang he already knew how to cook well. The monks could scarcely believe that an eight-year-old boy had mastered such recipes as fish casserole and buffalo curry," Kamala wrote.

She quoted Buddhadasa saying, "I was the leader in the kitchen. None of the other temple boys believed I could make fish casserole. Neither did the monks or novices. We bet on it! I showed my stuff. There wasn't anything I couldn't make, from easy things to the hard stuff like fish casserole or buffalo curry, which were the standard measures of a good cook. I had a little cooking school going at the wat. Hardly any of the other temple boys could cook."

The temple boys were well fed and cared for. The boys' parents usually sent extra food to the temple. "Rice came from the monks' alms round. The curries and soups were sent by various households in green pots. Whoever's house it was from, that boy went to fetch it. So there were plenty of pots of curry and always enough rice. In Phum Riang food was plentiful."

They received traditional educations. Local monks spent a lot of time chanting and working.

"In those days the monks did a lot of physical work." Buddhadasa remembered. "They didn't have the (Bangkok curriculum) to study. Most learned the various chants and that's how they meditated. I never saw them meditating at other times. The rest of the time they worked with wood a lot. They were carpenters and build huts, cottages, cabins, and small houses. If any wat lacked a main shrine hall, monks from other nearby monasteries would go help build one."

"In those days before we had public schools, if parents didn't need you to work at home, you could live at the wat until ordaining as a novice or monk. You could stay in robes for three or four years then disrobe and start a family."

Parents were happy to have their boys live in the monastery with the monks, where they could learn many practical things such as weaving palm mats and baskets.

Buddhadasa also learned traditional Thai boxing in the temple. The monasteries were training grounds for young boxers, who started their training at an early age. Thai boxing was designed to teach moral qualities. Buddhadasa learned boxing, because it was encouraged by the monks as part of the traditional formation of boys, though he didn't particularly like it.

He also learned traditional medicine in the monastery as a young temple boy, and was trained to collect medicinal plants for the abbot. He learned to identify many medicinal plants and knew their healing properties. He served as apprentice to experienced monks in order to learn the skills of herbal medicine and ancient healing. Everyone was welcome to ask the monks for medicines.

"The old hermits and sages knew a lot about herbal medicine," he said. "They passed their knowledge along from generation to generation. In the forest, one had to know how to help oneself. These days, people have given up interest in such things. They can't do things right, because they don't understand

nature."



Wat Nuea

After completing his adolescent training in 1918, at age twelve, he went to formal elementary school at Wat Nuea (Wat Bodharam), where he learned the new Bangkok curriculum that emphasized western scholarship. By the time he enrolled in local primary school, he already knew how to read and write. The new public school was located in the monastic grounds of Wat Nuea. Since the school was not far from his house, he could walk home for lunch every day.

One story from his first grade recounts how he was a precocious and skilled story-teller even at this young age. One of his friends always had the best sweets, because his mother was a sweets-maker. Young Buddhadasa worked out an arrangement to bribe his friends to give him sweets in exchange for telling stories and fables, indicating his skills and talkative nature.

His childhood school, now long deserted, is today a wooden one-story structure, filled with cobwebs and dust.



Childhood school.

He was a good student. One of his early school reports said: "1) He is diligent and finishes work fast and neat; 2) He has not yet been found to bully friends or forced to come to school; 3) He has good memory and likes to do things by himself; 4) He is as intelligent as anyone else."

Buddhadasa learned the cultural legacy of Buddhist Thailand, from the monks annual cycle of ceremonies and festivals, in which the cultural myths and rituals were enacted, particularly the important Jataka stories. At that time, the monks often preached The Great Birth Story in which Prince Vessantara perfected the virtue of generosity.

Kamala describes it: "The Great Birth was one of the most theatrical of the Buddhist festivals throughout Siam. Anywhere from one to a dozen skilled preacher monks would take on the voices of the many characters in the Great Birth story." Just before the sermon started, a monk would sit in the great Dhamma seat above the audience.

"Then monks would preach on the benefits of giving alms for the construction of various buildings, describe how much merit one would get for building an ordination hall, casting a bell, building a sala, and so on. Their sermons weren't like our modern Dhamma talks...It brought in a lot of money, and was great fun." Buddhadasa remembered.

"The village people kept the moral virtues well enough, better than people do today. There were some who didn't, but those with homes and property upheld the precepts because they risked embarrassment if, they failed to do so. At our home mother was very strict herself, about not liking living crabs and

fish. So it was the duty of us kids to put them in a pot of boiling water. In short, the fear of evil back then was much more pronounced than today. There weren't many people who stole or drank whiskey. Those who drank didn't drink much."

Then in 1921 he transferred to Sarapi-uthit School in Chaiya, six kilometers away from his small village of Phum Riang. In Chaiya, he studied the new western-style education curriculum that was being imposed by Bangkok reforms then underway. There were about 25 students in his classes, and all students learned the curriculum set by the Bangkok Ministry of Public Education.

From 1921-23, young Buddhadasa learned life lessons from his father, while he lived with his father in Chaiya where the family had opened another shop, because of the new road that had been built through town, generating lots of business in Suratthani at the time. He enjoyed these intimate years with his father, learning the art of writing poetry at this time.

Though a businessman, his father loved to write poems, and would even write out his ledgers in poetic verse. Kamala Tiyavanich recorded:

"Something else that stuck with me was that father liked to write stanzas, verses, and poetry. He had a poet's spirit which led me to enjoy that sort of thing." Buddhadasa remembered. His father would sit in the sala that he had constructed at the local temple, and write poetry.

His father "liked to write medicinal formulae in verse." Buddhadasa recounted. "I saw these in his notebooks, and so I liked poetry also. He wrote them properly in the classic style but did not have much time for them because his business constrained him."

His father "learned to write poetry by studying examples. He never went to school, so he couldn't have learned it at school."



The family store in Chaiya.

Buddhadasa also learned to love practical skills, such as carpentry, from his father. "Father had a carpenter's mind, which I liked.. Father was a carpenter; boat-building was his hobby."

Buddhadasa continued to attend middle school in Chaiya, as he lived with his father and helped out in the store. He attended the Sarapi-uthit School in Chaiya, six kilometers from his small village of Phum Rieng.

"The school was more advanced than my old school in Phum Rieng." he recalled. "The headmaster had a diploma in secondary school education and other teachers, including the main monk, had diplomas in primary school education."

The students were required to wear a uniform of western clothing - black pants and a white oxford shirt. He said he felt homesick for Phum Rieng, and didn't much like school. "At first I was homesick; even before the lunch break I was thinking of home. I was as filled with homesickness as if I were far away from my parents. Studying wasn't fun, but I studied enough to pass the tests fairly well."

During his school years, he was a regular boy who sometimes misbehaved. Kamala Tiyavanich records a story in which he one time stole some roses.

"Maybe before it got light I would go and sneak a couple of those beautiful roses on the other side of our fence. But that was before it got light. Our neighbors planted them along the fence between our houses. Even if they saw me take a few, they wouldn't say anything, although they weren't exactly happy that I took them. We would have to consider that stealing, so that kind of misbehavior occurred."

Working in the store, which served as a sort of community center, Buddhadasa was exposed to the many new ideas from the outside world, and urban culture of Bangkok that was infiltrating into the provinces. The store stocked a wide variety of books and magazines, recently published in Bangkok. Particularly, Buddhist books were popular. Modern books from Europe were being translated into Thai.

Buddhadasa had read and studied the new Dhamma Curriculum that was being propagated by the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand Vachirayan, who defined Buddhism according to modern western rational ideas, free of mythology and superstitious elements. So Buddhadasa was already well educated in Buddhism, long before he was ordained as a monk.

These books were very interesting to the local people, because Buddhism was for the first time, presented in Thai language that people could easily understand, rather than formal Pali texts.

The family store became the center where people gathered to discuss these new books. Buddhadasa loved to join into these discussions and became keenly interested in the official Buddhist texts that were being printed in Thai language.

End of Childhood

Buddhadasa's childhood came to an end with the death of his father in 1923, when Buddhadasa was seventeen. This was a heartbreaking time for the teenage youth, to lose his father at such a critical age.

Father Xiang "had a stroke, because he said he had an intense headache, the kind that people speak of as causing them to pass out." Buddhadasa reflected. "I went to get a massage doctor, but I wasn't fast enough, and he died within a few minutes. Death was probably the result of the bursting of a major artery in his brain."

