

~ Virtuous Path Series ~



**TEACHINGS
OF BUDDHADASA**

By Santidhammo Bhikkhu

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Buddhapanyanuntarama Buddhist Monastery (BBM)

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Preface

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

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

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

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

Yours in Dhamma,
Venerable Phra Maha Tawatchai Khunakaro
Abbot, Wat Buddhapanyanuntarama

Foreword

Namo Buddhaya Sidthan.

Homage to the Buddha, Success!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you are mindful, you are a Buddha.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The most important action of a peacemaker is the be peaceful. We cannot be angry peacemakers.

We pray for peace all over the world.

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

Venerable Santidhammo

Seattle, U.S.A.



Note on Romanization and Translation

1. The translations of Thai names and Pali words in this book uses mixed method between the Romanization standard of the Royal Institute of Thailand and popular spelling – with the former system considered first. Some examples are: *Buddhadasa* (the standard spelling), *Panyananda* (the popular spelling, instead of *Paññananda*). The main consideration is to provide the actual pronunciation with the common lettering, thus avoiding the use of special letterings which are not accustomed to common readers - unless where necessary.

2. The first time a Pali or Thai term is mentioned, it appears in *italics*; after that, it is in plain type.

3. This book uses the Pali words such as: *Dhamma*, *nibbana*, *Tipitaka*, and *arahant* instead of their Sanskrit equivalents; *Dharma*, *nirvana*, *Tripitaka*, and *arhat*.



TEACHINGS OF BUDDHADASA

*“Pure nature is simple,
humble, fresh,
peaceful, cool.
If you know this flavor,
you know the flavor
of Dhamma.”*

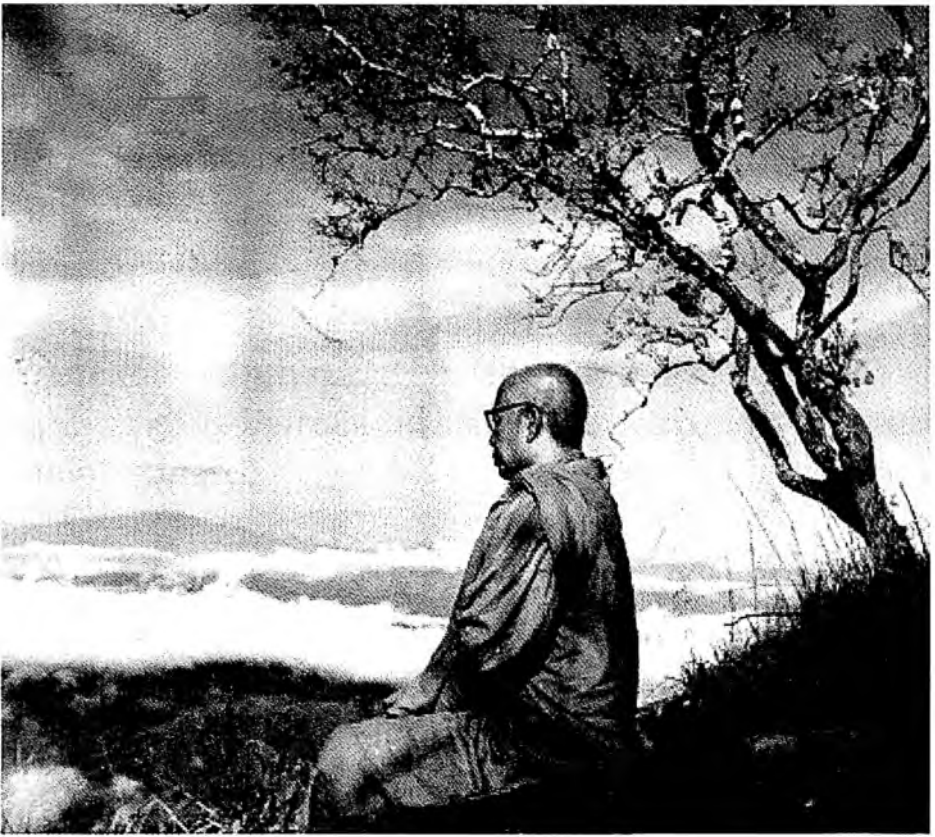
– Buddhadasa

Introduction



Ajahn Buddhadasa was one of the most important Buddhist teachers of the twentieth century. His life was dedicated to the regeneration of Buddhism in the modern world, particularly in his own homeland of Thailand. He presented traditional, orthodox Buddhist teachings, in a manner that was comprehensible and applicable to people living in the modern materialistic, high-tech world, full of conflict and radical change. He dug deep into the treasure mines of the Dhamma, to unearth Buddhist solutions of the social ills facing the individual and society in the world today.

We now live in an unprecedented new age of change, the modern world of technology, with its almost miraculous power and control over nature. This new age is also an age of unprecedented challenges and problems. The cultivation of our humanity has not kept pace with the development of our scientific/technological knowledge. We must cultivate an unprecedented new age of Dhamma practice, to develop wisdom, in order to control this newly acquired power over nature. We must learn to use our technological power with wisdom, understanding, love and compassion.



