

ENGAGED BUDDHISM

Buddhist Liberation
Movements in Asia



Edited by
Christopher S. Queen *and* Sallie B. King

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Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: Life and Society through the Natural Eyes of Voidness



Santikaro Bhikkhu

I offer this life and body to the Lord Buddha.
I am the slave of the Buddha, the Buddha is my master.
For this reason, I am called "Buddhadasa."*

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu is a Thai Buddhist monk whose dedication in service to the Lord Buddha has produced the largest and most innovative body of work of any bhikkhu in recent Thai history. He has been a pioneer in the application of Buddha-Dhamma to the realities of the modern world during the recent decades of rampant modernization and economic growth and has forthrightly criticized the immorality and selfishness of many modern social structures. Further, he has been Thailand's most vocal proponent of open-mindedness toward other religions.

Buddhadasa means "Servant of the Buddha"¹ and *bhikkhu* refers to a monk, a person who has left home in order to fully undertake Buddhist spiritual training, *dhamma-vinaya*. While *buddhadasa* itself is a generic term, a certain young Thai bhikkhu took it as his name when he began a unique experiment within Thai Buddhism called *Suan Mokkh* (The Garden of Liberation). In the more than sixty years since, he has initiated and inspired many innovations in the teaching and application of Buddha-Dhamma. Primarily, as he sees it, his life's work has been to restore the Buddha's teaching to its pristine state. Over the centuries many cultural

* The quotation is from *Tam Roi Phra Arahant* (In the Footsteps of the Arahant), Sukhapap Jai, Bangkok, 1986.

practices and superstitions inevitably have obscured the essential Dhamma. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has dedicated his life to distinguishing one from the other—that which leads to absolute liberation from self and its suffering, and that which does not—without limiting himself to the traditionally narrow religious concerns of the orthodox Theravada. His truly radical reform has been to go back to the original source of all Buddhism, that which is even more original than the scriptures or the Buddha himself, something he has come to call “the natural religion of non-selfishness.”

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has interpreted the Pali *Tipitaka* of Theravada Buddhism in light of its primary principles—noble truths (*ariya-sacca*), not-self (*anatta*) or voidness (*sunyata*), and dependent origination (*paticca-samuppada*)—so that all of the core teachings fit together and are more deeply understood through each other. In doing so, he moved away from some cherished, albeit secondary, dogmas of orthodox Theravada belief. The consequences of this reappraisal have been many, including an emphasis on the here-and-now rediscovery of the spiritual dimension of everyday life, a bridging of the lay-monastic fracture, greater compatibility with science, greater intellectual rigor, and the reintegration of political and social issues within a Dhammic worldview. The last achievement is the focus of this chapter.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and Suan Mokkh²

Childhood

Six hundred kilometers south of Bangkok, where the Malay peninsula suddenly widens, are ruins belonging to the Sri Vijaya Empire, which dominated the sea-lanes of Southeast Asia between India and China 1,200 to 1,500 years ago. Although Siam has been a Theravada Buddhist country for centuries, the archaeological evidence shows that Mahayana Buddhism came to what is now southern Thailand first.³ Among the Sri Vijaya ruins, numerous beautiful images of Mahayana Bodhisattvas have been found. Thus, the Buddhist roots of the Chaiya area are ancient and diverse.

At the turn of the twentieth century,⁴ the rubber economy and electricity had not yet come to Chaiya. Life followed the old traditions, which were centered in Buddhism, the effects of which were pervasive and profound. The customs and values of the people still showed the Buddhist roots of their culture. Life was simple and family-oriented. Sharing was common and crime rare. The seasons and cycles of rice planting passed on along with the festivals of the people. This was the climate in which Ngeuam

Panich (later Buddhadasa Bhikkhu), his brother Yikey (later Dhammadaśa), and their sister Kimsoi were born and raised.

In 1906, Ngeuam Panich was born at Pum Riāng, then the provincial seat of Chaiya Province,⁵ into a small merchant family. Ngeuam's father was second-generation Chinese (Hokkien) and his mother a native Thai. Their relatives were spread up and down the local seaboard. Many of his relatives were and had been bhikkhus and even abbots. The family kept a small store in the Pum Riāng market.

In speaking of his childhood, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu emphasizes three primary influences: his mother, the Wat ("temple"), and Nature. His mother was Buddhadasa's first spiritual guide. She taught the morality and values that have underpinned all of his later insights and accomplishments. Her home was firmly based in the five ethical precepts (*sīla*) and there was a daily contact with Buddhism through offering food to the monks on their daily alms round and other activities. The family was thrifty and hardworking. Even at a young age, Ngeuam and his brother learned to shred coconut meat more carefully so that more coconut milk, a staple in traditional Thai cooking, could be extracted. In a recent Mothers' Day talk, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu said that his mother's influence was crucial in the formation of his character. "Whatever abilities, knowledge, and such I have now, where do they come from? Let me say that they come from my mother most of all."⁶

At the age of 10, Ngeuam was taken by his parents to stay at Wat Pum Riāng, where he was a temple boy for the next three years. This is where he learned to read and write, had his introduction to Buddhist ceremonies, heard many traditional stories, and made frequent forays into the forest to collect medicinal herbs for the abbot. Ajarn⁷ Buddhadasa speaks fondly of his experiences among the temple boys, with whom he learned discipline, hard work, cooperation, punctuality, responsibility, humor, cleverness, and, most importantly, unselfishness. In "A Single Solution for All the World's Problems" he suggests this temple boy education as a way of overcoming the immorality and selfishness that is destroying the world.⁸

The influence of Nature was experienced while taking his father's cows into the field to forage and in collecting herbs from the forest for his abbot. The sea was always nearby, along with the mangrove forests that then covered much of the shore. The forest then was still primal, full of trees more than a meter wide. Rural life followed the natural cycles of the seasons and animal birth and death. Ajarn Buddhadasa also tells of an early passion for Siamese fighting fish, which much later developed into a hobby of raising exotic fish at Suan Mokkh. His study of the fish and other animals, as well as plants, especially orchids, provided many insights into Nature, an important source of material in his teaching.

Ngeuam left the Wat in 1911 to enter Wat Potharam School where he completed the four-year primary school curriculum. In 1921, his father opened a second store in Chaia, near the new railroad station. Ngeuam went to stay with him there and began secondary school. The following year his father died, compelling Ngeuam to leave school in order to help his mother run the family stores. He was now the head of the family at the age of 16.

Besides the obvious effects of running a store for four years, there were other important influences on Ngeuam during his late teens. First, he had access to a large number of new books, including many concerning Dhamma, which were sold in the store. This was a period when writers and thinkers like Krom Phraya Vajirananavarorasa and Luang Wichit Wattakarn were challenging many traditional Thai beliefs and beginning to demythologize Thai Buddhism. Ngeuam also had daily opportunities to discuss and debate Dhamma and other issues with local officials, the educated elite of rural Siam. By the time he was ordained as a monk, Ngeuam had read and discussed all the basic Dhamma books, and much more, that a young monk would be expected to learn. These contacts and responsibilities gave him some understanding of the wider world.

Early Days in the Sangha

At the age of 20, in line with Thai custom, Ngeuam undertook *upasampada* (the higher training) as a bhikkhu for the annual Rains Retreat (*Pansa*).⁹ He was given the Pali name Indapanno, which he later used on official documents. At first, his motivation was simply to express gratitude to his parents and ancestors; he had no intention to remain a monk longer than the customary three months of the Rains Retreat. Phra Ngeuam took to the bhikkhu life, however, and had an easy time of his studies.¹⁰ He also became a popular preacher from the very start. Taking what he learned in his daily Dhamma classes, he gave nightly sermons that explained the Buddha's teachings in simple, straightforward terms.

Enjoying the bhikkhu life, Phra Ngeuam decided not to disrobe after the initial Rains Retreat was over. This made it necessary for his brother to leave the university in Bangkok and come home to run the family business. Phra Ngeuam continued his Dhamma studies and began to teach newly robed bhikkhus. He had a natural facility for teaching and greatly enjoyed the responsibilities. Eventually, older bhikkhus and relatives noticed his intellectual abilities and sent him to Bangkok to further his studies and career.

At that time, the only way to advance within the institutional Sangha was to study Pali in Bangkok. Such studies were the opportunity to prove

oneself to senior monks and obtain patrons and positions within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. An uncle, who had been a bhikkhu at an influential Bangkok temple (Wat Pathum Kongkha) for many years, arranged for him to live and study there, but Phra Ngeum found Bangkok to be noisy and dirty. Worse, the lifestyle and behavior of many monks made a bad impression on him. After only two months he returned home dismayed, intending to disrobe. At the last minute, he decided to stick out a third Rains Retreat (1928) and passed the third and final level of Dhamma studies. Afterward, he forgot his plan to disrobe. The following year he taught at the Dhamma School of the royally sponsored Wat Boromathat Chaiya.

In 1930, Phra Ngeum's relatives and friends convinced him to try Bangkok again. There he was more interested in visiting Wats, attending lectures, and experimenting with photography, than the rote learning of Pali. Still, he passed the first Pali examination (*Parien 3*, Third Level). He also made his first attempt at writing, in which he showed a modern perspective and expressed the conviction that the highest levels of Buddhist realization are still possible today.

Nonetheless, Bangkok did not suit Phra Ngeum. He was increasingly put off by the noise, crowding, busyness, and pollution, and his health suffered. He missed the calm and simplicity of his hometown. As he continued his studies, he began to do more outside reading. The Pali curriculum itself did not include readings from the *Tipitaka*, but Phra Ngeum began to read it anyway. The contradiction between the lifestyles, behavior, and practices of the monks around him in Bangkok and the lifestyle and practices of the original Sangha gradually became obvious to him. He began to think that Bangkok was not the path and doubted that peace could be found there.

We have decided that Bangkok certainly is not the place to find purity. Our stumbling into the academic Dhamma studies (*pariyattidhamma*) has had the good result of making us aware that it was a mis-step. If we didn't realize this in time, we would take many more steps until it would be hard to extricate ourselves, as has happened with some people. From just this awareness of going astray has come a hint of how we are to take the right step.¹¹

Dissatisfied and suspicious of the rote translations expected in the Pali schools, he deliberately failed the next year's examination by giving answers he believed in but that were not what the examiners wanted. For now, he had something better to do than climbing the ecclesiastical ladder.

We have walked according to the world from the moment of birth up until the moment of this insight. From now on, we won't follow the world

anymore and will give up the world to search for that which is pure as the Noble Ones did until finding it.¹²

*Founding of Suan Mokkh*¹³

Phra Ngeuam left Bangkok and returned to Pum Rieng with the intention of living in a natural setting conducive to the practice of Dhamma as taught by the Buddha. This move had already been prepared through letters to his brother, who also was keenly interested in the problem of adapting the timeless Buddha-Dhamma to modern realities and who now called himself "Dhammadaṣa." A group of his friends called the "Dhammadana Group" helped. Phra Ngeuam returned home on May 12, 1932, and moved into Wat Trapang Jik, an abandoned temple about a kilometer from the Pum Rieng market. Here, just one month before Thailand switched to "democracy" in the form of a constitutional monarchy, Phra Ngeuam began his experiment, *Suan Mokkhabalarama*, "The Garden of the Power of Liberation" (for short, *Suan Mokkh*, "The Garden of Liberation"), the institutional expression of his emerging resolve to reform Thai Buddhism. In so doing, he went beyond the official and politically controlled religious institutions of his time without resort to harsh words, judgments, or condemnations.

Alone in an abandoned Wat, where he had to confront socially conditioned fears of spirits, Phra Ngeuam set about his intention to dedicate his life to the practice of Dhamma. He already knew, however, that his understanding of exactly what and how to practice was insufficient. Thus, for the sake of practicing Dhamma, he went back to the Pali texts for guidance. Unlike the forest Wats built around famous teachers, Suan Mokkh turned directly to the Dhamma and Vinaya (discipline) of the Buddha as the teacher.¹⁴ During that first Rains Retreat of Suan Mokkh, Buddhadaṣa Bhikkhu began to compile the Dhamma principles that would guide him. At first he thought this would only take five or six months, after which he would live a wandering life, perhaps in India. Circumstances turned out otherwise, and he never left Suan Mokkh.

As Buddhadaṣa Bhikkhu pursued these studies, he also experimented with their application in life. Along with his Dhamma studies and practice, he was kept busy speaking at other Wats and functions set up by the Dhammadana Group. From the start, we see the three central components of life at Suan Mokkh: study, practice, and Dhamma teaching.