"My father wasn't a particularly tense person; he took things pretty easy. He was always thinking of ways to improve and advance his work, which was the family business, but he didn't do anything in an intense or tense way."

Young Buddhadasa then had to drop out of school at age seventeen, and take over his father's role in running the family's grocery store. He took on the responsibility of supporting the education of his younger brother.

"After father died we gave up the store in Chaiya, and I went back to stay with mother in Phum Riang." Buddhadasa's duties as grocer involved overnight boat trips to the town of Surat Thani to buy stock, take care of the household chores, and be a leader "the man of the house" - for his mother and younger siblings. This was huge responsibility for one so young.

"I had to help with the family's burdens. If we all studied, then nobody would be at home to help mother. I was given the responsibility of overseeing everything, because mother was already old and was often sick."

His shop in Chaiya was the center of business, and many people came to visit and discuss issues of the day. He also carried wide selections of Buddhist books, that were available at the time, and enjoyed reading and discussing them with the visitors.

Part2

Buddhadasa became a monk

Yikoei, Buddhadasa's younger brother, returned from studying in Bangkok in 1926, and took over the family business, thereby giving Buddhadasa the freedom to follow the custom of temporary ordination in preparation for marriage

On July 29, 1926, he was ordained as a Buddhist monk in order to follow the Thai tradition that every young man must become a monk, and spend some time in a monastery before being considered an eligible for marriage. Buddhadasa was therefore ordained in the Mahanikaya Order at Wat Nok. His monastic name was Indapanyo, meaning one who has wisdom like Indra (god).

Buddhadasa initially intended to remain in the monastery only for the three or four months of the rainy season monastic retreat. He quickly realized, however, that he liked the monk's life, and decided to remain a monk for the rest of his life.



Yikoei

Even before ordination, he already had a good knowledge of the Buddhist texts, from his reading and debates in the family store . So during his first rains retreat at Wat Phum Riang, Buddhadasa gave nightly sermons in which he explained Buddha's teaching in simple language. The young monk also

trained himself to preach the Milindapanha texts. People were impressed with his knowledge and skill in preaching. Buddhadasa enjoyed the attention and prestige this brought to him.

At the end of that first rains retreat, he decided that he wanted to remain as a monk. Buddhadasa also developed a love for monastic solitude and because his brother, Yikoei, was managing the family business, Buddhadasa received his mother's blessing and encouragement to remain a monk.

He enjoyed life in the monastery, the camaraderie of the other youth, and his abilities in leadership. As a monk he continued to teach youth of Phum Riang village how to cook. "Sometimes I had to teach the novices and temple boys how to cook properly. They didn't know how. Sometimes, when I was overseeing the cooking, villagers passing the wat would catch a whiff of the curries and couldn't help but stop by to ask for a taste."

One of the great draws of monastic life, for Buddhadasa, was the opportunity to pursue higher education. In 1928, Buddhadasa went to Bangkok to continue his pali studies. He resided at Wat Pathumkhongkha.

In Bangkok, however, he was quickly disillusioned with the life in the big city, and did not find the sort of spiritual education he had expected. He was disappointed with the clerical education of the time and complained that, the monk's never had the opportunity to study the actual Scriptures of Buddhism, but were limited to studying the secondary commentaries.

Most of the learning was rote memorization and study of the *Dhammapada* commentaries, which are different from, and later than, the Pali cannon.

This together with his disappointment with lax lifestyles of the city monks, in the practice of the *vinaya*, made him lose interest in pursuing his masters degree. After only two months in Bangkok, Buddhadasa found his studies boring and depressing.

After one year in Bangkok, Buddhadasa took a leave of absence and returned to his hometown of Chaiya, to teach at a newly established school of scripture studies in Wat Phrathat. He also wrote his first book in 1929, a cremation volume for *Phrakru Sophanachetasikaram*, entitled "Giving Alms."

In 1930, Buddhadasa decided to try the Bangkok curriculum one more time, and returned to Wat Pathumkhongkha in Bangkok.

Rather than relying solely on his classroom studies, however, he studied Pali language with a private tutor. So as his Pali skills grew, he was able to read the actual Pali scriptures, the words of the Buddha. To his growing dismay, he discovered that the teachings of the Buddha were different than the real life Buddhism he saw around him in Bangkok. He began to question what he was learning. The first year he took exams, he got the highest score in the country. The second time he took the test, he failed, intentionally, because he answered what he had actually read in the suttas.

Buddhadasa had gone to Bangkok because he had wanted to get a "real Buddhist education" and had assumed the monks of Bangkok were more advanced. But he became disillusioned when he found that the opposite was true. The rural country monks were more virtuous and wise than the sophisticated city monks.

The Bangkok monks lead luxurious lifestyle, and viewed their education as merely a ladder for upward mobility and increased economic and social opportunity. He was deeply disappointed by the contradiction between the Buddha's teachings he could now read in the original Pali, and the example of the monks.

He believed the Sangha should renew itself through a return to the original practices of primitive Buddhism; the original way of life as laid out in the Pali Canon. He asked whether or not Nibbana was actually possible. And if so, why weren't the monks trying to attain Nibbana? Why wasn't it being taught in the monastic university?

In 1932, Buddhadasa decided to leave Bangkok for good. Upon leaving Bangkok, he wrote in his journal "purity is not to be found in the city" - and he believed he had a better chance of finding it in the forest, like the Buddha. He became a marginal figure, and stayed on the "edge" of the monastic system. Yet it was important to him that he never actually break communion with the traditional practices of Thai Buddhism

His diaries of this year say: "I cannot tell the exact date of my coming back home, but I have definitely changed by view from what I once held. This is because I fortunately found some good scriptures that helped me decide resolutely to leave Bangkok." He wrote a letter to his brother: "I intend to find a retreat far from external and internal disturbances so that I can scrutinize the Dhamma subjects that I have learned and hope to interpret. When I have finished my study, and attained a sufficient grasp of the principles of Dhamma to make sure that my research will not go astray, I will abandon the textbooks then lead an unencumbered life and search for purity and truth. I am looking for a retreat where I can temporarily stay and work with my textbooks. I am totally blind about where, if it is not our home village. Everyone should think of me as if I were not staying in Phum Riang at all. I need someone who will help enhance my chances for study. For boarding, please make little change from before. If nothing is available, cooked rice mixed with a dash of fish sauce will be alright."

"Bangkok is not the place to find purity. The mistake I made in enrolling in the ecclesiastical study is a blessing, for it makes me aware that I made a wrong step. Had I not known this, I would have made many more, and, as some people have learned, it would have been difficult to retreat. With the awareness that I have made a mistake, I can discover how to step forward correctly. I have followed the world from the minute I was born to this moment. From now on, I will seek purity and follow the path of the Buddha, which He had finally discovered. If I still stubbornly follow the world, I will lag far behind and will never enter the path. While I depend on the world physically, I will try my best to become detached from it spiritually so that I can find purity in the present."



Young Buddhadasa at Wat Pathumkhongkha.

He later explained his decision: "In returning to Phum Riang at that time, I did not have any clear plans, but it was the only choice left. Having turned towards Buddhism, I had to go all the way. I was born in a merchant family which had almost nothing to do with religion. Discarding the family tradition, I was left only with the desire of wanting to do better than what others had been doing. Thus, I was diligent in self-training which was actually unorthodox for a merchant."

1932 - Into the Forest

In 1932, at the age of twenty-six, Buddhadasa left Bangkok and moved to an abandoned temple about one mile from his family home, to follow the Buddha's path of literally renouncing the world for the forest. Here, in a natural setting, Buddhadasa began his solitary meditations and private study of the Pali *Tipitaka*, and experimenting with the traditional 13*dhutanga* - ascetic practices.

He lived as a solitary recluse in an abandoned monastery in the jungle. He first settled in a 28-acre forest overgrown in dense jungle. It was a deserted temple named Wat Traphang Chik near Phum Riang, which had been abandoned for over 80 years. He built a small bamboo hut there, and called this jungle Suan Mokkh - *Garden of Liberation*. It was at this time that took the name Buddhadasa, vowing: "*I bestow this life and body to the Buddha. I am the servant of the Buddha, and the Buddha is my master. Thereby, I am named Buddhadasa.*"

After turning his back on Bangkok, he was more or less self-taught from this time forward.

One month after Buddhadasa went to the live as a forest monk, a military coups overthrew King Rama VII and established a new modern constitutional monarchy. The constitution announced the dawn of democracy in Thailand: "the highest power in the land belongs to all people."