Ajahn Buddhadasa

How can we use technology wisely, if we do not even know what the purpose of technology is for. Is technology designed to further the meaning and purpose of human life on earth? Do we even know what is the purpose, or meaning, of human life? No? Then how could we possibly know what the purpose of technology is? And so, we blindly proceeded, producing increasing and intensifying technological changes in the world, without purpose or meaning. Isn't this apparent madness?

Buddhadasa was disturbed by this state of affairs, and sought to use Buddhist teachings to diagnose the problems facing the modern world, and provide a Buddhist solution.

As a young man, he became a monk and went to live in the forest of southern Thailand, to meditate on this question. In the jungle, he learned directly from nature, values of simplicity, harmony, balance (equanimity).

He taught that enlightened people in the modern world need not retreat from the world, but to “engage” the modern world in direct confrontation with modernity. Buddha’s teachings were not only for monks and nuns, but also for laypeople.

Lay people are on the front line of this engagement with the modern world; and ordained monks and nuns must make the treasures of the Buddhist tradition available to the lay people, through teaching, through role modeling, and through mutual cooperation. The monastery can act as a “base community” to generate fellowship, education, and action for social change.

Buddhadadaśa taught the centrality of *Nibbana* for Buddhist practice. He downplayed the role of ceremonies, rituals, folk customs, to focus on the central message of Buddha – that *Nibbana* is possible here and now, in this very life, in the midst of daily activities.

Meditation, peaceful mind, is the ground of this work.

Meditation is the central practice of Buddhism, leading to insight, wisdom, and peace of mind.

Empty mind is the fruition of this practice.

This empty mind, leads to joyful action in this world, for the benefit of all sentient beings.

This small book is an introduction for English-language readers, to some of these major themes of Buddhadasa's teaching. Buddhadasa gave thousands of lectures and teachings over the course of his lifetime, compiled in hundreds of massive volumes of books. Very few of these have been translated into English.

Buddhadasa's teaching style was fond of paradox and irony, and sometimes sounded provocative. He hoped to attract the attention of the young students, make them interested in debate and discussion of Buddha's teaching. He sometimes like to say shocking things, like saying "The more one studies Buddhism the less one understands it." His unconventional style sometimes unnecessarily provoked the attention of critics.





Part 1: Environment

Buddhadasa's biggest influence was perhaps his effect on the environmental movement, when he showed that that the "inner ecology" and the outer ecology – the health of the natural world, are inter-connected, inter-related.

Buddhadasa emphasized that Buddha was born on the ground, he journeyed on foot to teach dhamma, and he died lying on the earth. We who follow the Buddha, must "always keep our feet on the ground."

When supporters offered to tile the earth surrounding his *kuti* where he worked and welcomed visitors, Buddhadasa declined the offer, and also refused to have ornate buildings raised in the forest where he lived.

Buddhadasa developed a biocentric spiritual view, saying that "*Dhamma is Natural Truth.*"

Inspired by this interpretation of Buddhist teachings, many monks and laypeople in Thailand became environmentalists. Several monks have campaigned against the logging of teak and other precious woods, which threatens to destroy Thailand's rainforest. *Phra Prajak* and others have been arrested repeatedly for

organizing protests against the development of commercial eucalyptus plantations on national forest reserved lands. Many monks have been murdered by illegal loggers, for their efforts to preserve the last forests of Thailand.

As a youth, Buddhadasa was disillusioned with the conventional lifestyle of urban monks in Bangkok, and decided to follow the example of the Buddha, go forth alone to live in solitude in the forest. Buddhadasa discovered his love of nature as a young monk, when he first moved to live a life of isolation and seclusion, deep in the jungle of southern Thailand, where his first residence was just a small earth-floored hut with a thatched roof, and mat-walls. The jungle was a feared no-man's land, where trees and climbers grew densely, covering the forest.

“My hut was built next to a galvanized iron-sheet covered shack which housed a big Buddha image. The temple had been neglected for no less than eighty years, and big trees with widely shading branches had encroached upon the temple's boundary. Aside from my hut and the shack, there was nothing except the surrounding dense jungle,” Buddhadasa recounted.

Buddhadasa said he had to overcome fear as he sat alone in darkness in the jungle in the middle of the night.

Buddhadasa learned directly from nature, he said. “Trees, rocks, sand, even dirt and insects can speak...If we reside in nature near trees and rocks we’ll discover feelings and thoughts arising that are truly out of the ordinary. At first we’ll feel a sense of peace and serenity which may eventually move beyond that feeling to a transcendence of self. The heart and mind are protected from the troubles and anxieties of everyday’s worldly life, by the deep sense of calm that nature provides through solitude (*vivika*). Indeed, the lessons nature teaches us lead to a new birth beyond the suffering that results from attachment to self. Trees and rocks, can talk to us. They help us understand what it means to cool down from the heat of our confusion, despair, anxiety, and suffering.”