In the second year of Suan Mokkh, the two brothers began to publish the quarterly journal *Buddha-Sadana*, which was then the only Buddhist magazine in Thailand published outside of Bangkok and since then the longest running Buddhist periodical in the country. It soon developed a reputation for new ideas, readability, and insight. In the third Rains Retreat

of Suan Mokkh (1934), Buddhadasa Bhikkhu spent the entire three months in silence¹⁵ and recorded his experiences in the form of a Dhamma Log Book. He treated his life as a kind of Dhammic laboratory experiment: for example, investigating the effect of different foods on his body and mind, as well as keeping careful track of mental states. He kept a meticulous record of these experiences and wrote many short essays based on observations of Nature and insights into the workings of the human mind.¹⁶

In his writings, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu began to explore the connection between study and practice, arguing for their complementariness rather than their dichotomy. It should be noted that young Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's approach was unique in Thailand. For at least a millennium, going way back to the Sri Lankan commentators, there had been a strict separation between city monks (*gamavasin*), who studied and performed ceremonies, and forest monks (*arannavasin*), who lived a simple meditative life. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu integrated both strands of monastic life, something that had not been seen in Siam for centuries, if ever. Here was a forest monk who kept many of the traditional ascetic practices (*dhutanga*)¹⁷, ate one meal a day, lived alone, yet was a diligent scholar and a prolific writer and speaker. Rather than emphasizing one or two elements of traditional Buddhism, such as the moral precepts or meditation practices, as has been done with more recent reform groups, he tried to integrate everything genuine into a balanced middle way.

The Growth of Suan Mokkh

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu lived alone for most of the first four years, but the quality and innovation of the writing and ideas in *Buddha-Sasana* inevitably attracted increasing attention. After five years some monks came to stay with him. Visitors included high-ranking monks, such as the Somdet of Wat Thepsirinda, who was then administering the Thai Sangha on behalf of the Supreme Patriarch, and influential civil servants, who were to provide important support and recognition. Later, they were also to provide protection against those threatened by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's ideas.

Beginning in 1940, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu gave a series of lectures at the Buddha-Dhamma Association in Bangkok. Until this point, he had been teaching on the fringes of Thai intellectual society and lacked the podiums supplied by rich Bangkok Wats and royal patronage. In his first Bangkok lecture, he spoke for over two hours concerning the way to realize Buddha-Dhamma. In this and subsequent lectures we can see the primary features of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's mature teaching style. His presentations were in plain language, rational, clear, and unencumbered by literary profuseness

and old-fashioned monkish phrases. He left out accounts of miracles and divine beings and focused directly on the Dhamma, trying to show that anyone of average intelligence could study, understand, practice, and realize its truth for themselves. In this first lecture, he even dared to suggest meditation to the Bangkok intellectuals.

In subsequent years, he gave lectures titled "Peace as Being the Fruits of Realizing Buddha-Dhamma" (1942), "Buddha-Dhamma and Peace" (1946), and "Buddha-Dhamma and The Spirit of Democracy" (1947). The series concluded with his first major controversy in June 1948 after speaking about "The Mountains of the Buddha-Dhamma Way," in which he asserted that the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha of most Buddhists were obstacles obstructing their way to liberation, *nibbana*. Because of their egoistic attachments they did not have the true Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha that alone can liberate us from suffering, *dukkha*. The idea that all aspects of Buddhism must be cleansed of attachment to "I" and "mine" was hard for many to swallow. Through these lectures and *Buddha-Sasana*, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was firmly established as an innovative free-thinker who was unafraid to express views that were not acceptable to the majority, when he thought the old way of understanding hindered people's spiritual insight and growth.

By the early 1940s, the original site of Suan Mokkh had become crowded, and so a large tract of land was purchased around long-abandoned Wat Tarn Nam Lai ("Temple of the Flowing Water") through which ran a beautiful stream. In the center of this Wat was Golden Buddha Hill on which were scattered remnants of an ancient temple or stupa. In 1944, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu moved there permanently and others followed.

At this point Suan Mokkh and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu had become well-known to educated Buddhists throughout the country. It is time we considered the Dhamma teaching that led to this recognition; however, a final comment is necessary as we conclude this biographical sketch. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu always felt that the person and its biographical details were not very important. Personal stories too easily distract us from the Dhamma and strengthen the illusion of self. "The person doesn't really exist. Who are you talking about?" he would ask. So may the foregoing be forgiven and taken with a grain of salt as we turn our attention to the Dhamma, which Buddhadasa served for the sake of liberating humanity from *dukkha* and making world peace possible.

The Social Teachings of Buddhadasa

In line with the overall purpose of this book, this chapter focuses primarily on the "social teachings" of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. However, we must consider a few qualifications. First, for Buddhadasa Bhikkhu there was

no ultimate separation between the social and spiritual. They are two interpenetrating aspects of the one reality (Dhamma) according to the Law of Nature (Dhamma), that is, interdependency. "Don't separate them, otherwise world peace is not possible."¹⁸ Further, because Ajarn Buddhadasa looked at everything from certain basic perspectives—those he considered the heart of Buddhism—we must examine those perspectives at least briefly. And the more deeply we wish to explore the social teachings, the more we must be rooted in the spiritual teachings in which they are based.

Ajarn Buddhadasa used the word "spiritual" in a way that includes the material, physical, and social. Previously, Theravada had spoken only of body (*kaya* or *rupa*) and mind or heart (*citta*). For Ajarn Buddhadasa, a problem arises when we overemphasize the distinction between body and mind—any duality for that matter—because one cannot be understood without the other. To avoid polarizing this pair, he used "spiritual" to encompass and transcend them both.

Buddhism is neither materialism or mentalism, but is the correctness between the two or is both of them in the right proportions. The religion which can be taken as the best social science must not be a slave of materialism nor crazy about mental things.¹⁹

The spiritual does not reject the body, society, economics, politics, or any other area of life but understands all the dimensions of life in a fundamental way, that is, in the context of Dhamma. Essentially, the spiritual is concerned with the central issue of life—the illusion of self and the voidness of self—that permeates all aspects of human life.

Truth is One

When exploring the teachings of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu it is dangerous to focus much on any one principle as central or primary, as some writers have done. The noble truths, impermanence, not-self (*anatta*) or voidness (*sunyata*), conditionality (*idappaccayata*), dependent coorigination (*paticca-samuppada*), and thusness (*tathata*) have all been called "the heart of Buddhism". We cannot have one without the other; to overemphasize any one principle would distort their understanding, for these natural principles clarify and illuminate each other and the fundamental reality of the universe. Ajarn Buddhadasa utilized the full range of the Pali Canon, plus other religious traditions, modern science, and the phenomena of Nature to explore the Dhamma, which is a whole (*kevala*). As he often said, citing the Buddha, "Truth is one, there is no second."²⁰

Now let us consider some of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's main themes, aware that there is not enough room in a chapter of this length to do them justice. We must be content with merely sketching the general picture.

The Power of Understanding

Ajarn Buddhadasa liked to stress that the noble eightfold path—that is, our spiritual life—begins with right understanding (*sammaditthi*). Whatever the problem to be solved, he emphasized the need for changing the way we understand and think about things, which means educating or training ourselves correctly. To live happily, we require a worldview that fosters and makes such happiness possible. Personally we must study, reflect upon, and investigate the Dhamma; socially we must educate our children and each other in unselfishness.

Ajarn Buddhadasa believed world peace is the goal of the Buddha and his servants. What then is the means appropriate to the end? Bhikkhus have given up worldly power and cannot force people to do or believe things. Instead, they seek to persuade by example and teaching, especially so that people can experience the truth for themselves. In working for peace, Ajarn Buddhadasa chose to clarify the meaning of Buddha-Dhamma and its relevance to modern society through “Dhamma Proclamation” (*Dhamma-ghosana*).²¹ He took this to be the most pressing matter and concern. Thus, his work was in the area of ideas, meanings, values, and perspectives using a variety of media, including lectures, books, a journal, poetry, audiovisuals, and Suan Mokkh and its facilities. He did not involve himself in direct political work or even Buddhist institution-building. Even within Suan Mokkh he avoided organizational trappings.

Other writers have discussed Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s hermeneutical tools, especially the principle of “people language and Dhamma language,” so we can skip the details of them here.²² The key point is the importance of meaning and interpretation when we work with Dhamma and its understanding. Throughout our lives as human beings we accumulate, make, and remake meanings. How we do so individually and collectively determines the degree of peace, happiness, and freedom in our lives. Ajarn Buddhadasa daily met people with endless hurts and read about social problems in the newspaper or heard about them on the radio. He saw that something was missing or incorrect in their lives and understanding of life. People lack the means to interpret life and make meanings that liberate them from *dukkha*. This is why Ajarn Buddhadasa chose to focus on *ditthi* (understanding, views).

Dukkha and Its Quenching

Right understanding begins with the experience, awareness, and understanding of suffering, *dukkha*. The Buddha himself declares the purpose and scope of his teaching: “In the past, Bhikkhus, as well as now, I teach only *dukkha* and the utter quenching of *dukkha*.”²³

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu referred to these words repeatedly, and they provide the proper context of his own life and work, for anyone who calls himself "The Servant of the Buddha" must faithfully carry on the Buddha's work and objective. *Dukkha* and its quenching is a summary of the Four Noble Truths, the framework of Buddhism. Here we have the entire scope and range of the Buddha's teachings, although its heights and depths may not be immediately apparent. None of Ajarn Buddhadasa's words can be understood properly, except in this context. In particular, his social commentaries require this context in that the reason why we must discuss politics and economics is that they are the sources of so much *dukkha* in individuals and conflicts in society.

Much more than "suffering," *dukkha* includes stress, conflict, ugliness, dissatisfaction, meaninglessness, and imperfection. According to the Buddha, "The five aggregates [constituents of personality] are the essence of *dukkha*." Thus, *dukkha*—whether we translate it as pain, misery, or dissatisfaction—boils down to egoistic life, which as the Buddha repeatedly points out, arises from ignorance, desire, attachment, and egoism. This, then, is where Buddhadasa Bhikkhu attacked social problems.

The final quenching of *dukkha*, Ajarn Buddhadasa stressed, comes about only through the relinquishment or "tossing back" of all egoism and clinging. When we have no feelings or thoughts of "me" or "mine" toward anything in the universe, including our own consciousness, then there can be no more *dukkha*, no more birth and no more death. Peace in our societies also depends on letting go of egoism and selfishness. As we shall see later, this idea formed the basis of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's social teaching.

Having understood what the Buddha had discovered, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu pursued the same course and objective; all that matters to him is *dukkha* and liberation from *dukkha*. For Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, something is Buddhist solely because it quenches *dukkha*. When asked if something is "good" or "correct," Ajarn Buddhadasa asked in return, "Does it quench *dukkha*?" *Dukkha* provides the existential test to all ideas and experiences. Is there *dukkha*? Then, something is not yet right (*samma*). If no *dukkha* can be found, then things are correct, at least for a while. In this way, spirituality is based in tangible experience rather than beliefs, theories, and concepts. Further, since we need not conceptualize it, *dukkha* and its quenching is a standard that escapes the confusion of dualities such as "good and bad." This standard is central to everything discussed here.

When we decide that the life without *dukkha* is the life for us, then we must find out how that life is lived. Ajarn Buddhadasa pointed to the heart of this way of living by recalling the Buddha's one-sentence summary of his entire teaching: "All things ought not to be attached to (as 'I' or 'mine')." ²⁴ There is no thing in this universe—no concept, belief, experience, possession,

heaven, God or Truth—worth regarding as “I” or “mine.” Here we have a second central principle, inseparable from the first and the rest, in Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s teaching. *Dukkha* can only be understood in light of attachment or clinging (*upadana*) and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu insisted that all attachment boils down to regarding something as being “I” or “mine.” Conversely, the quenching of *dukkha* only occurs when attachment is quenched. Thus the path is one of nonattachment, of letting go. If you don’t want to suffer, don’t attach yourself to anything.²⁵

Is nonattachment just an idea, just a theory? Not for Ajarn Buddhadasa. If we approach it as such, it may not help us very much or may even make us suffer more. But if we see that nonattachment is a natural consequence of the way things are (the Law of Nature), then there will be more to it than just an idea. Here we must come to terms with and personally experience the fact of selflessness (*anatta*) or voidness (*sunyata*).²⁶ Why is it *dukkha* to attach to things as “I” or “mine”? Because they are void of any independent substance, core, or “thingness” that can correctly be regarded as a “self.” To cling to an illusion, something that is not really there, grounds the mind in falsehood and conflict. This insight follows from the realizations that all created things are impermanent, are characterized by *dukkha*-ness, and depend on causes and conditions. Therefore, to overcome our deeply ingrained habits of attachment, we must realize that everything is void of self.²⁷

For Ajarn Buddhadasa, voidness has two applications. First, it is an inherent characteristic of all things, similar to *anatta* (not-self). Not only are “things” (*dhammas*, natures) not “me” and not “mine,” they are void of selfhood and any independent entities that can be rightly taken as being selves. This characteristic is a primary object of insight. The second application refers to the “void mind” (*cit-wang*). Void of what? Void of I-making (*ahamkara*) and my-making (*mamamkara*), void of the clinging to “I” and “mine,” void of selfishness, void of *dukkha*. This is an experience to be developed. Here Ajarn Buddhadasa used a common Thai word, “*wang*,” which is used in expressions like “the chair is *empty*” and “*free* time.” An immensely profound insight is thus expressed in a very simple term. Other teachers picked up on “voidness” and “letting go,” until they became well-known terms among Buddhist practitioners in Thailand.