"We took this change to be a good omen that would lead us into a new era, a period in which we hoped to correct many things as best we could," Buddhadasa said.

"My first residence at Suan Mokkh then was just a small earth-floored hut with a thatched roof, attap-strip walls, and a floor area of three or four stretchers," Buddhadasa recounted fondly. "It was built next to a galvanized iron-sheet covered shack which housed a big Buddha image. The temple had been neglected for no less that eighty years, and big trees with widely shading branches had encroached upon the temple's boundary. Aside from my hut and the shack, there was nothing except the surrounding dense jungle. At the time of my arrival, the place was a feared no-man's land; many men did not dare go alone to the *uposatha* even in daylight, for they were afraid of ghosts and supernatural beings. Therefore, trees and climbers were growing densely all over the place. Except for an old, dilapidated water well about 500 meters from the uposatha, there was nothing that could be considered unnaturally existing."



Buddhadasa first resided at Suan Mokkh behind this shack which housed a big Buddha image.

He adopted a life of total isolation, seeing no one even to the point of having his brother leave his food hanging from a tree every day, in order to avoid any human contact whatsoever. He spent his time in solitary meditation, and private study of the Pali cannon, steadfastly following the practices of a forest monk as a means to understanding the meaning, value, and their physical and spiritual effects. He discovered the reasons behind various monastic rules through his own experience. These regulations all aimed at testing and strengthening mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

Buddhadasa said he had to face fear that he discovered in himself as he sat alone in darkness in the jungle in the middle of the night. "The state of staying alone in a secluded dwelling during a silent late night can not be explained with written words, nor be perceived by a non-forest dweller thorough comparison with his staying as a usual dwelling. There is a power which seems to have already taken away all of your will, when you begin to realize that you will be alone in a place without any protection. Add to this a first-time, sudden disturbance or uproar, and you unavoidably get startled."

A white stone pillar with this declaration inscribed on it still stands in the forest near the hut in which he lived. In his 1934 journal, Buddhadasa declared: "I will sacrifice everything and aim only for sublime happiness in order to share it with others."

Buddhadasa learned from nature, he said. "Trees, rocks, sand, even dirt and insects can speak...If we reside in nature near trees and rocks we'll discover feelings and thoughts arising that are truly out of the ordinary. At first we'll feel a sense of peace and serenity which may eventually move beyond that feeling to a transcendence of self. The heart and mind is protected from the troubles and anxieties of everyday worldly life, by the deep sense of calm that nature provides through solitude (*vivika*). Indeed, the lessons nature teaches us lead to a new birth beyond the suffering that results from

attachment to self. Trees and rocks, can talk to us. They help us understand what it means to cool down from the heat of our confusion, despair, anxiety, and suffering."

"Reading the Buddhist Canon in the city was... four or five times less profound than in the forest ... writing is more lively there...the crowded environment is full of a mental stream that is directly opposed to that in the forest," Buddhadasa recounted.

From nature he learned that human beings live in a web of life that is embedded in nature and the natural world. He was very concerned with the environment, and taught that the heart of Buddhist morality was "caring" (*anurak*) for living beings, and life systems.

Caring is a very deep existential attitude, he said, protecting, sheltering, nurturing, and sustaining living beings. Selflessness leads to genuine caring for others, life, life forms of every kind.

"The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun,the moon, the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees and soil. Our body parts function as a cooperative. When we realize that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise, that human beings are all mutual friends in the process of birth, old age, suffering, and death, then we can build a noble, even a heavenly environment. If our lives are not based on this truth, then we shall all perish," he said.

"In the Buddha's time, as written in the scriptures, the Buddha advised his disciples to go to the forest, to sit under the trees in search of the ultimate truth. Buddha was born on the ground, he journeyed on foot to teach dharma, and he died lying on the earth. I will follow him, to always keep my feet on the ground,"Buddhadasa said.

He described the forest of Suan Mokkh at the time: "At noon, the forest became quiet. The coucal bird seemed to have the duty of giving out the signal for a rest; with its hoot, all the birds took their perches, some even dozed off. Squirrels stayed put, wild fowls kept down on their pits, and small animals on the ground hid themselves away for a rest, since some of them had finished their morning meals and some wanted to avoid the mid-day heat. Silence crept in, and sometimes there was no wind; this created calmness similar to that during a late night. At this time, a monk who was not concerned with having the second meal at noon could once more have an extra peaceful moment. To stay in which a forest without getting used to this aspect of nature would be a great shame."

"But sometimes while we were in a calm state, there was suddenly an uproar in the forest. I noted that this was a warning or an alarm for an upcoming danger. It was not because the animals woke up from their rest, for the coucal bird had not sent out hits afternoon signal, but because there was an actual danger: some big birds of the eagle family flew by. While these big birds were still around, the forest animals never stopped their cries."

"At Suan Mokkh then, we had more than 40 squirrels, and countless number of small birds. The birds and a big flock of wild fowls cried loudly in unison to warn one another of the danger. Their cries sounded a convincing plea for help and would terrify one who had not experienced them before."

"If there was no special incident like this, the forest would be quiet until afternoon, when the coucal bird once again gave its timing signal. Then the animals would begin to move one by one, and the forest would wake up to its normal activities." "A mouse-deer with its suckling offspring and a quail with its young brood followed it like a trail. All of these were very lovely in the late afternoon. Some

kinds of birds sang like they were always present during both daytime and night time. Some birds were so beautiful that it was almost unbelievable that they are naturally created without God's help. When it rained at night, the most numerous reptiles found were the poisonous spit viper snakes, whose bites can give the victim's foot a painful, putrefied wound that leads to detached or deformed toes. And the most numerous present every night were mosquitoes. All of these were the natural environment which gave many never-boring lessons." "Regarding the various species of animals, I found that they were awake and working throughout the night in equal number as in the daytime, and no less tumultuous than in the daytime."

In the beginning, he didn't know how to practice meditation, and found no teachers. So he had to train himself and develop meditation method merely by reading the Buddha's teachings, found in *Anapanasati Sutta* and *Satipatthana Sutta*. He translated texts into Thai so that they could be used as a guide for all people. This handbook is called "Following the Arahants' Footprints" and was first published in 1933.

He found that life in seclusion in the forest was very helpful for meditation practice, and even his scriptures studies were enriched by the forest life. "Even for study, staying alone is definitely beneficial. Reading the Tipitaka in Bangkok was less profound than so doing in the silent forest ... Subjects can be scrutinized more profoundly in the forest writing is more lively there," he said. "Therefore the place of Dhamma practice is important. And this is the aspect we must learn directly from nature."

"If we don't spend time in places like this (Suan Mokkh), it will be virtually impossible for us to experience peace and quiet. It is only by being in nature that the trees, rocks, earth, sand, animals, birds, and insects can teach us the lesson of self-forgetting."

The Dhammadana Group

Dhammadasa, Buddhadasa's brother, was highly inspired by Buddhadasa's experiments, and became an enthusiastic supporter of his efforts to revive the teachings of the Buddha. He set up a lending-library of Buddhist books. He also founded a study group named *Khana Dhammadana*, to explore the original teachings of the Buddha, and invited Buddhadasa to give lectures.

The Dhammadana group was founded to regenerate Buddhism by disclosing the foundational truth of the *Dhamma-vinaya* in accessible language. He also hoped to revive the practice of Insight Meditation more widely among monks and laypeople "because the study of scriptures without practice is useless."

The Dhammadana group was excited by the discoveries Buddhadasa was making, and in 1933 published the first quarterly journal *Buddhasasana* in order to begin spreading the Buddha's teaching. Buddhadasa wrote most of the articles under various pseudonyms, and Dhammadasa was editor and publisher of the magazine, which was distributed for free.

Buddhadasa became interested in 1) demythologized Buddhism, and used European rationalist Standards emphasizing the rational dimensions of Buddhism; ignoring the metaphysical, cosmological elements of traditional Buddhism; 2) Focused on life in this-world, action in the present material world, therefore saying Buddhism contributed to personal and social happiness in the present lifetime. This pointed out that Buddhism had economic and political value as part of the

struggle for liberation from suffering.; 3) he pointed out the centrality of Nibbana in Buddha's teaching - nibbana is available to lay people too, in the present, everyday life (because the emerging middle-class had education to understand the Buddha's teaching, and leisure time to practice it). the Dhammadana in accessible language. He also hoped to revive the practice of Insight Meditation more widely among monks and laypeople "because the study of scriptures without practice is useless." The Dhammadana group was excited by the discoveries Buddhadasa was making, and in 1933 - published the first quarterly journal Buddhadasana in order to begin spreading the Buddha's teaching. Buddhadasa wrote most of the articles under various pseudonyms, and Dhammadasa was editor and publisher of the magazine, which was distributed for free.

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In 1933, as Buddhadasa's reputation as a teacher began to attract attention, he became the object of suspicion and resentment from local Buddhist leaders, who regarded him as a "mad monk."

In 1934, a humorous episode occurred in Buddhadasa's life, when an eccentric Italian monk named Lokanatha Bhikkhu invited Buddhadasa to go on a pilgrimage to Rome to convert the pope. He declined the invitation, as it was an "uncertain outcome."

Lokantha was born in Italy in 1897, and was original named Salvatore Cioffi. Kamala wrote: "He had received a bachelor's degree in science from Columbia University in the United States, but at twenty-eight he was ordained as a Buddhist monk in Burma and went to practice meditation in the Himalayas and in Sri Lanka. In a lecture he gave in Bangkok, Venerable Lokantha announced his plan to propagate Buddhism in Europe and the U.S. and to recruit 'lion-hearted monks and novices' to go with him to study in India so that they could preach in English.



Lokanatha Bhikkhu

For the first two years in Suan Mokkh, Buddhadasa lived in solitude and isolation. The third year, he returned to normal monastic practice, and allowed other forest monks to join with him to practice.

Ajahn Panyananda came to spend rains retreat with him this year. They became life-long friends, and "joined together" in an effort to reform Buddhism. Panyananda was about five years younger than Buddhadasa and was still a young monk at the time. They stayed in touch throughout their lives and cooperated on numerous projects. Panyananda became the most famous preacher in Thailand, whereas Buddhadasa exerted influence primarily through his writings.



Ajahn Panyananda

In 1934 Buddhadasa published a biography of the Buddha, *The Buddha's Life in His Own Words*. The book generated a sensation because it left out miracles and legend stories of latter commentaries. The Board of Education of *Mahamakut* University in Bangkok, accepted the biography as a text book, and became the most popular biography of Buddha.

Sulak Sivarak said that many Thais were shocked by the biography of the Buddha. "I had been brought up conservatively and my temple was conservative. Buddhadasa was very pro-democracy. He wanted to rewrite the history of Buddha without using royal language. That was very progressive for the time, and for me. He shocked a lot of people."

In 1935, the Dhammadana Group moved to Chaiya (six kilometers from Phum Riang) due to the extension of the railway. Buddhadasa regularly walked four-times every month, to present teaching to the group.

The following year, Buddhadasa and his brother Dhammadasa founded a school for children in the Chaiya city, with 55 children. Within ten years the school served 500 local children, with modern Buddhist education.

Buddhadasa's writings, through his book and magazines, began to attract attention from Buddhist authorities in Bangkok. That same year, *Somdet Phra Buddhaghosajariya (Charoen Yanavarathera)* of *Wat Thepsirin*, who was also the Chairman of the Sangha Council, traveled to southern Thailand and paid a private visit to Buddhadasa in his remote forest hermitage, in order to gain first hand impression of the young monk.

Then in 1938, Buddhadasa was visited by a group of influential ministers from the Ministry of Justice, who wanted to study the dhamma with him. They began to provide financial and moral backing to Buddhadasa's enterprise to reform Buddhism, and became lifelong advocates of his ideas.

Dr Sanya Dhammasakdi, one of the judges in this group, later became Thailand's only civilian Prime Minister in the brief 1973-76 period of liberal democracy.

Phraya Ladpli Dhammapragalbha, director of the court of appeals, arranged for Buddhadasa to give annual teachings to prospective judges.

In 1939 Buddhadasa, wrote the long article titled "Answering the Questions of the Priest" in which he strongly criticized the idea of a personal god. This was in response to an Italian missionary priest who had been living and working in Thailand for many years, trying to convert Buddhists to Christianity.

1940 was a turning point for Buddhadasa, when his work began to attract attention from authorities in Bangkok. The Buddhist Association of Thailand invited him to give a lecture to students in Bangkok.

The Buddhist Association of Thailand (BAT) was the most important venue for Buddhist intellectuals of that time. BAT was established by a group of lay Buddhists in 1933, and included people from every class and background. The organization was founded to promote Buddhist studies and practice, and propagate Buddhism internationally. The organization regularly held public lectures concerning Buddhist topics. They also published interesting Buddhist books.

Buddhadasa accepted the invitation, and gave a two hour presentation titled "The Way to Reaching Buddha-Dhamma" before an audience 3,000 students who came to hear him speak.

Buddhadasa shocked the public with his talk, primarily because gave the talk as a lecture in a lecture hall rather than a temple, and gave his talk standing behind a podium, speaking to an audience seated in chairs. According to Buddhist custom and vinaya, a monk may only speak Dhamma while seated, to an audience of devotees seated on the ground. Buddhadasa's presentation seemed shockingly unconventional and modern, in the 1940s.

The first lecture was well received by the new intellectuals of Bangkok - both monks and laymen. Consequently, many monks and lay people began to visit Suan Mokkh to confer with Buddhadasa. Buddhadasa became the symbol of a modern lecturer-monk who preached on up-to-date topics relevant to the current situation and socio-political problems in Thailand. He was the first monk to be accepted by the democratic and socialist sections of the Thai intelligentsia.

Part 3

Buddhadasa Begins His Life Work

In the 1940's, Buddhadasa slowly began to emerge as a religious teacher on the national stage, attracting attention from the emerging educated middle class, intellectuals, civic leaders, and students. Thailand grappled to come to terms with the crisis of World War II and the Japanese invasion of the country.

The 1941 Sangha Act, passed by Prime Minister Phibun, gave more creativity, diversity and democracy to Buddhist groups. The Sangha Act of 1941 established a more democratic, decentralized approach to government of the sangha, allowing new, innovative, and diverse ideas to emerge among the monks in Thailand, in order to meet changing conditions of the local communities.

The Act stipulated a Supreme Patriarch, but his decisions were subject to the approval of the members of the various committees. The Supreme Patriarch had very limited power. The new experiment in democracy allowed for the fresh ideas and approaches advocated by Buddhadasa, and the newly educated middle classes in the universities were ready to listen. For twenty years, from 1941-1963, Buddhist monks had greater freedom in experimentation and development of Buddhism in Thailand. The Act remained in force for 21 years, until 1962.

Ajahn Buddhadasa flourished under the new spirit of freedom. In 1943 he relocated Suan Mokkh to a 124-acre mountain, five kilometers outside Chaiya. The Suan Mokkh became the vortex of activity and influence that expanded in ever-growing circle throughout Thai society.

Throughout the 40's, 50's, 60's, Buddhadasa traveled extensively, constantly teaching, sometimes five times per day, in such locations as Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, the ecclesiastical universities, ministry of Justice, Ministry of education, Teacher Colleges and various temples, where he was in great demand as a speaker to give sermons and lectures.

"We cannot overturn the land," Buddhadasa said at the time. "We can only do our work, to the best of our ability, and accept the results in due course. We only hope that our devotion to the religion might inspire more people."

The period immediately after World War II was a very busy time for Buddhadasa. Stability was restored in Thailand, and Buddhadasa worked to promote Buddhist solutions for social problems facing the nation, rebuilding from the war. He published *Buddhadhamma and Peace* in 1946, and reminded the people that "peace arises when human beings abandon craving and desires which lead to conflict."

"This world lacks peace because it is unable to grasp the thing which is close at hands, so close it is actually in hand, that is, within everything," he said. Personal transformation leads to social peace. "The Buddha's purpose was world peace."

The following year, in 1947, Buddhadasa gave a series of lectures on the meaning of democracy, exploring the role of Buddhism in the post-war Constitutional Monarchy government. His lecture,

Buddhadhama and the Spirit of Democracy, was attended by *Pridi Panomyong*, leader of the democratic 1932 revolution.

Pridi was inspired by Buddhadasa's ideas, and invited Buddhadasa to his private residence to continue discussions on the subject of democracy. Buddhadasa insisted that democracy was a moral order, rather than a political philosophy. A Buddhist-politics is based in morality, not in power, exploitation, and self-interest, like modern liberal democracy.