Ajarn Buddhadasa pointed out that the void mind happens in different ways. The first way is accidental or coincidental. In ordinary life, even for the most spiritually indifferent people, circumstance can arise such that the concept of self does not get stirred up. This is more or less “forgetting oneself,” for example, when we act spontaneously in an emergency or when we are so awed by the power and beauty of Nature that the mind becomes momentarily silent. The second way is the suppression of the self-concept

and selfish feelings through strong concentration (*samadhi*). The third way happens when Dhamma practice is well established and contact with sense experiences occurs with sufficient mindfulness and wisdom. Then, ignorance is not given an opportunity to concoct desire, attachment, ego, and *dukkha*. Ultimately, through full realization of the fact of the inherent voidness of things so that all tendencies to perceive and conceive things in terms of self are eliminated, "supreme unsurpassable voidness" is realized. In this way, Ajarn Buddhadasa showed that voidness is accessible to all human beings. It is not just some absolute metaphysical truth; it is a way of practice leading to the ultimate voidness—*nibbana*. In fact, the mind can only be void because its nature is voidness and we can only realize that void nature when the mind is void. In practice, the two meanings are inseparable; Ajarn Buddhadasa switched frequently between the two to make the point. Following the Buddha, he also described the realization of progressively deeper "*nibbanas*."²⁸

Here it would be good to remember that the Dhamma we are discussing is not primarily the Buddha's "teachings," although the word "Dhamma" is commonly understood in this limited way. Rather, Dhamma is the Truth, Reality, Law, or that to which the teachings point. Or, as Ajarn Buddhadasa liked to remind us, Dhamma is Nature.

Everything is Nature

For Ajarn Buddhadasa everything is Dhamma and

Dhamma means Nature, which can be distinguished in four aspects: Nature itself (*sabhavadhamma*), the Law of Nature (*saccadhamma*), the Duty of living things according to Natural Law (*patipattidhamma*), and the results that follow from performing duty according to Natural Law (*pativedhadhamma*). All four are known by the single word "Dhamma."²⁹

The Thai word for Nature is *dhammajati* and like the Latin root of the English word "nature," *jati* means "birth." Thus, *dhammajati* is "that which is born out of the natural order," which means that all things are "natures" and that everything is Dhamma, is Nature. For Ajarn Buddhadasa, this was the fundamental reference of Buddhism. By contemplating this most basic meaning of Dhamma, we come to the other primary "dimensions of Dhamma," according to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: the law of Nature that governs all natures (*dhammas*); the duty required of every *dhamma*, especially human beings, each moment by natural law; and the natural fruits of that duty correctly or incorrectly done.³⁰

Nature is the sum total of reality; there is no thing that is not Nature, not even the Absolute or Ultimate Reality, whatever we call "it." Everything is produced out of Nature by the law of Nature. Nature and humanity are not separate; human beings and all their creations are as much a part of Nature as are insects, trees, rivers, and stars. Thus, in Ajarn Buddhadasa's understanding, we are not set against or above Nature but are only a part of Nature that must find and fulfill its natural role or duty (Dhamma). This insight is important for overcoming both personal egoism and collective or structural egoism, such as the materialism and consumerism of modern societies.

Another way that Buddhadasa Bhikkhu used the theme of Nature is his advice to live in intimate contact with Nature (in the more limited sense of trees, insects, rocks, and weather), especially the natures not yet altered by human greed, anger, and delusion. By living close to Nature, we are closer to Dhamma and it is easier for us to understand Dhamma. "The trees can speak, the rocks can speak, the pebbles and sand, the ants and insects, everything is able to speak!"³¹ When we listen, we can hear them say: "You crazy people, learn to stop, to cool down, to give in, just a little bit!"³² "You stupid people. . . . Don't fight and kill so much!"³³ There is no better teacher or classroom than Nature itself. "A dry leaf is a symbol of the mind that has no 'I' and 'mine.'"³⁴ For this reason, Ajarn Buddhadasa stressed that all Buddhas are born outdoors, awakened outdoors, and enter *parinibbana* outdoors.³⁵ Or, as he put it, "No Buddha was ever enlightened in a university."³⁶

Ajarn Buddhadasa never insisted that Nature be left untouched, but that we live in mindful and respectful harmony with it. If we listen to and learn from Nature, we will not be selfish towards it, nor abuse it. But now most of our environments are no longer natural because human artifice, fired by selfishness, has interfered almost everywhere.

They nurture each other. Material progress nurtures selfishness and selfishness nurtures material progress, until the whole world is filled with selfishness.³⁷

This is one of the tragedies of the modern world. Our selfishness out of control, everything we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch becomes a manifestation of selfishness. These further stimulate confused, stressful, selfish states of mind. By cutting down the forests, we cut ourselves off from Dhamma.

When our interactions with Nature are solely for the sake of survival, selfishness does not ruin and destroy.³⁸ When we maintain our "inner Nature," the outer Nature will be taken care of.

Only the genuine Buddhists (those who have Dhamma and know the Buddha) can conserve Nature, while those who are Buddhists in name alone cannot do it. True Buddhists are able to conserve the deeper Nature, that is, the mental Nature. Non-genuine Buddhists can't conserve Nature, even the material kind. When the mental Nature is well conserved, the outer material Nature will be able to conserve itself.³⁹

Then we can live close to and learn from Nature. We see, hear, and are touched by things that express peacefulness and interdependency. This influences our minds in ways conducive to spiritual insight and nurtures a much healthier perspective on life. We learn to look on and act toward the world unselfishly. Then, we can perform our duties toward life, family, and society—in addition to the spiritual duty—without creating more problems.

The Law of Nature

Nature is not meaningless or pointless; there is something that governs it all. Our investigation of Nature leads to the discovery of a principle that comes closest to being Ajarn Buddhadasa's fundamental teaching, namely, the law of Nature, *idappaccayata*.⁴⁰ *Idappaccayata* means "the state (or fact) of having this as condition," that is, conditionality or interdependency.⁴¹ The formula the Buddha used most often to explain *idappaccayata* is:

This being, that exists; because this arises, that arises.

This not being, that does not exist; because this ceases, that ceases.⁴²

For Ajarn Buddhadasa, this was the universal law of Nature that governs all of Nature. He liked to call it "the Buddhist God," emphasizing that it is an impersonal God rather than a personal God. It is the creator, preserver, and destroyer all rolled into one. It is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and absolute, thus having all the necessary qualities of the "Supreme Thing."

Everything is conditional (*idappaccayata*) and the principle of everything is conditionality; according to this principle all actions are conditional and dependent. Thus, if we would like to have a God like they do, we must take *idappaccayata* (conditionality) as God. It will be a more powerful God than any other; at best, the others are equal to it. If we take *idappaccayata* as our God, we'll have a God which no other surpasses. . . . God the

Creator is nothing more than conditionality, God the Destroyer is nothing more than conditionality, God the Preserver is nothing more than conditionality, Omnipresent God is nothing more than conditionality, God which is everything is nothing more than conditionality. If Buddhism has a God, it is in *idappaccayata* (conditionality).⁴³

Not a supreme being, or non-being, it is the Supreme Truth, Law, and Reality—one that is void of self.

A specific case of *idappaccayata* is dependent origination (*paticca-samuppada*), which examines our fundamental problem of *dukkha* according to the law of conditionality. The key elements in the dependent origination of *dukkha* are ignorance, sense consciousness and experience, feeling, desire, attachment, and ego-birth. When we live without mindfulness and wisdom, these elements continually flow out of sensory experience and bring us into *dukkha*. When we are mindful of Dhamma, ignorance cannot set off the process of blind conditioning into *dukkha*. Such mindfulness is to know and see the law of Nature in everything we experience and do. Knowing it, we live according to it, which is our natural duty. Then, there is no *dukkha*.

Buddhists aim to penetrate deeply to the inner Nature, the spiritual Nature, the Nature which is the Law of Nature, which is the source of everything. We try to study so that we realize the Nature within which is called "Dhamma-element" (*dhammadhatu*), namely, the law of dependent coorigination or conditionality. If we realize this Nature, we have no way that selfishness can happen.⁴⁴ Understanding of dependent co-origination (*paticcasamuppada*), when it develops correctly and completely, leads to clearly seeing that there is no real self. The thought one has a self doesn't arise. So we must study dependent co-origination. We will have no self when we fully understand dependent co-origination, which can be called the "heart" or "essence" of Buddhism.⁴⁵

These observations about Nature and natural law are central to Ajarn Buddhadasa's approach both to spiritual questions and to moral and social questions. In fact, the natural principle of conditionality allows us to set aside distinctions between self and other, between personal and social. In Nature there is one reality, there is no second.

This has been a brief overview of Ajarn Buddhadasa's favorite Dhamma teachings. Because he reexamined and reworked almost all the standard terms and categories of Theravada Buddhism, much has had to be left out. As we look into the social dimensions of Dhamma, please keep these perspectives in mind and remember that they are only some of the key elements in a thorough-going and consistent reinterpretation of the Pali texts.

Dhamma and Society

When words and teachings are mined for their deepest spiritual potential, when interdependency and voidness are the central teaching, when Nature is the primary reference, and when the goal is the end of all *dukkha*, does one have anything meaningful to say about society and all the suffering found and caused therein? Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has addressed this pressing question since the beginning of Suan Mokkh.

There tend to be people who wrongly understand that Buddhism doesn't have much to do with society or that the connections are only on a lower level. Some people misunderstand so far as to say that those who strictly train themselves according to Buddhist principles find it difficult to do anything tangibly beneficial for society. I feel that such understanding is not yet in line with the truth. However, there is a way for us to develop the kind of understanding through which our socially beneficial actions become the highest spiritual benefit for ourselves, also. So I've tried to distinguish and make obvious social benefits. . . . In addition I try to point out that the social goods and acting for the benefit of society are prerequisites of traveling beyond to *nibbana*.⁴⁶

The Buddhist goal of quenching or ending *dukkha* is not to be falsely spiritualized into an other-worldly end, for the genuinely spiritual does not denigrate or reject the body. *Nibbana* can only be found right here in the middle of *samsara*, the whirlpool of birth and death. So when we talk about ending *dukkha*, we mean both personal and social problems.⁴⁷

As early as the 1940s, in the series of lectures at the influential Buddha-Dhamma Association through which Buddhadasa Bhikkhu made his first big impact on the national scene, he discussed issues such as "Buddha-Dhamma and Peace" and "Buddha-Dhamma and the Spirit of Democracy."⁴⁸ In "Buddha-Dhamma and Peace" (March 1946) he pointed out that there was more to peace than getting rid of the Japanese occupation forces. He argued that without a proper understanding of Buddha-Dhamma, human desires expand endlessly and lead to violence and oppression. The Buddha pointed out an unconditioned peace "above the world," which can only be reached when we act correctly according to the law of nature. Social and spiritual peace appears when, through the realization of Buddha-Dhamma, we can abandon our desires. "This world lacks peace because it is unable to grasp the thing which is close at hand, so close it is actually in hand, that is, within everything."⁴⁹ The only hope for genuine peace is when everyone realizes Dhamma. At that time, Ajarn Buddhadasa seemed to emphasize the personal realization of *nibbana* as the meaning he gave to "peace," but

there were also hints that the more individuals realized the unconditioned peace, the more social peace could be achieved. In the years since, while always giving primacy to the absolute peace of *nibbana*, he increasingly spoke of achieving world peace, such that he came to say, “the Buddha’s purpose is world peace.”⁵⁰

“Buddha-Dhamma and the Spirit of Democracy” (1947) explored the importance of democratic values—freedom, equality, and brotherhood—in the Buddha’s teaching and in the original Sangha. At the same time, he explored the spiritual meaning of these three values: freedom from the law of karma and from defilements; equality of opportunity in realizing *nibbana*; and fraternity among those who live the homeless spiritual life together. The subtitle of the talk was “Moral and Wisdom Perspectives Have Nothing To Do With Politics.” He explained that they “have nothing to do with politics” because there is no need to make democracy into something political, which is a complicated and troublesome business. But here, whoever hears the word ‘democracy’ thinks it is about politics.”⁵¹ To some extent, he was being careful to stay within the boundaries expected of monks; more importantly, however, he wanted to give deeper meaning to the word “democracy” than was common.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu specified that democracy has a “natural spirit” and to “understand this democracy clearly we must rely on the Buddha’s words.”⁵² After giving examples of how the Lord Buddha exemplified freedom, equality, and fraternity in his life, teaching, and the organization of the Sangha, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu related these democratic virtues to Nature and Dhamma.