Pridi Panomyong

Buddhadasa explored the interface between Buddhism and Democracy, in his series of lectures. He said Democracy is "morality" not "politics." "Freedom, equality, fraternity are determined by Nature," he said, "If we are to love one another, live together in harmony, and survive in this world peacefully, Nature merely determines that there must be these three conditions. All people will be happy when they can think as they please, are equal, have fraternity," he said.

"Freedom, equality, and fraternity exist in Buddhism and are modeled by Lord Buddha's behavior. Buddhist morality embodies democracy. There is no need for fear of turning Buddhism into politics."

"Liberal democracy is totally free and doesn't define clearly what freedom it means. This allows mental-defilement in people to take advantage of the situation to be free according to the power of defilements. Although the ideal is set out in a philosophically beautiful way, in practice it doesn't work. Philosophy doesn't have the strength to stop the defilements. Thus, we must be very careful about liberal democracy for it can be very dangerous. Anyone can claim freedom, both fools and sages. If they don't get what they want, they will say there is no freedom."

Pridi was very enthusiastic about Buddhadasa's ideas, and planned to establish a second Suan Mokkh

in his home province of Ayutthaya and asked Buddhadasa to "write hymns" which school children might sing, to promote the ideas of democracy.

In 1949-1951 Buddhadasa was appointed as the fifth regional leader for dhamma propagation throughout the 14 provinces of the Southern Thailand. As fulfilment of his duties, he traveled around the southern provinces giving dhamma talks to civil servants and local people, on marathon preaching tours. He sometimes visited fourteen provinces in thirty-five days. He often gave five talks per day.

"I traveled with the freight." Buddhadasa laughed. "Our schedules had been mapped out in advance and the arrival dates had already been fixed. I ate my small meals in a boxcar with the animals. At every place we stopped, I was scheduled to give a sermon. Sometimes I gave as many as five sermons a day. I gave a talk in the morning. After I had one meal of the day, I delivered another talk to sub district chief and village headmen. In the afternoon I gave another damma talk to a group of civil servants. In the evening I preached to prisoners in the jail. Around 9 o'clock at night I gave another sermon to village folk. I almost died. But I was strong then, and I did not lose my voice. At every place we stopped, I spent the night at a local wat."

In 1949, Ajahn Buddhadasa was invited to found a teaching center at Wat Umong in the town of Chiang Mai, located in the northern region of Thailand. Obligations prevented Buddhadasa from taking up residence in the monastery as guiding teacher, but he sent his colleague Ajahn Panyananda, to establish a temple there.

Wat Umong in Chiang Mai became the northern center for spreading Buddhadasa's fresh approach and ideas. The monastery at Wat Umong is one of the oldest in Chiang Mai, dating back to 1300 A.D. An early king of Chiang Mai established the forest temple for a hermit monk named *Thera Jan*.

The monastery was eventually abandoned, though Japanese troops had a stronghold here during World War II. When peace was established as the end of WWII, Prince Sirorot rebuilt the monastery. When the restoration was complete, he invited Buddhadasa Bhikkhu to take up residence in the monastery as the guiding teacher.

Ajahn Pannananda and his followers transformed the deserted monastery into a forest monastery similar to Suan Mokkh, and began to spread Buddhadasas' methods and ideas throughout the northern providences of Thailand.



Ajahn Buddhadasa (second from right) at Wat Umong.

Ajahn Panyananda became a very renowned preacher and teacher in the following years. "By using his own experiences and observations, Ajahn Panya explained the Dhamma in fluid and spontaneous stories and anecdotes. "His lively lectures captured the imaginations of the younger generation, particularly schoolchildren. He was able to draw young audiences away from the theatres in town. When the teacher first arrived in Chiang Mai, he was unknown, but after nine years in Chiang Mai, his reputation as an outspoken preacher had spread far and wide. He was often invited to give Dhamma talks in Bangkok," Kamala records.



Ajahn Buddhadasa stood in front of the stupa at Kusinara.

In 1955, Buddhadasa took a three-month pilgrimage to India, to the birthplace of Buddha. The Indian pilgrimage had a profound effect on the mind of Buddhadasa. While in India, he took pilgrimages to study and understand the historical background of Buddhism and Indian culture. He visited the four important places of Buddha's life, Lumbini where Buddha was born, Buddhagaya where he attained enlightenment, Sarnath where he first began teaching, and Kusinara where he passed away.

Buddhadasa was fascinated by Indian culture, and the insights it provided into understanding the life and teaching of Lord Buddha. While in India, he was surprised when he noticed the mango trees, and wondered why there were more mango trees than any other.

He remembered King Ashoka's rock edict which decreed that everyone should plant various kinds of trees, and supposed that the mangos were the result of King Ashoka's edict.

Buddhadasa's workload continued to increase in 1956, when Phraya Ladpli Dhammapragalbha, director of the court of appeals, arranged for Buddhadasa to give annual teachings to prospective judges.

The first conference consisted of 10 lectures over a three week period. These lectures were

subsequently edited and arranged into what became "The Handbook for Mankind", one of Buddhadasa's most influential, and often-published books. His annual lecture series for judges continued for the next 14 years.

In 1956, Buddhadasa traveled to Rangoon, Burma, as a representative of the Thai sangha, to attend the Buddhajayanti, the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's *parinibbana*. There he delivered a speech "Certain Wonderful Characteristics of Theravada Buddhism."

A new dark age of turmoil spread across Thailand in 1957, when a military coup, led by Field Marshall Sarit, overthrew the government to establish a military dictatorship. Sarit Thanarat was Prime Minister until his death in 1963. Sarit's regime was the most repressive and authoritarian in modern Thai history. He dissolved parliament, banned all other political parties, imposed strict censorship of the press.

Sarit established a National Economic Development board to foster economic and development throughout Thailand, and promote market economy, and American-style consumerism and development. His new motto was: "Work is money. Money is work. Both bring happiness."

To Buddhadasa, the government slogan "Work is money. Money is work. Both bring happiness" was wrong-view, and encouraged more greed and desire.

During the Sarit regime, Buddhadasa was often under suspicion of being a communist sympathizer because he was openly critical of the government development program, saying it would undermine the traditional values of Buddhism, rooted in generosity-morality-wisdom, rather than the profit-motive. "Worship of money will eventually lead to corruption." Buddhadasa predicted.

"The reason a person is incapable of doing his job perfectly, faultlessly, is that he is always far too concerned with getting something, always motivated entirely by his own desires. As a result, he is not the master of himself and cannot be consistently good, honest, and fair. In every case of failure and ruin the root cause is slavery to desire."

Money does not bring happiness, Buddhadasa said. People should reduce desire and greed in order to see clearly with wisdom. "In becoming involved in things, we must do so mindfully. Our reactions must not be motivated by craving. The result will follow naturally. The Buddha... was completely free from desire, yet succeeded in doing many things far more useful than what any of us is capable of doing,"

Buddhadasa often had public conflict with advocates of modern development schemes. *Kukrit Pramoj* said that Buddhadasa's teaching would harm the development of the country: "Because the person who has no cravings or attachments, the person whose mind is freed, holds to nothing as himself or as his own, he is in no condition to be able to develop the country, develop the land, or even to develop himself."

Buddhadasa was sensitive to the criticism and said he wanted the people to work for the common good, but to work free from suffering, with a happy mind. "I want the people to work with less suffering and to have completely successful results. By what means will we attain this? Will it not be done with liberated mind, or would confused mind be better?"

"There is no evidence (for the idea) that those who (have liberated mind) will not work. The Lord Buddha and the arahants worked more than us, sacrificed more than us, and became more tired than us, and all their work was for helping others rather than self-interest." Buddhadasa said.

"I have tried to do what is best, to follow just what the Lord Buddha suggested, that the lay people should know about voidness (sunnata) and void mind as is appropriate for them ...It is clearly written in Pali, in the blessed scriptures, the Lord Buddha said sunnata is a matter having eternal benefit in helping the laity."

"I want everyone to realize that Dhamma is duty - to see that duty itself is Dhamma," Buddhadasa said. "The result of work, of duties, are never lost...but happiness is already achieved when we do our duties, including the little ones."

"If you have truly learned and applied this fact, you will be contented; and contented, you will be happy," he said. "We do our best, our very best. We act as correctly as we can, we are satisfied as we can be, and we are happy...That is all there is to do. Dhamma is duty, duty is Dhamma."

Work should be an expression of love and duty toward others, not out of desire for self-indulgence.

"Please never doubt that work holds the highest honor

In revealing the true value of human life.

If enjoyed, too, it makes the heart blossom.

Before long, through work, one will understand Dhamma profoundly.

Work itself is the very practice of Dhamma.

All kinds of work, done as practice, are truly valuable.

Just as a sharpshooter can bag a sack full of birds with a single shot.

In devotion to work, the worker gains much wisdom."

In 1958, Buddhadasa was appointed abbot of Wat Phra Borommathat, a royal temple in Chaiya.

The Vietnam War escalated throughout the decade of the sixties, and drew Thailand into the intense conflicts of the Cold War. Buddhadasa was very concerned about the increasing violence and social turmoil, and proclaimed Buddhist teachings with ever increasing urgency, as an antidote to the suffering caused by the war.

In 1963, Field Marshal Thanom became the military dictator of Thailand. A staunch anti-Communist, he continued and intensified the pro-American and anti-Communist politics throughout the decade of unrest, which helped to ensure massive US economic and financial aid during the Vietnam War.

Thailand became an important hub for American Military Troops to launch military expeditions.

From Thailand, American Air Force planes took off and bombed North and South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in support of the war effort in Southeast Asia.

Thailand was pulled ever deeper into the geopolitical mess of Cold War, as the sixties developed.

During this time Buddhist monks were routinely threatened into refraining from political comment, a silencing compounded by decades of cultural belief persuading most monks that politics and other worldly affairs' were none of their concern. The government tried to control the monks, afraid that outspoken monks like Buddhadasa were possibly communist-sympathizers. Countless monks were caught up in the purges, which seemed to threaten Buddhadasa himself.

One of Thailand's most senior monks, Venerable Phimontham, abbot of the Wat Mahathat monastery of Bangkok, was arrested and declared a "threat to national security" for supposedly supporting communists. He was forcibly disrobed, and jailed.

Venerable Phimontham's only crime had been to teach vipassanā meditation to laypeople, which attracted large numbers of students and working class citizens.

Ajahn Buddhadasa's teaching's attracted the suspicious scrutiny of the new authoritarian government, because he was searching for Buddhist answers for social problems facing the nation.

In the 1960's, Buddhadasa articulated his socio-political position in terms of "dhammocracy":the social and political order should follow the law of Dhamma - the teachings of the Buddha. Later on in the atmosphere of the student led Revolution in Thailand from 1973 to 1976, Buddhadasa presented his unique theory of "Dhammic Socialism" (Dhammika-sangkhom-niyom).

Buddhadasa argued that Buddhism, and all world religions, are essentially socialistic in nature. Buddha was born into this world to help all beings -- not to benefit any one person or even himself, he said.

Social teachings of Buddha are not "political" but rather are "moral", he said. "Western thinkers from ancient times have said that everyone once born is inescapably a social being, an economic being, a political being. But here we must say that this isn't enough, isn't sufficiently adequate formulation. So we ask to add another point. We must also be moral beings."

"Society that makes people happy is socialism" he said. Society that makes people unhappy is anti-social.

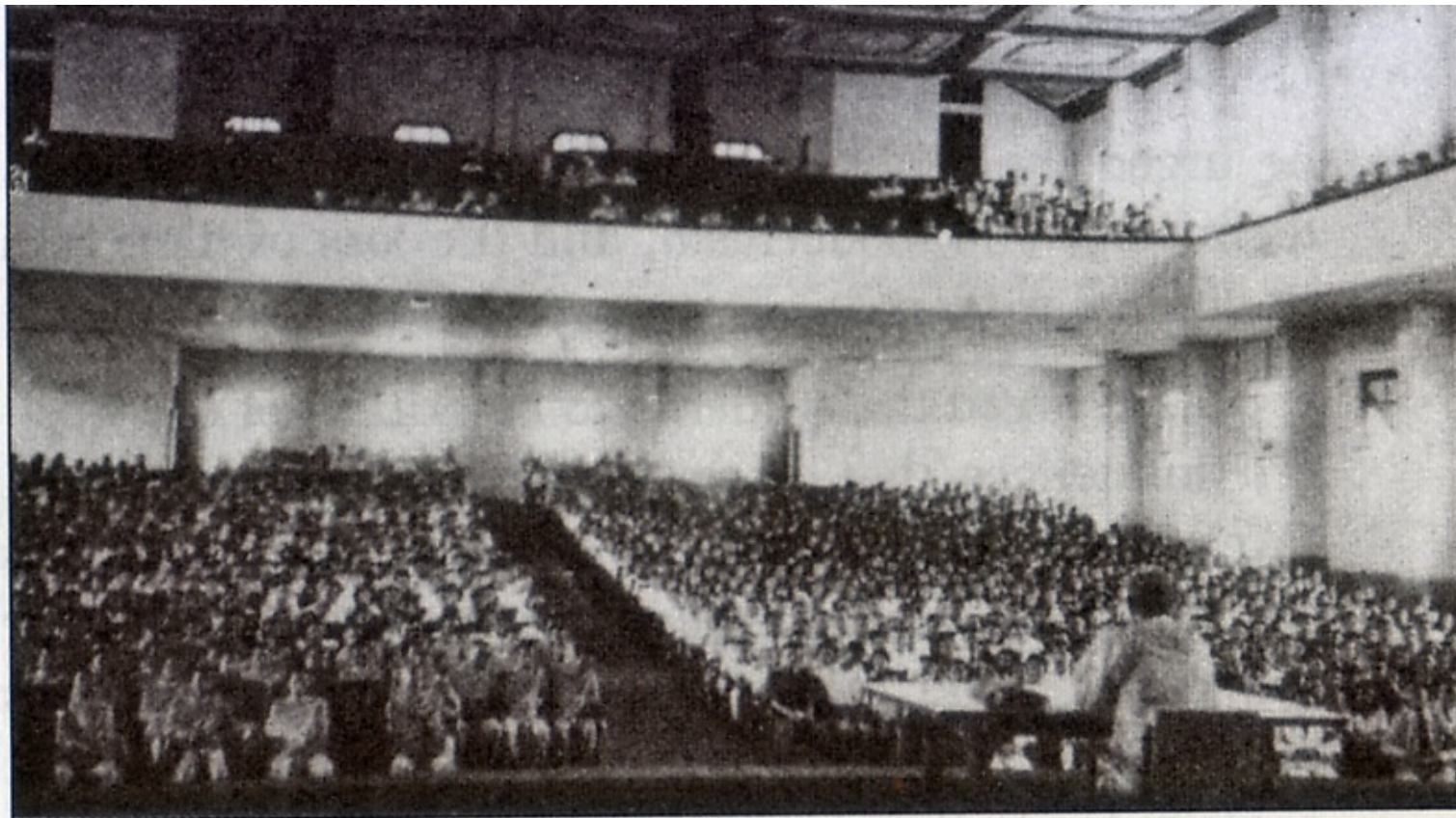
He urged Thai Buddhists to find common ground, rather than become polarized with the opposing forces in the Cold War. Taking sides in political polarization is immoral and selfish, he said.

By 1966, the political atmosphere in Thailand became toxic and dangerous as the Cold War and the Vietnam War escalated. Buddhadasa cut back on traveling outside Suan Mokkh due to his health. He began a program of teaching every Saturday, which attracted visitors from all over Thailand.

In January 1966, Ajan Buddhadasa spoke directly to the students, when he gave a talk at Thammasat University in Bangkok, in which he taught the students how to be fearless and think for themselves. He

said the essence of Buddha's teaching was non-self, void-mind.

He taught the students how to apply Buddha's teachings to the real problems of their everyday lives as students. "Forget about yourself when you are studying for an examination," he said. "Leave only concentration, and pierce through the questions. A mind free of any 'me' or 'mine' will pass or fail immediately comes up agile and clean. It remembers immediately and thinks precisely; so sitting for an examination with proper concentration will produce good results. This is how to apply empty-mind, or non-clinging, when sitting for an examination. In this way you get good results."



Buddhadasa gave a lecture to students in Bangkok.

The two talks Buddhadasa gave at the Thammasat University were published as 'Buddhadhamma for Students'. Many students were returning to Buddhism in search of answers and possibilities for changing society, not provided by their modern Western-style education. In the face of rapid social change, at times bordering on chaos, they sought a non-violent approach to the issues and injustices of their times. Buddhadasa gave a talk to university students in Bangkok in which he urged them not to become infatuated by western technology and modernism, and the loss of their own traditional wisdom.