These three conditions (*bhava*) are determined by Nature. 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 pleases them, are equal, and have fraternity.⁵³

These are examples to demonstrate that freedom, equality, and fraternity—in terms of *siladhamma*—exist fully in Buddhism and in the Lord Buddha’s behavior. Buddhism already had the character of democracy as understood morally. There is no need to fear that we misunderstand this thing, that is, that we will turn Buddhism into politics.⁵⁴

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu used the *Agganna-sutta*⁵⁵ to illustrate how differences developed among human beings. At first, all beings were equal. Later, variations in physical appearance developed due to differences in behavior, that is, morality. As morality deteriorated—causing laziness, theft, sexual wantonness—social problems grew. To deal with crime, “the democratic

system appeared in the world for the first time," a king (*raja*) was chosen, and the people "stipulated that he must punish those deserving punishment, must capture those requiring capture, and must banish those deserving banishment."⁵⁶

Thus, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu insisted that democracy is a moral rather than political issue. Our value as individuals and societies is determined by moral decency, not by aristocratic birth, education, or wealth. "Dhamma alone makes the difference. . . . Whatever we will be, whether democratic or not democratic, is because of the power of Dhamma."⁵⁷ He always insisted on this point, as we will see later, with the twist that politics is also a moral issue when properly understood. Only selfish people treat politics as a matter of power. The limited democracy of morality is difficult but possible, while absolute democracy—synonymous with *nibbana*—is in the world but not of it. Absolute freedom, equality, and brotherhood cannot be found in the world, in things under the power of time; they can only be found in the realization of Buddha-Dhamma.

Later, in the 1970s, Ajarn Buddhadasa began giving talks such as "A Socialist Type of Democracy," "Socialism According to Religious Principles," and "The Type of Socialism which Can Help the World," all of which were published and discussed in Bangkok.⁵⁸ This was a direct response to the Thai sociopolitical situation. At that time, the Vietnam war was still going on and the United States had official and secret (although not to the local people) air bases in Thailand. Many GIs came to Bangkok for "R & R," which contributed to a rapid expansion of the sex and tourism industry. Thais were fighting with the United States against the Vietnamese and the Thai military continued to be the dominant force in Thai politics. At the same time, the student and labor movements were growing strong and demanding the removal of the United States bases.⁵⁹ In such a climate, the polemics flew fast and the easiest way to get somebody thrown in jail or killed was to accuse him of being a communist. To many of the power elite, socialism was the same as communism, that is, the enemy. Further, Thai monks were expected to stay clear of politics, which means that most of the senior monks in Bangkok tacitly supported the ruling elites. At such a time, Ajarn Buddhadasa chose to speak out on socialism and gradually develop what has come to be called "Dhammic Socialism."

Why must we speak about socialism? Is it crazy or is it just chasing after current fashions? There are many angles with which to consider this question. We need not chase the socialist fad anywhere because Buddhism already has an excellent and special socialist system. Further, the present world is having problems concerning socialism and there are some forms

of socialism which are like malignant germs which will cause infections and disease for human beings in the world.⁶⁰

Ajarn Buddhadasa was attempting to bring a moral and spiritual perspective to the situation, in hopes of avoiding violence. Many intellectuals were interested in socialism but only from political and economic points of view. For Ajarn Buddhadasa, that was too shallow; he felt it could never really succeed. Therefore, he began to articulate a view of socialism that was in harmony with, in fact, grew organically out from, Buddhist principles and insights. With the necessary moral underpinnings and the guidance of Buddhist wisdom, he felt, a genuine socialism could emerge that would bring peace.

At first, it was necessary to make clear that the socialism he advocated was not the kind motivated by revenge. Thai society does not tolerate monks who advocate or support violence for the sake of changing the political and economic status quo. (Nonetheless, monks who have supported the use of state violence in order to maintain the status quo have been well rewarded.) More important, he himself believed that monks should stay free of partisan politics and should not support the use of force. On the other hand, he consistently made clear the inherent immorality of capitalism and never spoke of "Dhammic Capitalism." While the socialism he read about in books and newspapers was still caught up with selfishness, he felt that socialism, when properly understood, could be a vehicle for unselfish social relationships and, thereby, peace.

Dhammic Socialism

Let us begin with basic definitions. "Socialism" (Thai *samgama-niyama*, literally, "preference for society") as understood by Ajarn Buddhadasa is foremost the point of view and attitude that the common good comes first, that society is more fundamental than the individual, that the interests and needs of society as a whole come before those of the individual.

Here, Dhammic Socialism according to Buddhist principles holds that Nature created beings which must live in groups. Both plants and animals live together in groups or communities. This system we will call 'socialism': the correctness necessary for living together in groups which Nature has dictated. In short, it is living for the benefit of society, not for the individual benefit of each person.⁶¹

Out of this understanding, political, economic, and social structures can emerge that are peaceful, moral, and just. Here, society is the collective of

all the individuals grouped together on a certain level for mutual benefit and support. In this respect, socialism can be contrasted with individualism and liberal democracy, both of which, as Ajarn Buddhadasa saw them, share the common root of selfishness.

Dhammic means to be composed of, based in, governed by, and in line with Nature and the Law of Nature. It means to see and fulfill one's natural duty (Dhamma) in all situations. It is to be "correct for the sake of survival, every step and stage of human evolution, both for oneself and for others."⁶² "To be Dhammic, besides being honest and virtuous, also requires knowledge. If one's knowing is incorrect, no matter how honest and virtuous one may be, one will not be able to make it Dhammic. They might make laws which go against Nature or that create suffering and danger."⁶³ Thus, "Dhammic Socialism" is a preference for society as a whole in a way that is in line with Nature and the Law of Nature. Ajarn Buddhadasa stressed that our socialism must be Dhammic because the modern understanding of the term "socialism" is overwhelmingly materialistic, centering only on economic and political factors more or less devoid of moral considerations.

We can see that there are many kinds of socialism. For example, the socialism of Karl Marx is just the revenge of the worker. There's nothing to it other than revenge by the workers or laborers. Such socialism of revenge is angry and acts through its anger. The socialism of Buddhists, however, must include the word 'Dhammic,' which means consisting of or having Dhamma, that is, correctness: acting and practicing correctly in line with Dhamma principles, not acting out of anger or revenge. 'Dhammic' means connected with and going according to Dhamma.⁶⁴

Ajarn Buddhadasa insisted that moral concerns and higher spiritual insights must be primary. For him, capitalism and communism—especially in their recent historical forms—were the same in that they are fundamentally selfish. In both, classes are opposed to each other and one is dominant. He felt that this violates a deeper social reality and our duty toward it.

Everyone is indebted to society and is bound by the social contract from the moment one was born from one's mother's womb, or even from the time one was in the womb.⁶⁵

In short, "Dhammic Socialism" is the principle that society should be governed for the sake of genuine peace. Over and over again Ajarn Buddhadasa stressed that peace is the purpose of Buddhism, both personal inner peace (*santisukha*) and world peace (*santipap*). Such peace can only be achieved when nonselfishness informs all aspects and levels of society.

There are many implications to and consequences of this insistence that socialism—in fact any political, economic, and social system or government—be grounded in and governed by natural truth (Dhamma). I will draw out some of the more important ones here.

First, this socialism can only exist within Nature since everything is Nature. All social realities—economics, politics, culture, language, art, crime, religion—are part of Nature and must be understood and responded to accordingly. Thus, Dhammic Socialism cannot be separated from Nature, and, therefore, is under the Law of Nature, that is, the law of interdependence.

Second, the interdependence of Nature makes Nature inherently socialistic. We should observe that from birth through our entire lives we are dependent on parent, relatives, friends, the government, and even enemies. Our lives, well-being, and meaningfulness depend on those of others, which makes us social creatures. The animals and plants are socialistic through their mutual dependencies. As we also depend on them, human socialism depends on the larger socialism of all living things. Socialism, as Ajarn Buddhadasa understood it, is a natural consequence of the natural order and of human beings gathering together in mutually beneficial and supportive groups.

So we aren't surprised by all the different ideological, dogmatic, biased (*saccabhinivesa*) socialist systems when humanity is unable to achieve the genuine socialist system of Nature. When we don't realize the natural truth of this matter, we get stuck in views and opinions, that is, many varied forms of dogmas and biases about this word.⁶⁶

Third, there is a social contract arising from the place of human beings within Nature. Because society gives us everything, we ought to be grateful and recognize the duty (Dhamma) to act for the benefit of society.

As for practicing benefits for society, the meaning is that Buddhists still respect and accept the social contract, that is, the fact that everyone in the world has rights, duties, and obligations inseparably and unconsciously linked, which ought to cause everyone to consider that he has the duty to bring benefits in gratitude to each other, which is important for humanity or the honor of humanity. We can say that the one who violates the social contract does not deserve the name "human." Therefore, Buddhists, whether those who are not yet liberated or those who are liberated must recognize the social contract and practice correctly in situations concerning it, namely, having the duty to benefit society.⁶⁷

Fourth, this is not merely a social duty, it is our religious duty. Those who do not see this duty have failed to understand their religion, especially if they are Buddhists.

That there are bhikkhus, samaneras, upasakas, and upasikas [ordained and lay Buddhists] who are careless in this matter derives from their not knowing this aspect of the Buddha's purpose, or from their knowing but wrongly understanding that it is a trivial matter. In fact, this matter is important enough to cause significant harm for that individual and for the religion collectively. That it is harmful for that person doesn't mean that he will lose the benefits he ought to get from society, but means that such behavior shows that his capacity for sympathy and kindness (*nam jai*), or his subconscious personality, is hard and crude. Or he is soaking in a character which grows more crude with each day. When a person's capacity for sympathy and kindness has become habitually hard like this, how ever can his mind be gentle, subtle, pliant, and ready for understanding or for higher practices of body, speech, and mind such as *sila*, *samadhi*, and *panna*? It amounts to the closing of the gate of realizing the path, its fruits, and *nibbana*.⁶⁸

When we look deeply enough, we see that the social duty of working for the common good, that is, the maintenance of peace, justice, and morality in society, supports our spiritual duty, that is, the abandonment of ignorance and egoism in order to realize *nibbana*. For Ajarn Buddhadasa, there was no conflict between the interests of the individual and the interests of society as a whole when we consider genuine needs and benefits. That which is truly beneficial for society is beneficial for its members. Of course, there must be short-term disadvantages for some individuals sometimes, but when the welfare to its members is not served in the long run, no society will survive.

Fifth, socialism is nothing new, especially for Buddhists. It is not a Western property to be imported into Asia. As Ajarn Buddhadasa understood it, socialism has been around since at least the Buddha's time.

We already have the ideal of socialism without being aware of it. Whether in the administrative system of the Sangha from the Buddha's time until now, or within the Dhamma system of Buddhism, or in the Buddha's way of behaving toward other beings in the world, we can see that it is the highest socialism.⁶⁹

A tangible example of "Buddhist Socialism" was King Asoka of India, the traditional exemplar of Buddhist rulers. Ajarn Buddhadasa also felt that Ramkhamhaeng of Sukothai (the ancient Thai kingdom) demonstrated socialism. Further, because of its long association with Buddhism Thai culture has socialistic roots. "Our ancestors taught us to act so that all lives can live together correctly in kindness and friendliness, in line with the standard of Nature."⁷⁰

To be Buddhist is to be socialist, and Thais can find their own form of socialism in their cultural roots.

If one believes in Buddhism, the spirit of socialism will be in one's flesh and blood. One sees fellow human beings as comrades in *dukkha*, friends in birth, aging, illness, and death. We are comrades in suffering such that we can't sit and watch.⁷¹

It is time Buddhists knew the socialism of Buddhism and unsheathed it as a weapon in withstanding the blood-crazy socialism of dogmatism (ideology) which does wrong by itself then puts the blame on others.⁷²

Ajarn Buddhadasa seemed to try to accomplish two things here. First, he legitimized socialism as an issue and an approach appropriate to Buddhism, Thai culture, and the current situation. Socialism is not something to be shunned as Western or foreign, for it can be found in Thailand's cultural and religious heritage. In fact, it is more appropriate for Thailand than the Western forms (capitalism, consumerism, technocracy, etc.) currently being mimicked. Socialism, as he understood it, would allow Thai society, as well as Asian culture as a whole, to preserve and further develop those elements of their heritage that are superior to what is being imported from the West.

Finally, he argued for a more religious understanding of socialism, one based in Dhamma principles. He tried to raise or enlighten the level of discourse on these matters beyond the usual elements of power and materialism. The human being is much more than a mere "economic animal" or "political animal"; therefore, theories that disregard our cultural, psychological, and spiritual aspects will fail to satisfy all of our needs. The spiritual dimension, being the aspect of our lives that provides ultimate meaning and happiness, requires special attention. Only by so doing can correct socialism be found.

Politics is Morality

While Buddhadasa Bhikkhu took pains in earlier talks, such as "Buddha-Dhamma and The Spirit of Democracy," to specify that Buddha-Dhamma has nothing to do with politics,⁷³ he eventually dropped the distinction. In fact, he said that the Lord Buddha is "the supreme politician." Still, he insisted on the distinction between the politics that is based in morality and the politics that is about power, exploitation, and self-interest. Only the former is acceptable to Buddhists.

Ajarn Buddhadasa insisted that socialism—like politics, economics, education, and other social concerns—is a moral issue, despite frequent

criticism from those Buddhists who feel a dirty word like “politics” should never be mentioned in the same breath as Buddhism, and from politicians who do not want morality to interfere with their activities. Recognizing socialism’s relationship to morality is crucial to understanding and using it for the common good.

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 correct. It lacks an adequate foundation. So we ask to add another point: we must also be moral beings.⁷⁴

Morality (*siladhamma*), for Ajarn Buddhadasa, was more profound than merely following rules or precepts, as *siladhamma* is often understood. It must always be rooted in Natural Law if it is to be wise, peaceful, and successful.

Ajarn Buddhadasa defined *siladhamma* (or simply *sila*, morality) as “1. the condition of being normal, 2. the Dhamma that causes normality, and 3. the thing that is normality (itself).”⁷⁵ The key term here is normality (*pakati*), which the Pali Text Society dictionary defines as “original or natural form, natural state of condition” and in its instrumental form means “by Nature, ordinarily, as usual.”⁷⁶ In Thai usage, these meanings are retained but with an emphasis on ordinariness, normality, and naturalness. The true normality of “*pakati*” must be natural, that is, derived from the law of Nature rather than thought. “*Sila* means ‘*pakati*.’ If anything leads to *pakati* and not to disorder, it is called ‘*sila*.’ The Dhamma that brings this state about is called ‘*sila-dhamma*.’”⁷⁷ Without sacrificing the popular meaning of morality, Ajarn Buddhadasa informs it with more profound roots. Let us examine this further.

When we consider *sila-dhamma* as it is usually understood, that is, applied to our actions, speech, and means of sustaining life (corresponding to the third, fourth, and fifth factors of the noble eightfold path), “normality” concerns our relationships with other people, other living things, and the rest of Nature. As these relationships are naturally those of interdependency (*idappaccayata*), they are *pakati* (normal and natural) when they are free of conflict, for only then are they mutually beneficial. Freedom from conflict is absence of violence, injustice, exploitation, and abuse. In short, our relationships and the actions that compose them are moral or “normal” when they harm neither us nor others. “The word *pakati* means not to collide with anyone and not to collide with oneself, that is, not to cause distress for oneself or for others.”⁷⁸ All of society should be organized on this principle. “Setting up a system which makes society *pakati* or happy is

called 'socialism.' If something causes disorder, it is a kind of immorality in society."⁷⁹

Moral, normal, natural relationships that are both beneficial to all involved and free of harm require unselfishness. When the mind functions under the influence of ignorance—when it lacks wisdom—desire, attachment, and egoism take over.⁸⁰ Unless carefully restrained, egoism turns into selfishness and selfish behavior is always harmful, tends toward conflict, and often becomes violent. Ideally, by replacing ignorance with wisdom there is a selflessness that automatically creates the conditions for peaceful, harmless actions and relationships. "With mindfulness controlling the flow of *paticcasamuppada*, self doesn't arise and selfishness doesn't happen. Then we are able to have Dhammic Socialism."⁸¹

But there is still more to this natural normalcy. *Pakati*, and thereby *sila-dhamma*, is not limited merely to the realm of speech and actions, as morality is commonly understood in Theravada Buddhism. Normalcy must refer also to our inner state, to the *citta* (heart-mind). When the mind-heart is *pakati*, it is free of attachment and defilement, that is, it is in its natural or original state, which in Pali is called the "*pabhassara-citta*" (luminous mind). Mind is "abnormal" when it is clouded by selfishness and defilement; mind is "normal" when it is free of "I" and "mine."

Further, there is the spiritual level of *pakati* that consists of direct knowledge and experience of truth, namely, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, not-self, and interdependency. Lastly, the ultimate *pakati* corresponds to the absolute, that is, *nibbana*. The unchanging, timeless, unconditioned, Supreme Reality is the ultimate level and standard of *pakati*. When we examine *sila-dhamma* fully, we see that it cannot be taken as just one level of human life, separated from the entirety of experience. Rather, it connects with all levels of human experience and reality from the deeply personal to the familial and communal to the universal and back. Thus, Ajarn Buddhadasa's understanding of *sila-dhamma*, whether we translate it as "morality" or "normalcy," and with it Dhammic Socialism, is clearly holistic (*kevala*). Rather than setting up a dichotomy between the social and the individual, or between the moral and the spiritual, which would force them into conflict and confuse us, he saw them as being naturally integrated.

In short, Ajarn Buddhadasa emphasized that Dhammic Socialism must be governed by wisdom, that is, it must be based in profound understanding of Nature, its law, and our corresponding duty. Morality and wisdom depend on each other. By extension, wisdom and Dhammic Socialism depend on each other, also. Why did Ajarn Buddhadasa bother to emphasize this? Once again, because of his concern for *dukkha*. He observed that anyone stuck with the traditional idea of *sila-dhamma* will only be avoiding

evil and doing good because of a limited conception of right and wrong. If our avoidance of evil and doing of good lacks the illumination of higher understanding, we cannot avoid identifying with the not doing of evil—"I'm not bad," "I don't do anything wrong"—and the doing of good—"I only do good," "I'm a good person." This attachment to our actions—the "doer"—no matter how good, traps us in dualistic concepts of right and wrong and makes the morality egoistic and caught up with *dukkha*. Such a morality is profoundly unsatisfying. Not only does it fail to liberate us from *dukkha*, it can even be a source of further *dukkha*.

The situation is much different when the *sila-dhamma* is grounded in *paramatha-dhamma* (ultimate reality, transcendent truth). Then, the understanding of voidness and dependent origination prevents attachment. Those in whom such understanding is not sufficiently developed to avoid all attachment can reflect on not-self and interdependency so as to understand better the Nature of clinging and mitigate its painful consequences. From this understanding, avoidance of evil is natural and done automatically. "Good deeds" are done, without regarding them as "good," not for the sake of "goodness," but because they are required by the Law of Nature. Everything is done simply as a wise and compassionate response to the way things are.

Ajarn Buddhadasa taught Dhammic Socialism because he thought we needed it to get out of the terrible trap of egoism and *dukkha*, both personal and collective. Needless to say, a society based on standards of nonselfishness would not face the environmental, crime, drug, violence, and moral crises that confront Thailand, the United States, and the rest of the world. These very crises prove, to Ajarn Buddhadasa at least, that selfishness will be our ruin. So long as political, social, ecological, educational, and religious institutions and systems do not serve the cause of human liberation, and even heap more *dukkha* upon us, for that long we will be in danger of destroying ourselves. Ajarn Buddhadasa proposed Dhammic Socialism as the basic solution, the necessary response to the reality of many layered, pervasive, intertwined *dukkha*. Ajarn Buddhadasa tried to clarify the main principles; many details remain to be worked out concerning appropriate political, economic, and other social systems.

Dictatorial Dhammic Socialism

Due to the ambiguity of democracy—the Thai version of liberal democracy in particular—Ajarn Buddhadasa challenged us with "dictatorial dhammic socialism." He asked what will happen with a government of, for, and by the people if the people are selfish. This question and his advocacy of "dictatorship" has raised some hackles.⁸² Some people accused Ajarn

Buddhadasa of justifying dictators—perhaps unintentionally, perhaps not—and creating openings for the likes of Stalin and Hitler. Others feel frustrated when a generally progressive religious leader contradicted some of their cherished beliefs. There would be less confusion if critics paid more attention to what Ajarn Buddhadasa meant by “dictator.”

Now almost everyone in Thailand fails to understand the word “dictator.” They’re afraid of dictators the same as they’re afraid of ghosts; it’s stuck in their hearts. Tyrants have brought disaster to the world. That’s what they call “dictatorship,” meaning tyranny with evil leaders who dictate according to their own interests.⁸³

For English speakers, the use of the translation “dictator” loses some of the connotations of the original Thai word. The Thai term is “*phadetkarn*,” a noun meaning “the use of absolute governing power,”⁸⁴ derived from *phadet*, a verb meaning “to cut, eradicate, break”⁸⁵ and also “to expedite, to dispose of quickly, to dictate.”⁸⁶ In using this term, Ajarn Buddhadasa emphasized the qualities of absoluteness, firmness, and decisiveness needed to solve many intractable social problems.

‘Dictatorial’ means to do something absolutely and decisively (resolutely, unequivocally). This ‘absolute’ must be correct. If there is Dhamma, it dictates absolutely and correctly. Dictatorship is merely a tool, the means of decisiveness. Thus, dictatorship is neither evil nor good in itself, but depends on the people who use it. If used evilly, it’s evil; if used well, it’s good. . . . Now we are speaking of the dictatorship which is used in a good way and has Dhamma as the dictator. Would everyone please give justice to the word ‘dictator.’⁸⁷

If people would behave unselfishly on their own, “dictatorship” would not be needed. But when they choose to chase after their own selfish desires, strong qualities are needed to clean up the mess.

Ajarn Buddhadasa’s critics tend to interpret dictatorship as being human dictators, that is, they recognize only the conventional meaning of “dictator” as a person or self. In Dhamma terms, however, “dictator” is the absolute power of the world, which is the law of Nature or Dhamma rather than a person or self. In other words, the dictator is voidness. Ajarn Buddhadasa’s primary reason for using the word “dictator” was to emphasize that absolute decisiveness is needed to overcome the self and its selfishness. On the other hand, he used the term “dictator” fully conscious of the connotations it has for modern people. He knew it would stir up interest and discussion, and he did not mind if these were critical.

For the authority of Dhamma to function in society, it must act through social institutions, in particular, the rulers. Although secondary, an individual or group that dictates on behalf of Dhamma may be needed. Ajarn Buddhadasa insisted that such a ruler must have Dhamma, in particular, the Ten Virtues of Rulers (*rajadhamma*).⁸⁶

If a good person dictates, that is even better. If a bad person, it is hopeless. When the socialist system is well, it must have a tool to dictate. A ruler who fulfills the *rajadhammas* is the best kind of dictator. There probably aren't any political science books from the West to teach us this, maybe because they never had this kind of ruler or King.⁸⁹

The real power is the Law of Nature or Dhamma. By carrying out the ten *rajadhammas*, a ruler (individual or collective) conforms to Dhamma. In Dhammic Socialism, a human dictator—whether an individual or group—is only legitimate when carrying out the dictates of natural law for the sake of peace. Should any person or group usurp or abuse power—that is, use it selfishly and oppressively—the people are justified in deposing them. In fact, this is inherent in the original meaning of the word “*raja*,” according to the *Aganna Sutta*.⁹⁰ Here, in an origin story of sorts, the Buddha is reported to have said that the man chosen to protect the fields and property of the people is given three titles: *Maha-Sammata* meaning “Authorized by the People,” *Khattiya* meaning “Lord of the Fields,” and *Raja* meaning “He Who Satisfies Others.”⁹¹ Thus, the *Raja* must rule for the sake of the people and with their consent. To satisfy the people, a ruler must have Dhamma; without Dhamma, he is merely a usurper or tyrant. The Dhammic dictator, by definition, cannot oppress the people or use violence against them.