He urged the students to be critical of the western influences that were penetrating Asian culture. "Westerners have their own knowledge traditions about earning a living to feed the mouths and fill their stomachs. . . The foreigners worship technology. It is in their every breath. It is a matter of survival as it contributes to the material well being. Thus the white people become obsessed with it. There is no room for spiritual development. It has disappeared. Those who have once professed some faiths have now discarded their faiths. God is dead. There is no need to believe in anything. The white people have only technology left for them. . . This technology makes anything possible, but spiritually, there is nothing but darkness, no enlightenment."

The white people "have become reckless enough as to surrender themselves and become enslaved to material things, thus driving them towards rapid 'progress' in technology innovations.

"It is most dismaying that good qualities of our culture have been lost, and we are now actually descending into an age of darkness," he said. "We used to have happiness and enjoy bliss and peace (in Thailand), even though we had no cars, no air planes, and other (modern machines) and yet we had the peace and happiness of humanity"

"This changed when we make contact with the white people, and it did not take us long to accept modern living. We copied them. Gradually we became infatuated with their technology, and discarded our spiritually enlightened culture, our original cultural heritage."

Ajahn Buddhadasa helped the young people explore the powerful possibilities of Buddha's teaching, in responding to the social problems of the time. He urged the students to return to the original principles of Buddha. He showed how the timeless teachings could be applied to non-violent social change. Buddhadasa became the most important Buddhist thinker of the time, in the eyes of the Thai students.

"Buddha taught us to walk the Middle Way," Buddhadasa said to the students. "He taught self-help. He taught us to be familiar with the law of causality and to adjust to the cause appropriately for the desired result to follow. He taught as the principal of practice 'Avoid Evil, do Good. Purify the Mind.' He reminded us that all compounded things are impermanent and perpetually flowing, and that we must be well-equipped with heedfulness."

Part 4

International Stature of Buddhadasa

In the 1960s, Ajahn Buddhadasa began to attract an international following, with growing numbers of western youth finding their ways to Suan Mokkh to learn meditation. Suan Mokkh was listed in tourist guide books.

A new movement of "Engaged Buddhists" began to look to Buddhadasa's teaching for guidance in applying Buddhist principles to social problems.

In 1967, Buddhadasa met the Dalai Lama for the first time, during the Dalai Lama's first Trip outside India, when he traveled to Bangkok to visit Thailand's King Bhumipol. During his flight to Thailand, the Dalai Lama looked out the window and saw an American B-52 bomber, and later recalled in his memoirs: "I was moved when I realized that the theatre of human cruelty extended even to ten thousand meters over the earth."

While in Bangkok, the Dalai Lama visited Wat Bovoranives where he had an audience with the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, *Phra Sasanasobhon*. The Dalai Lama expressed a desire to study vipassana meditation at a Thai monastery, and was suggested that he study with Buddhadasa.



*Dalai Lama and Ajahn
Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh.*

In 1967, Buddhadasa Bhikku was invited to deliver three influential lectures on Inter-religious relations, as part of the Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lecture, in Chaing Mai. He compared Christian and compatible Buddhist concepts, and how they each explain the same basic truths. These lectures were compiled in the book "Christianity and Buddhism".

Buddhadasa explained that, on a deeper level, Christians and Buddhists were possibly talking about the same thing, the same experience. Different religions are trying to lead people to the same universally valid experience. Buddhadasa said that terms like the Buddhist "Dhamma" and the Christian "God" are, when properly interpreted, just different ways of referring to the same truth.

In 1968, he began a new project, teaching Buddhist missionaries to go abroad.

Foreigners discover Suan Mokkh

In the 1970s, Buddhadasa's teachings began to embrace not only Thailand, but the whole world, as growing numbers of Westerners from Europe, North America began to make their ways to Suan Mokkh in a search for inner peace. Thousands of disaffected youth were looking for meaningful spiritual practice, and turning to Buddhism for answers to their questions.

Some few ordained as monks and lived in meditation centers in Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka. Buddhadasa asked the Western tourists and students to take a second look at their own heritage, before it was too late. "Even the white people are beginning to realize that the East has something special and lofty in cultural and spiritual values ... some intelligent white people make an effort to come to us in order to learn a way of meditation practice known as Vipassana, aiming to overcome craving and desire. This is real Buddhism."

In 1971, Buddhadasa announced three new objectives. "To try to make everybody reach the heart of their religion, no matter what religion that person follows. To create understanding among religions in order to live together peacefully in the world. To join forces with all religions in order to turn the world away from materialism."

1972

In 1972, the Dalai Lama, aged 37, travelled to Chaiya, Thailand, to Wat Suan Mokkh to pay respect and meet with the Buddhadasa, then aged 66. The Dalai Lama arrived, accompanied by two lamas.

During the visit, Ajahn Buddhadasa invited the Dalai Lama to give a Dharma talk to the monks, outdoors under trees in the area reserved for teachings. About 40 monks and novices of the Theravada tradition, some nuns and a handful of lay people, came to listen to the Dalai Lama talk about the 'meaning of emptiness, in the Buddhist tradition.' The inquisitive monks listened with great interest.

"Who is the Dalai Lama? Is the Dalai Lama the robes? No. Is the Dalai Lama the voice? No. Is the Dalai Lama the face? No. Is the Dalai Lama the form? No. Is the Dalai Lama the name? No. Where is the Dalai Lama? There is no such thing, no such being, as the Dalai Lama."

At the end of his talk, the monks bowed to the Dalai Lama, as Buddhadasa looked on, smiling with the satisfaction at the display of unity between Theravada and Tibetan monks.

The Dalai Lama was very interested in the Theravada tradition of Insight Meditation (Vipassanā). During the visit, Buddhadasa and the Dalai Lama discussed Anapanasati Sutta, and the possibility of establishment of a Tibetan House at Suan Mokkh, where Tibetan monks might learn Insight meditation under the guidance of Buddhadasa.

1973-1976: Struggling with Democracy

Buddhadasa attracted increasing interest from Thai intellectuals and students, during the social upheavals of Thailand in the 1970s. Ajahn Buddhadasa received a lot of attention as Thailand grappled with Thailand's brief period of democracy between 1973-1976, when Dr Sanya Thammasakdi, the Rector of Thammasat University, was appointed as the civilian Prime Minister in 1973. Thammasakdi was a lifelong supporter of Ajahn Buddhadasa, having first studied with the Buddhadasa back in 1938.

The early 70's was an age of growing political awareness in an increasingly educated middle-class and demands for economic progress, and relief from the Vietnam War, which was escalating in intensity.

For the first time the urban middle class, led by the students had gained the apparent blessing of the king for a transition to democracy. During the social changes, Thailand became more moderate, less anti-communist, and friendly toward its neighbors. The new popular governments quickly called for withdrawal of U.S. forces from Thailand and the establishment of normal relations with the communist countries. The Thai leaders realized that they had to try to live with communist neighbors in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Buddhadasa began a period of his most political thought, in order to help Thai society manoeuvre its way through troubled political waters, giving talks on socialism and social reforms in talks to students, with titles like - "A Socialist Type of Democracy", "Socialism According to Religious Principles", "The Type of Socialism That Can Help the World".

Buddhadasa was very concerned, as Marxist Socialism spread throughout Asia, and the socialist/communist ideas were hotly debated, and violently imposed, as the Vietnam War reached its climax, dragging every nation into the fires of war, and threatening Thailand's stability.

Buddhadasa was concerned with poverty and material deprivation, oppression exploitation, violence, which is an obstacle to spiritual practice and happiness - and as driving the young people into the arms of the Communist party.

Buddhadasa published his advice to students and activists, and hoped to provide a Buddhist compromise between polarized society, by applying Buddhist solutions to the social problems dividing the country. He called for people to consider their duties and responsibilities as individuals, to their religion, government, nation, and their fellows, and to the common good.

When the people turned away from their Buddhist traditions of generosity and wisdom, social and political problems arise as a result. The solution for social conflict is regeneration of the wisdom traditions, he said. "Our ancestors taught us to act so that all lives can live together harmoniously in kindness and friendliness, in line with the standard of Nature."