Critics complain that such a teaching justifies dictatorships in a part of the world where democracy is not very strong and where many governments tend to be corrupt and abusive of human rights. Ajarn Buddhadasa responded that liberal democracy does not have a better record when we look at it without bias.⁹² He believed that dictatorship—as he defined it—is better able to get things done. He cited events from Thai and local history to illustrate his point. Those of us who have been raised to hate fascism may not agree with him, but we should recognize that he is not talking about fascism or totalitarianism. Further, perhaps we should consider whether he had a valid point when he asked, Which is more important, clinging to our democratic ideology or solving society's problems? If democracy does not solve the problems, is it really better? If it does solve the problems, there will be no need for a human dictator, only the dictatorship of Dhamma.

Dhamma as Democracy

Ajarn Buddhadasa felt that “democracy,” especially as it is being touted by Western governments, businesses, and missionaries—that is, capitalistic liberal democracy—is vague and ambiguous. Here, he was not speaking as a political scientist or ideologist but as a person practically concerned with the well-being of society. Therefore, he spoke of “democracy” as it is popularly understood in Thailand; this is the “democracy” he criticized. He also gave the word his own twist, as he had done with “socialism.” Whether democracy is beneficial or harmful depends on the kind of democracy being discussed.

“Democracy” is a word we hear every day, but it is a word which is ambiguous and most deceitful. This is because each person uses his personal defilements to give his own meaning to “democracy.” One kind [of democracy] is a tool for taking advantage of or harming others; another kind is a tool for building peace.⁹³

The democracy that is primarily concerned with the good of the individual and the rights of the individual is wide open to exploitation by individual defilements. While there can be a kind of democracy that genuinely champions the common good, the democracy ideologues do not speak of it nor does U.S. foreign policy support it. Further, this defiled and selfish “liberal democracy” creates divisions and violence in society.

It creates simultaneously both capitalists and laborers, which are usually seen as opposites or opponents. Because democracy is blurred, there are capitalists. Because democracy is blurred, there occurs the right to seize from the capitalists, that is, the rights of laborers. Because democracy is blurred to the point at which nobody really knows where it is, everything is left to the desires of each person in each case.⁹⁴

The great danger, then, is that the freedom of democracy will be used selfishly, that is, according to the defilements (*kilesa*). As Ajarn Buddhadasa sees it, the vast social problems of our era—increasing poverty, crime, militarization, environmental destruction, suicide, drug abuse, to name only a few—demonstrate that democracy is in fact being used selfishly, incredibly so.

Liberal democracy is totally free and doesn't define clearly what freedom it means. This allows the defilements in people to take advantage of the situation to be free according to the power of defilement. 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 terribly dangerous. Anyone can claim freedom, both fools and sages. If they don't get what they want, they will say there is no freedom.⁹⁵

Freedom, like democracy and socialism, is another concept or value that must be qualified. Is it wise or blind? Is it just or selfish? Is it freedom from *dukkha* or merely from responsibility? For Ajarn Buddhadasa, the only safe freedom is the kind which fits with Dhamma. Let me stress that Ajarn Buddhadasa was not necessarily against all forms of democracy, only the forms that encourage or give too much freedom to selfishness.

As one might expect, Ajarn Buddhadasa had his own definition of "democracy." He felt that "Buddhism has the spirit of democracy" because it recognizes the equality of sharing the common experiences of "birth, aging, illness, and death equally." In short, because all human beings suffer, they are equal and therefore naturally have "the spirit of democracy." Further, he reasoned, "the Buddhist Sangha lives together in a democratic system" and because it can be taken as the Buddhist ideal of communal living its democratic characteristics mean that Buddhism is democratic.⁹⁶ In short, "democracy is Dhamma or is *siladhamma*."⁹⁷

Notice that he here used "democracy" in the same way as he used "socialism." Both terms were described from the same perspective and as being important for the same reasons. It seems that Ajarn Buddhadasa turned them into synonyms, at least when understood in his way. On the other hand, he clearly stated that democracy, as he understood it, is not synonymous with capitalism. In fact, capitalism is undemocratic.

If there is democracy, there is no way for there to be capitalists. If there are capitalists, there cannot be democracy. There is no equality or freedom in that kind of democracy, not to mention brotherhood. . . . Nobody can obstruct the interests of the capitalists.⁹⁸

This point has not always been made as forcefully or directly as it could be, perhaps because of the military dictatorships that have run Thailand throughout most of Ajarn Buddhadasa's teaching career. Direct criticism of the government and political system was not tolerated until recently. Censorship of the press and self-censorship by the monks have been the rule. Nonetheless, Ajarn Buddhadasa made it clear that he considered capitalism to be selfish and immoral, a cause of violence and an obstacle to peace.

On the other hand, Ajarn Buddhadasa was suspicious of Marxist revolutionary movements, primarily because of their emphasis on class struggle, which seemed to him to be motivated by revenge, and because of their use

of force. Nonetheless, he still believed that true socialism is ideal, as is true democracy. For him, "Dictatorial Dhammic Socialism" is a middle way between the contending ideologies of liberal democracy and vengeful communism.

If small countries like ours have a dictatorial Dhammic Socialist system of government it will be like burning the area around our house to clear away the grass so that forest fires won't endanger our house. The forest fire is blood-crazy socialism which is epidemic in the world at this time. Even the capitalist system should be considered as a forest fire. If we must face these forest fires we must clear around our homes. If we have dictatorial Dhammic Socialism we can face both capitalism and the blood-crazy revenge of some workers because pure socialism doesn't create capitalists or laborers. It creates only *sappurisa* or human beings who are correct, who are neutral and without bias.⁹⁹

In the end, the primary issue is not a debate between democracy and absolutism, but whether the political system of a particular society is in line with Dhamma or not; that is, whether it is selfish and immoral or leads to genuine peace. "Suan Mokkh believes in the democracy which has Dhamma as dictator, or, to put it another way, has love as dictator. Kindness and compassion are a dictator like parents who love and care for their children but sometimes must punish them"¹⁰⁰

It should be clear that Ajarn Buddhadasa's main objective all along was to overcome selfishness. He played with political terms because they stir up people's interest, not because he was a politician or political scientist. People had already "invested much thought" in issues like peace, democracy, and socialism; he attempted to attract this interest and "apply it to a better understanding of Buddha-Dhamma."¹⁰¹ The more people understand Dhamma, the less selfishness there will be in society.

Some critics feel that Ajarn Buddhadasa's ideal is unrealistic, that a moral, unselfish society will never happen. His patient response was that no other principles could bring about peace. If it is difficult to accomplish, put blame on one's own selfishness, not Dhammic Socialism. For now, the task is to call attention to the issues that have been discussed here, so that a proper debate may take place. For the most part, our social, political, and economic discussions are too narrow and flat. We must give them moral and spiritual life, which is the proper contribution of Buddha-Dhamma. Then, together, we can work out the appropriate forms needed in each cultural, historical situation. If the end result is peaceful, nonselfish, and rooted in natural law, Ajarn Buddhadasa's objectives will have been achieved. Thus, his Dhammic Socialism can be democratic or dictatorial or both, for

he defines these words in ways that do not put them in conflict. The key is that the principles work, that is, lead to world peace. "Any political system, if permeated with Dhamma, can solve the problems."¹⁰²

And lest we forget, working for the common good and for world peace cannot be separated from our spiritual practice. "This helping others is a matter of helping to destroy selfishness."¹⁰³ For individuals, there is a spiritual side to our responsibility. When it is practiced by society, it can be called "Dhammic Socialism." That Nature forces us to do so in order to survive makes it "dictatorial Dhammic Socialism." This is Ajarn Buddhadasa's vision of world peace in which social and spiritual practice are made one through the destruction of selfishness.

Ajarn Buddhadasa's Influence

The teachings discussed in this essay aim to end *dukkha* and bring about peace. Have they indeed brought such results? What influence have these teachings had in Thailand? The direct result of Ajarn Buddhadasa's work is difficult to measure, for its fruits are found in the understanding and attitude of those who study and practice accordingly. These cannot be quantified. A further complication is that there are many who claim to be Ajarn Buddhadasa's disciples (and their numbers have escalated since his death). It is not easy to determine who is genuinely putting the principles he taught into practice. We must rely on what people tell us about themselves, as well as observe their actions, work, and lifestyle. Roughly, the people influenced by Ajarn Buddhadasa fit into four groups: Buddhist groups and organizations, social elites, progressives, and other religions. Here, we can mention only some prominent examples.

Buddhist Groups

Through his life, writings, talks, and Suan Mokkh, Ajarn Buddhadasa has influenced many individuals who have in turn gone on to their own work, groups, and Wats. Of these, monks and novices are foremost, as Suan Mokkh was originally intended to train them and they made up the majority of residents until recently. Many monks, after a few years of study at Suan Mokkh, went on to start their own Wats or to take up responsible positions, primarily teaching, in established Wats. Well-known examples are Phra Payom of Wat Suan Kaew in Nontaburi, who is very popular with youth and working-class people, and numerous monks at Wat Chalapraton Rangsarit, including the Abbot, Luang Paw Panna (Phra Depvisuddhimedhi),

who is probably the best known Buddhist teacher among Thais. Some monks, such as Luang Paw Panyat of Wat Pah Dhammada (Ordinary Forest Temple), have been involved in grass-roots development work. A number of well-known nuns and women Dhamma teachers have also been deeply influenced by Ajarn Buddhadasa, for example, Upasika Ki Nanayon (known as Ajarn Kor Khao-suan-luang in her later years) and, more recently, Upasika Runjuan Indarakamhaeng, a former university lecturer.

In addition to these individuals and institutions, many lay Buddhist organizations were inspired by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, including the Teachers of Morality Club of Thailand, which works in schools; the Sublime Life Mission, which publishes books; and the Buddhadasa Foundation. In the 1960s and 1970s, Ajarn Buddhadasa was the first to have university students ordain as monks during the summer break and come to the monastery for religious instruction and meditation teaching. In doing so, he helped to apply the ancient Thai custom of temporary ordination for young men to the modern situation.

A brief mention should also be made of foreign Buddhists from Nepal, India, Japan, and the West who have met with and become friends of Ajarn Buddhadasa. The Dalai Lama and he met in Bangkok during 1967. When His Holiness was able to return to Siam in 1972, Ajarn Buddhadasa hosted him at Suan Mokkh. Their main topic of conversation was meditation, specifically, the systematic practice of *anapanasati* (mindfulness of breathing).

Social Elites

Among the elites of Thai society, the groups that have been most influenced by Ajarn Buddhadasa are judges (Ministry of Justice), teachers and educators (Ministry of Education), and doctors (Ministry of Public Health), all of whom work in the civil service, have higher education and social status, and are somewhat conservative. The ones who have been most drawn to Ajarn Buddhadasa are those who share his concern for morality, for Thai culture and society, and some degree of religious understanding and growth. Although they represent the status quo to some degree, his influence helps them to look further and deeper.

In 1938, Suan Mokkh was visited by three well-respected jurors and lawyers, who became lifelong supporters of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. One of them, Dr. Sanna Dhammasakdi was Thailand's only civilian prime minister (1973–1976) and is now chairman of the king's privy council, as well as honorary president of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. Another, Phraya Ladpli Dhammapragalbha, then director of the appellate courts, arranged for Ajarn Buddhadasa to give Dhamma training to prospective judges. This training, consisting of ten lectures given over a three-week period, began

in 1956 and lasted for fourteen years, after which Ajarn Buddhadasa handed the responsibility over to Pannananda Bhikkhu (Phra Depvisuddhimedhi), his close friend and coworker for many years, who continues training the judges up to the present. Many of these lecture series were published as books (and many are still in print), including the well-known *Handbook For Mankind*. Regularly, judges came to pay respect to Ajarn Buddhadasa and express their gratitude for his teaching. If he has helped 10 percent of them to be more wise, compassionate, and just in their work, then Thai society is the better for it.

Ajarn Buddhadasa considered education to be very important and spoke on the subject a great deal. Dhammic Socialism can only come about if youth are educated appropriately. In 1936, the Dhammadana Group opened its Buddhānigama School in Chaiya, the first tangible manifestation of the Suan Mokkh—Dhammadana Group's interest in education. This school became well known due to the high number of its students who went on to high government positions and yet retained a moral foundation. Graduates include former cabinet ministers, Supreme Court judges, and the current commander-in-chief of the army.

Ajarn Buddhadasa's ideas on education were taken seriously, and still are, among teachers, professors, and education administrators. In 1955, he lectured on "Ideals of Teachers from the Buddhist Perspective" to teachers from around the country. A few years later he began to appear increasingly at the major universities and spoke to large audiences, as many as three thousand at a time. He also gave many talks at the Teachers' Congress (*Guru Sabha*). While the education system has not yet been overhauled to reflect his ideas and still mimics the West, some of his students have implemented policies and projects that have tried to mitigate the competitive and selfish aspects of the current system.

In 1985, officials responsible for the ethics component of the new primary school curriculum met and worked at Suan Mokkh. Ajarn Buddhadasa guided their work with daily talks on ethics, education, social responsibility, and nonselfishness. Runjuan Indarakamhaeng, who formerly worked for the Ministry of Education and then became a well-known lecturer at a Ramkamhaeng University (Bangkok), now a resident of Suan Mokkh and one of Siam's most respected woman Dhamma and meditation teachers, was directly involved in the work. Although there have been many problems in implementing this ethics curriculum, such as entrenched bureaucratic interests, the input of Suan Mokkh provided a deeper vision and strengthened the small steps that were made.

Again, there has been little effect on the medical system as a whole, which continues to follow the Western capitalist model wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, individual doctors, including administrators and teachers in

the main teaching hospitals, have changed the way they practice so as to better live up to Buddhist principles. These doctors are less interested in money and more committed to service and social well-being. This group of doctors often invited Buddhadasa to lecture to the Buddhist clubs at their hospitals.

Even prime ministers have taken an interest in Ajarn Buddhadasa. H. E. Pridi Panomyong, leader of the 1932 Revolution and Thailand's senior statesman at that time, attended the "Buddha-Dhamma and the Spirit of Democracy" lecture in 1947 and invited Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, who was only forty-one years old then, for private consultations. Usually, Thailand's political leaders have only sought advice from elder and high-ranking monks. It seems Buddhadasa Bhikkhu had a knack for relating the highest teachings of Buddha-Dhamma with the key issues of the day in a way that intelligent people could understand and benefit from. Pridi even attempted to build a Buddhist center modeled after Suan Mokkh in Ayudhaya, his home province. The attempt failed when Pridi was driven into exile by rightist politicians and generals.

Progressive Groups

In addition to Buddhist circles, Ajarn Buddhadasa has also had some influence among progressive social groups. One reason for this influence is that he has articulately, directly, and forcefully criticized the current state of affairs in Thai Buddhism, Thai society, and the world. His critiques may not come from the same perspectives as the progressives, but there has been room for common cause. In fact, just the fact that someone of his stature is critical is important when most of the monastic hierarchy is conservative, passive, silent, and often co-opted. The progressives had little access to the government-controlled mass media in the 1960s and 1970s and welcomed anything that seemed to support their cause. While he said some things that made the progressives uncomfortable—his idea of dictatorial Dhammic Socialism for example—for many years he was the only prominent monk to teach in ways supportive of their efforts. Many in the student movement of the 1970s, the main force for social change then, found inspiration and guidance in Ajarn Buddhadasa's teaching and example. Even now, important Buddhist social workers—such as Sulak Sivaraksa and Pracha Hutanuvatra, founders of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists—are profoundly affected by the life and work of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.

On the other hand, Ajarn Buddhadasa did not exactly take the side of the progressives. He felt strongly that taking sides is not correct, is selfish, and goes against Dhammic 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.¹⁰⁴

While it is probably true that the progressives are not the main cause of such separations and conflicts, they often help maintain the divisions.

One prominent social activist, unfortunately little known in the West, who has been deeply influenced by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu is Dr. Prawet Wasi. A tropical hematologist on the faculty of Siriraj Hospital of Mahidol University, Dr. Prawet was a leading researcher for many years. He also has become a leading figure in the network of Thai nongovernment organizations (NGOs). He heads the Foundation for Children, one of the country's best known NGOs, and has been influential in the herbal medicine movement, which has regained a significant role in rural health care. Partly because of the prestige of being a Magsaysay Award winner,¹⁰⁵ but also because of his nonoffensive style, Dr. Prawes also commands attention in government circles. Because he is listened to by groups as diverse as the National Security Council and democracy activists, he fulfills the important function of bridging opinions that tend to be opposed and in conflict. Creating a middle ground for constructive dialogue is one way he tries to apply Ajarn Buddhadasa's teachings. Since his retirement from the university, he lectures widely in Thailand and abroad, serves on the boards of most of Thailand's universities, and advises a number of NGOs. He is interested in developing a Buddhist-based alternative education and for this reason visits Suan Mokkh regularly to support the new project for training foreign monks at Suan Atammayatarama.

We should also mention artists, such as the poet Naowarat Pongpaiboon and the painter-poet Angkarn Kalayanapong, who have woven Buddhist themes and perspectives into their work, including poems about Suan Mokkh and Ajarn Buddhadasa.

Dialogue with Christianity

In 1939, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu wrote a long article titled "Answering the Questions of the Priest," in which he strongly criticized the idea of a personal God, that is, a God that is conceived in personal or anthropomorphic terms. This was a response to a visit by an Italian missionary priest who had been living in Thailand for many years. At that time, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was not impressed by the teachings of the Christian missionaries,

especially what he heard on the radio broadcasts. He found what he heard rather simplistic and superstitious, exactly what he was trying to overcome in Thai Buddhism. Further, like many educated Buddhists, he was suspicious of motives of Christian missionaries, the tactics they used, their wealth, and their support from the Western powers.

Ajarn Buddhadasa had been reading the Bible himself and began to study it more deeply. On his own, more or less as he had done with the Buddhist *Tipitaka*, he found there was more to the Christian tradition than he heard on the radio. Eventually, he concluded that there was no point in criticizing the superstitious interpretations of some Christians. There was much more to be gained by working with open-minded Christians. For Ajarn Buddhadasa, all religions are the same in one central respect—eliminating selfishness. Thus, all religions share the same enemy—materialism. Should not they work together then, each in its own way, for the welfare of all humanity? He has espoused this theme for many years, expressed in his “Three Resolutions” (*panidhana*):

1. To help everyone realize the heart of their own religion;
2. To help bring about mutual good understanding among religions;
3. To work together to drag the world out from under the power of materialism.¹⁰⁶

Beginning with the Thompson Memorial Lectures in Chiang Mai (1957), which he was the first non-Christian to give, Ajarn Buddhadasa repeatedly called for mutual understanding and cooperation among religions. He was the most important voice for Inter-Religious Exchange in Siam, and was often criticized by other Buddhists for it. Two of his books on Christianity have been translated into Western languages. *Christianity and Buddhism*¹⁰⁷ is a Buddhist understanding of the Bible, with particular emphasis on the recorded teachings of Jesus, directed mainly at Christians. *Christianity as Far as Buddhists Ought to Know*¹⁰⁸ is for Buddhists, explaining how they can learn from the Christian teachings as the Christians themselves present them, focusing mainly on the theme of Love. To this day, Suan Mokkh is the Wat where Christians feel most at home. A number of Thai and foreign Christians, both lay and religious, looked to him as a teacher.¹⁰⁹ There is even a small Catholic reform movement in the Philippines partly inspired by his life and work.

Final Remarks

In his mid-eighties, in poor health, Ajarn Buddhadasa continued to work and innovate. He initiated a few last projects that expanded the work of Suan

Mokkh. Over the last five years, Ajarn Buddhadasa directed the development of the International Dhamma Hermitage. It has been built by Ajarn Poh Buddhadhammo, the current abbot of Suan Mokkh, on seventy acres of former coconut groves beside two limestone hills across the highway from Suan Mokkh. Also known as Suan Mokkh International, the Hermitage is a retreat center at which monthly meditation courses are given in English and almost monthly in Thai. Usually the courses are attended by over a hundred people. The Hermitage is also used for meetings and workshops, especially those for interreligious exchange and understanding.

Another facility—tentatively named Suan Atammayatarama—is newly completed. Near the International Dhamma Hermitage, thirty acres of land have been set aside as a training center for foreign monks (Western and Asian). Ajarn Buddhadasa conceived of it as a school for “Dhamma Missionaries” where men who wish to dedicate their lives to world peace can live a simple life close to Nature, study Dhamma thoroughly, establish a profound meditation practice, develop teaching skills, and learn to apply the principles of Dhamma to the many problems afflicting the world. A curriculum is being developed, and there are plans for periodic seminars exploring the relationships between Dhamma and social issues, for example, education, AIDS, and feminism. The facilities for this school were completed in 1993.

A similar project is being considered for women. Acknowledging that bhikkhus are not always able to help women and that women have an important contribution to make in solving society's problems, Ajarn Buddhadasa wanted to establish a center for women who wish to become Dhamma Mothers (*dhamma-mata*), “those who give birth through Dhamma.” He felt that the status of women had been dropping steadily since his youth and that this decline should be reversed. Because it is not yet possible to reestablish the Bhikkhuni Order in Thailand and since the white-robed *mae chi* have important limitations, he felt a new approach was needed. Although he was not in a position to give the Dhamma Mothers the same social status as bhikkhus receive, he believed that material support can be provided so that women are also able to live the homeless life and have spiritual opportunities equal to those of the bhikkhus. He envisioned that the Dhamma Mothers would live a simple life focussed on meditation, with some supporting study. They would not travel much, perhaps would be flexibly cloistered. Then, he hoped, as the Dhamma Mothers live up to their name, through example and teaching, society will give them the respect they deserve.

In his last two years, despite poor health following a heart attack and strokes, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu continued to work on various projects. When he died, many were left unfinished. The disciples who are cataloging his notes will publish some manuscripts that were sufficiently complete, such

as his *Dhamma Will and Testament*, which he playfully warned might get him defrocked. A large number of his lectures, including many designed as part of the *Dhamma Proclamation Series*, remain to be published. Various groups, especially the Dhammadana Foundation, which is still headed by his brother Dhammadasa, intend to continue bringing them into print. As Buddhadasa said repeatedly in his later years, "Buddhadasa does not die. I will be present wherever the Dhamma is being discussed and practiced."

Postscript

The final section of this chapter was originally written in the present tense, since Ajarn Buddhadasa was still active despite a heart attack, minor strokes, and other serious physical ailments endured over the last couple of years. Then, on May 25, 1993, two days before his eighty-seventh birthday and the sixty-first anniversary of Suan Mokkh, he had a serious stroke that soon deteriorated into a coma. After six weeks of hospitalization, he returned to Suan Mokkh and died on July 8, 1993.

Although he was unconscious for the final six weeks, he inadvertently provided another opportunity for Thailand to question its values and morals. Previously, he had refused to be taken to the hospital and put limitations on the treatment he would accept, for example, no blood transfusions and no surgery, including the most minor. Nonetheless, the medical establishment and popular opinion forced the monastery to allow him to be "kidnapped" to Bangkok's leading teaching hospital. Although it was obvious to many that there was no chance for recovery, the medical team insisted on "fighting" to the very last moment. His body was finally released from the hospital just in time to return to Suan Mokkh for its last breaths. These events have prompted an important discussion and evaluation of Thailand's health-care system and its ethics. Thus Ajarn Buddhadasa's teachings on Nature, nonattachment, and the middle way are being applied in yet another area of modern life.¹¹⁰

Notes

1. *Dasa* can also be translated "slave."

2. Primary resources for this section are *Lao Wai Meua Wai Sondhaya: Atajivaprawat kong Tan Puttatat (As Told in the Twilight Years: The Memoirs of Venerable Buddhadasa)*, interviewed and edited by Phra Pracha Pasannadhammo (Bangkok: Komol Kimtong Foundation, 1986); *Phap Jivit 80 pi Puttatat Phikkhu (Pictorial Life of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's 80 Years)*, ed. Phra Pracha Pasanna-dhammo

and Santisuk Sophonsiri (Bangkok, Komol Kimtong Foundation, 1986); and the author's personal conversations with Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. In this chapter, works for which no translator are given have not yet been published in English and translations are this writer's own.