Teaching true Buddhism is the antidote to both communism and modern materialist consumer culture he said: "When the country is full of people who are destitute and desperately poor, and farmers who are poor, starving and weak, how can the nation be secure? They, the pillars of the nation, will be worn away,,"

Greed is the cause of suffering in capitalist societies as well, he noted. "We are experiencing the problem that these evil minded capitalists are seeking the blood of humanity to such an extent that the

poor must rise up to fight and destroy their enemies, flooding the world with blood."

But communism is not the solution either. "Communism cannot be the same as Buddhism. The main point and principle of Buddhism do not teach that we should acquire anything as being ours."

"We have been born in a primitive, underdeveloped country, although that is in fact only true of the minority. But we follow the backsides of countries which are developed or run after materialism. We are people who are able to become *paccekabuddhas*, but we don't want to. We still run after the tail end of the progress of those who are materially developed. Why do we worship the material side of development?...It is more, more, more, because we don't know that it is dangerous to humanity,"

"The Buddha himself said, "The *Tathagata* is born in the world for the happiness of all beings." ... it is proper for us to sacrifice ourselves to play a leading role in the affairs of the whole world as the Buddha intended us to do....I am of the opinion that Dhamma is a political ideology," he said.

Buddhists have a duty to be engaged in worldly affairs, he said, out of compassion for the world. "Religion doesn't only mean the actions of individuals to pass beyond suffering. We must still help others to pass beyond suffering also. That is, we must have loving-kindness towards our fellow man and towards all sentient beings, because if we are completely without loving-kindness we will be a self-centered person."

Nevertheless, he was critical of politics and urged Buddhists to be cautious. Politics will not solve the problems of the society. "Politics is defined as performing duties so that the world exists happily. (Politics) is arraigning or acting so that the many, many people who live in this world truly live together in peace and happiness....Dhamma, which is politics, will make the world pass beyond *kilesa*, harmfulness, evil and the self-centeredness of 'I' and 'mine.'"

October 6, 1976 - Massacre

The brief experiment of democracy came to an end in 1976 with a military coup which replaced the elected civilian government with a military dictatorship. The military appointed Tanin Kraivixien, a hard line anti-communist and a royal favorite, as prime minister.

Bangkok was overrun with political violence, and in the climate of increasing repression, many students fled to the jungles and joined the Communist Party of Thailand. Others went back to their villages.

The victory of communists in the neighboring countries of Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam created a climate of crises in Thailand. The new government attacked left-wing activists, communist sympathizers and progressive students due to the fear of communism.

Buddhadasa was dismayed by the growing conflagration of war, that threatened to engulf the whole world, and chose to celebrate his 70th birthday by talking about "the world that has gone awry".

He analyzed the causes, prescribed ways in which individuals could survive the turmoil that threatened to engulf Thailand, and called for all religions to come together and find ways to make

peace in the world.

"The global crisis originates in the kitchen, the bedroom," Buddhadasa said. "A single person's lust could cause a whole world war" he said, because people are driven in greed to feed sensations.

"The world has become smaller," he continued. "It has 'shrunk' thanks to scientific advances (in communications and transportation). When problems arise in one country, they inevitably spill over into another. There is no assembly of true representatives (of the people); there is only a gathering of the selfish-minded who keep fighting one another. How, then, can you call for solidarity from the people?"

Buddhadasa appealed for the people of the world to return to their spiritual roots, as an antidote to the poison of materialism. Spirituality remains the ultimate solution, he said, as long as people know how to apply the "heart of their own religion rightly, adequately, and in a timely fashion".

"We can cultivate dhamma to be like our armor" he said. "Our minds won't be susceptible to the fangs of a world that has turned upside down. We won't have to cry or go without sleep. We won't laugh when we win something, nor cry when we lose it. Our minds will be above loss and gain; they will transcend time - time that has become valuable because of our desires."

Many people blame religion as a source of conflict, but on the contrary, religious traditions can be the solution to conflict, he said. The religious traditions must purify and reform themselves, Buddhadasa said, a stripping away the unnecessary accretions of history. Only then will the true radiance of spiritual traditions emphasis on selfless compassion become a light in the world.

"If dhamma (morality) doesn't return, the world will head toward calamity."

He did not like the class-conflict model of socialism. "Now the time has come that there is a socialism which conflicts with natural truth. Some individuals and groups behave as rebels against Nature and separate into two sides. One side has the power of money and the other side has the power of labor. Separating humanity into groups, then setting them against each other as enemies, is not the wish of Nature, nor is it the wish of any religion."

In 1977, Buddhadasa invited the Dalai Lama to visit Suan Mokkh. Ajahn Buddhadasa encouraged Theravadians to be more open to other Buddhist traditions, and work together for world harmony. The Dalai Lama made two visits to Thailand before opposition from the Chinese government made it become politically impossible.

Ajahn Buddhadasa first met the Dalai Lama in Bangkok in 1964. A few years later, the Dalai Lama visited Suan Mokkh mainly to discuss Anapanasati (mindfulness-with-breathing meditation) and Insight meditation. The Dalai Lama felt that Tibetan Buddhists needed more practice cultivating Samadhi and saw the Theravada Buddhist tradition as the principle resource for this.

During their visit, they discussed the possibility of Tibetan monks coming to live at Suan Mokkh and Ajahn Buddhadasa began to draw plans to build a Tibetan gompa in one corner of the monastery, to house the Tibetan guests. Unfortunately, due to Chinese opposition, this never came to fruition.

Buddhadasa began giving monthly Dhamma talks on national radio in 1978 and continued the series of talks for the next fourteen years, until his death.

In 1980, the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand visited him at Suan Mokkh and *Mahachulaongkorn* Buddhist University of Mahanikaya Order named him an Honorary Doctorate of Buddhism. Then in 1989, King Bhumimol gave him the honorific name Phra *Dhammaghosacariya*. With this "seal of approval" from the King of Thailand, Ajahn Buddhadasa became a recognized national treasure, beyond reproach of those who considered him "controversial."

In his twilight years, he lamented the development of Suan Mokkh from a remote jungle to a developed meditation center attracting international visitors. He missed the wilderness of the natural setting.

"During the earlier days of my departing the village life for the forest life, everything gave me something to think about and I had so many new feelings that I could not record all of them in writing. Such scenes, with profound meaning and difficult problems, are presented by the natural settings when the wilderness has not been altered from the original natural condition at all. Because Suan Mokkh was later modified little by little every year, the cumulative result over the years led to a divorce from some natural aspects that used to give me painful lessons at present, the surrounding only gives coolness and comfort but hardly gives any thought-provoking lesson for a study of real nature..."

"Therefore the place of Dhamma practice is important. We must study directly from nature, and this is possible only when we manage to live close to nature as much as possible, much like what I did at the beginning of Suan Mokkh. We will take this as a rule for setting up new meditation centers in the future, so that they are close to nature forever and completely separate from literary activities, advertisement, and guest welcoming."

Final Teaching: Peace On May 25, 1993, Ajahn Buddhadasa had a stroke. That morning, he said he was feeling ill, gave the keys to the abbot and retired to his room.

During the weeks before his final illness, he said he was tired of living, and ready to pass away. "The Lord Buddha attained nibbana when he was 80," he said. "I'm already 87. I don't know why I'm still alive. It's not good to live longer than the Buddha...My eyes are really blurred. The doctor says that blood vessels in my brain are constricted."

"On 25 May 1993 Buddhadasa woke at his usual rising time of 4.00 A.M. and for a few minutes he wrote notes for a discourse to be given on his eighty-seventh birthday in a couple of day's time. But he told his attendant that he felt ill and returned to bed. A couple of hours later Buddhadasa told the abbot of Suan Mokkh, Phra Khru Palat Silawat, that he was afraid his "old ailment was coming back." Not long afterwards he said, 'I can't say anything. My tongue is getting hard.' Buddhadasa's speech became increasingly indistinct in the following period, but he continued making an effort to talk.

His final words before losing consciousness were, "na pathavi na apo na tejo na vayo...." (no earth, no water, no fire, no wind) which he repeated again and again. He also said, "I don't feel that it's me. There is no gain and no loss. Peace. Well being." He then fell into a coma from which he never

regained consciousness.

He was cremated on September 28, upon Golden Buddha Hill at his forest retreat, Suan Mokkh. Ajahn Panyananda said, "From this moment on, Buddhadasa will live in all our hearts, may we all continue to perform our duty to the Dhamma in his place."

Buddhadasa didn't want Pali chanting at this funeral service, Panyananda said. "The people who listen to Pali can't understand it. The person who chants doesn't translate the meaning for us to hear. He wanted to reform the way we make merit."

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