3. There is a traditional belief that two of Emperor Asoka's missionaries—the monks Sona and Uttara—came to *Suvarnabhumi*, the capital of which is now Nakorn Pathom, in the third century (B.E.).

4. Christian Era. 1900 C.E. corresponds to 2443 Buddhist Era (Thai reckoning) and 2500 B.E. corresponds to 1957 C.E. Thais count 1 B.E. as the year following the Lord Buddha's *parinibbana*, whereas the Singhalese and Burmese count 1 B.E. as the year of the *parinibbana*.

5. In 1909, the provincial seat moved to Ban Don, at the mouth of the Tapee River, and was renamed Surat Thani, "City of Good people." Pum Rieng remained the district seat until 1921, when it moved to the Chaiya market.

6. *Phra Khun kong Mae keu Santipap kong Lok* (The Virtue of Motherhood is Peace for the World), (Bangkok: Atamm Mayo, n.d., original talk given on Mother's Day, August 12, 1989).

7. *Ajarn* is the Thai form of the Pali *acariya*, teacher or master.

8. "A Single Solution to the World's Problems" (*Nam Prik Tuay Diow*) in *Messages of Truth from Suan Mokkh*, (*Saccasara jak Suan Mokkh*) published in Thai and English (Bangkok: The Dhamma Study and Practice Group, 1990), translators unknown.

9. The *Pansa* (Pali, *Vassa*) literally means "rain" and refers to the three-month period when bhikkhus temporarily cease their wanderings. It is also the traditional way of counting years and seniority within the bhikkhu Sangha.

10. *Phra* is the common Thai term for monks. It is derived from the Pali *vara* (excellent, splendid, noble).

11. *Pictorial Life of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's 80 Years*, p. 55.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Two valuable books concerning the early years of Suan Mokkh are *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh* (Sip Pi Nai Suan Mokkh), tr. Mongkol Dejnakintra (Bangkok: Dhamma Study and Practice Group, 1990) and *The Style of Practice at Suan Mokkh* (*Naew Patipat Thamm Nai Suan Mokkh*) tr. Santikaro Bhikkhu (not yet published).

14. Cf. *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, *Digha-nikaya* (D.ii.100, 154).

15. Children in the neighboring Muslim village liked to make fun of him, "Crazy Monk, Crazy Monk."

16. *Anutin Patibat Tham: Suksa Jivit Yang Pen Witayasat* (*Dhamma Practice Diary: Scientific Study of Life*), (Bangkok, Pacarayasarn, 1986).

17. Not to be confused with the more extreme forms of asceticism and mortification found in other religions.

18. From personal conversation with the author (February 28, 1993) concerning the fifth conference of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists.

19. "Dhammic Socialism According to Religious Principles" (*Dhammika Sanghaniyama tam Lak Sasana*) in *Dhammic Socialism (Dhammika Sanghaniyama)*, ed. Donald K. Swearer (Bangkok: Komol Kimtong, 1986), p. 52. All citations from this book are this writer's own translation from the Thai portion of the book, although the translations of Swearer, et al., have been consulted.

20. Reference uncertain. The Words of the Buddha cited in this paper are all passages from the *Tipitaka* frequently mentioned by Ajarn Buddhadasa.

21. *Ghosana*, in a modified Sanskrit form, is currently used in Thai for "advertising" and "propaganda."

22. "People language" is more literally and conceptually accurate than the "everyday language" used by some translators. Some of Ajarn Buddhadasa's own writings in this area can be found in "People Language and Dhamma Language" in *Keys to Natural Truth*, ed. Santikaro Bhikkhu (Bangkok: Dhamma Study and Practice Group, 1988) and "Help, Kalama Sutta" in *Evolution/Liberation* #5, ed. Santikaro Bhikkhu. Donald Swearer, Louis Gabaude, and Peter Jackson have all emphasized Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's hermeneutics, although there are some problems in Peter Jackson's version.

23. *Majjhima-nikaya, Mulapannasaka, Alagaddupama-sutta* #22, (M.i.140).

24. *Majjhima-nikaya, Mulapannasaka, Culatanhasamkhaya-sutta* #37 (M.i.251) and elsewhere.

25. Here and elsewhere we run into difficulties with language. In English, "attachment" is given various connotations by various thinkers and disciplines. Often it is understood only in a positive sense, e.g., being attached to a spouse, or love. *Upadana*, however, can be negative as well. Further, the thing one is attached to doesn't matter nearly as much as the activity of attachment itself: the feeling of "I" or "mine" concocted by ignorance.

26. For the purposes of this essay, voidness and not-self (*anatta*) can be treated as more or less the same thing. "Because it is not self, it is void of any meaning of self, of selfhood."

27. Here it is worth noting, in passing, that Ajarn Buddhadasa's insistence that voidness is essential for all Buddhists has been controversial in Thailand. Senior monks even used to ask him to stop teaching it to lay people.

28. Ajarn Buddhadasa gave Pali names to these different ways or levels of voidness and *nibbana*, distinctions the Lord Buddha had applied to *viraga*, a synonym of voidness.

29. *Dharmaghosana Atthanukrom (Dhamma Propagation Book of Meanings)*, Bangkok: Alliance for the Propagation of Buddhism, 1990), p. 67.

30. These "Four Dimensions of Dhamma" roughly correspond to the four noble truths.

31. *Siang Takon jak Dhammajati (The Shouting from Nature)*, p. 5 (Uddhidhamma Fund, Bangkok: 1991). When the title of a source is given in Thai, it has been published only in Thai and this writer provided the translation.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

35. He believed this to be true for all the prophets of all religions.

36. *Asitisamvaccharayusamanusarana jak Puttlatat Phikkhu (The Eighty Years of Age Memorial from Buddhadasa Bhikkhu)*, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (Thailand: Chaiya, Suan Mokkh, 1986), p. 142.

37. *Buddhasasanik kap Kananurak Dhammajati (Buddhists and the Conservation of Nature)*, (Bangkok: Komol Kimtong, 1990), p. 13. (This writer hopes to publish an English translation soon.)

38. For Ajarn Buddhadasa, "survival" was not merely physical or genetic, and must include spiritual salvation.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

40. A common synonym and special application of *idappaccayata* is called *paticcasamuppada* (dependent co-origination).

41. *Ida*, this; *paccaya*, condition; *-ta*, state of being.

42. This formula appears throughout the *Tipitaka*, e.g., M.iii.63 and S.ii.28, 95.

43. *Idappaccayata* (Conditionality), (Chaiya: Dhammadana Foundation, 1989), p. 27.

44. *Buddhists and The Conservation of Nature*, p. 12.

45. *Buddhadasana kap Udomgati Dhammika Sangkhom-niyom (Buddhism and the Ideal of Dhammic Socialism)*, (Bangkok: Vudhidamma Fund, date uncertain, probably 1991), p. 19.

46. From the Introduction to *Buddhadasana kap Sangkhom (Buddhism and Society)* in *Desana lae Ovada (Sermons and Talks)* (Suhkapapjai, Bangkok: 1989), p. 167. Original talk given September 22, 1952.

47. *Kam Sawn Puu Buat (Teaching for Those Gone Forth)*, (Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, date unknown), p. 6.

48. *Chumnum Pathakatha Chut Buddha-Dhamma (Collection of Buddha-Dhamma Lectures)*, (Chaiya: Dhammadana Foundation, 1987).

49. Ibid., p. 234.

50. Numerous public talks, as well as conversations with this writer.

51. *Collection of Buddha-Dhamma Lectures*, p. 242.

52. Ibid., p. 251.

53. Ibid., p. 245f.

54. Ibid., p. 253.

55. Digha-nikaya #27, (D.iii.80).

56. Ibid., p. 271.

57. "The Spirit of Democracy," p. 276.

58. One talk on "Socialism"—to judges' assistants—was actually requested by the Ministry of Justice (September 15, 1974 at Suan Mokkh).

59. Similar developments occurred in other Southeast Asian countries, especially the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos, another U.S. client-dictator.

60. "The Kind of Socialism Which Can Help the World" from *Dhammic Socialism*, p. 94.

61. *Buddhism and the Ideal of Dhammic Socialism*, p. 4f.

62. *The Eighty Years of Age Memorial from Buddhadasa Bhikkhu*, p. 119.

63. *Dhamma kap Karn Meuang (Dhamma and Politics)*, p. 267.

64. *Buddhism and the Ideal of Dhammic Socialism*, p. 4.

65. *Buddhism and Society*, p. 177.

66. "The Kind of Socialism Which Can Help the World," p. 96f.

67. "Buddhism and Society," p. 175f.

68. Ibid., p. 174.

69. "The Kind of Socialism Which Can Help the World," p. 96.

70. Ibid., p. 102.

71. Ibid., p. 97.

72. Ibid., p. 98.

73. *Collection of Buddha-Dhamma Lectures*.

74. *Fa Sang Rawang 50 Pi Ti Mi Suan Mokkh* (*Dawning During the 50 Years of Suan Mokkh*), Part I, (Bangkok: Suan Usom Foundation, 1986), p. 44f.
75. *Book of Meanings*, p. 216.
76. Rhys-Davids and Steede, ed., *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary* (London: The Pali Text Society, 1979), p. 379.
77. "The Value and Necessity of Having Morality" from *Dhammic Socialism*, p. 134.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
79. "Socialism According to Religious Principles," p. 46.
80. This is the essence of the Buddha's *paticcasamuppada* (dependent coorigination), as Ajarn Buddhadasa understands it.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
82. One American journalist could barely keep from shouting while interviewing Ajarn Buddhadasa, then later exploded on this writer and others, insisting that "politics is about power, not morality."
83. *Dawning During the 50 Years of Suan Mokkh*, Part I, p. 32.
84. *Bacananukrom Ohabab Pajapanditayasathan 2525* (*Royal Academy Dictionary 1982*), (Bangkok: Aksornjaroentat, 2525), p. 554.
85. *Ibid.*
86. So Sethaputra, *New Model Thai-English Dictionary*, (Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich, 1965), p. 627.
87. *Dawning During the 50 Years of Suan Mokkh*, Part I, p. 33.
88. The Ten *Rajadhammas* are generosity, morality, self-sacrifice, integrity, gentleness, self-control, nonanger, nonviolence, patient endurance, and conformity to Dhamma (*Khuddaka-nikaya, Jataka Book 5*, 378).
89. "Socialism According to Religious Principles," p. 83.
90. *Digha-nikaya #27* (D.iii.93).
91. *Ibid.* and "Buddha-Dhamma and the Spirit of Democracy," p. 271.
92. In the area around Suan Mokkh, the destruction of the environment and the increase in crime with consumer capitalism give evidence to his point.
93. "Socialism According to Religious Principles," p. 55.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
95. *Ibid.*

96. Ibid., p. 30 for all quotes in this paragraph.
97. p. 38.
98. *Dhamma and Politics*, p. 322.
99. "Socialism According to Religious Principles," p. 90.
100. *Dawning During the 50 Years of Suan Mokkh*, Part I, p. 36.
101. *Collection of Buddha-Dhamma Lectures*, p. 242.
102. *Dhamma and Politics*, p. 289.
103. *Gay Dhammaputra (Children of Dhamma Camp)* (Bangkok: Karn Pim Phra Nakorn, 1975), p. 133.
104. "The Kind of Socialism which Can Help the World," p. 110.
105. Named after the late Ramon Magsaysay of the Philippines, and sometimes called "The Asian Nobel Prizes," these awards are given yearly to Asians who have made significant contributions to their countries and the region.
106. The exact wording varied over the years and according to the audience. See, in particular, the talks he gave on his eightieth birthday, which were broadcast nationwide, *Panidhana Sam Prakarn kong Buddhadasa Bhikkhu* (The Three Resolutions of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu), (Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, 1986).
107. Various translators, (Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, 1967). A New English translation will be published soon.
108. *The Essence of Christianity as far as Buddhists Ought to Know*. This series of twelve lectures was published as *Putth-Khrit Nai Tasana Tan Buddhadasa (Buddhism and Christianity as seen by Venerable Buddhadasa)*, (Bangkok: Tianwaan Press, 1984).
109. He has many friends from other religions, especially Muslims, who are numerous in southern Thailand.
110. This writer was at the center of the crisis as one of the monks who attended upon Ajarn Buddhadasa's body in the I.C.U. of Siriraj Hospital. In response to requests, I hope to write a Dhamma reflection on the events and issues raised, which may be completed in 1997.

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