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

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

“The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun,

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

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

He described the forest of Suan Mokkh: “At noon, the forest became quiet. The coucal bird seemed to have the duty of giving out the signal for a rest; with its hoot, all the birds took their perches, some even dozed off. Squirrels stayed put, wild fowls kept down on their pits, and small animals on the ground hid themselves away for a rest, since some of them had finished their morning meals and some wanted to avoid the mid-day heat. Silence crept in, and sometimes there was no wind; this created calmness similar to that during a late

night. At this time, a monk who was not concerned with having the second meal at noon could once more have an extra peaceful moment. To stay in which a forest without getting used to this aspect of nature would be a great shame.”

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

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

“If there was no special incident like this, the forest would be quiet until afternoon, when the coucal bird once again gave its timing signal. Then the animals would begin to move one by one, and the forest would wake up to its normal activities.”

“A mouse-deer with its suckling offspring and a quall with its young brood followed it like a tail, all of

these were very lovely in the late afternoon. Some kinds of birds sang like they were always present during both daytime and nighttime. Some birds were so beautiful that it was almost unbelievable that they are naturally created without God's help. When it rained at night, the most numerous reptiles found were the poisonous spit viper snakes, whose bites can give the victim's foot a painful, putrefied wound that leads to detached or deformed toes. And the most numerous present every night were mosquitoes. All of these were the natural environment which gave many never-boring lessons."

"Regarding the various species of animals, I found that they were awake and working throughout the night in equal number as in the daytime, and no less tumultuous than in the daytime."

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

"Even for study, staying alone is definitely beneficial. Reading the *Tipitaka* in Bangkok was less profound than so doing in the silent forest....Subjects can be scrutinized more profoundly in the forest. Writing

is more lively there,” he said. “Therefore the place of Dhamma practice is important. And this is the aspect we must learn directly from nature.”

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

Living in the jungle for many years, Buddhadasa said he discovered that Dhamma is nature: 1) nature, or the entire natural system of the cosmos; 2) the laws of nature; 3) activity in accordance with the laws of nature (moral action); 4) the results attained from abiding by the laws of nature.

Buddhadada’s teaching was that nature and the Dhamma are the same. The destruction of nature is the destruction of the dhamma. Toward the end of his life he became very concerned about the harm to the environment, and one of his talks at Suan Mokkh in 1990, three years before his death, was titled “Buddhists and the Care of Nature” (*Phutthasasanik Kap Kan Anurak Thammachat*)

Buddhadasa taught that each person’s well-being is linked with the well-being of everything and everyone else. “The deep sense of calm that nature provides through separation from the stress that plagues us in the day-to-day world protects our heart and mind. The

lessons nature teaches us leads to a new birth beyond suffering caused by our acquisitive self-centeredness.”

To act contrary to this truth is to suffer the consequences, in Buddhadasa’s dramatic terms “the greedy and selfish are destroying nature....Our whole environment has been poisoned – prisons everywhere, hospitals filled with the physically ill, and we can’t build enough facilities to take care of all the mentally ill. This is the consequence of utter selfishness...And in the face of all of this our greed and selfishness continues to increase. Is there no end to this madness?”

“The more craving you have, the faster you will destroy the world.”

“If we were all to live together according to Nature’s plan, we would see that Nature’s way is one of peace. When people go against Nature, the result is confusion and turmoil. The role of religion is to solve our basic human problems in order to bring about peace, to put an end to turmoil and confusion.” Buddhadasa said. “It performs this role by showing us the perfect absolute power of Nature.”

“We need to live in harmony with Nature,” he said. “When we do not live in harmony with nature, we are not fully human that we cannot experience peace and fulfillment in a way that only humans can. When such is the case, we are no better than animals. Animals at least live according to the way of Nature, and so

they experience relatively little suffering. Humans have used their advanced intelligence to take advantage of one another, going against the way of the Dhamma and the way of God.”

“Actually, we should experience fulfillment on a higher level than animals, but we make our condition a kind of living hell, a suffering (*dukkha*) even worse than animals, when we go against the way of Nature.”

"Forest Wat, Wild Monks"

Buddhadasa gave a talk titled “*Forest Wat, Wild Monks*”, in which he described the transformation of monks who live in nature, like the Buddha. Here is an abridged version of some of the major themes from that talk:

“The Buddha and his disciples originally lived outside the cities and villages in forests and wildernesses; never within the city walls. Suan Mokkh is forest wat. I wanted to live a lifestyle like the Buddha lived.”

“I chose a place in the forest because I wanted to promote *vipassana-dhura*, the way of meditation.”

“The monks must have a discipline or system of living intimate with nature, being companions with nature, to sit and talk, to sit and watch, to sit and listen, together with nature. To live naturally.”

“We are nature monks, living in harmony with nature, close to nature, studying nature until realizing

nibbana, which is the pinnacle of nature. It means ‘the most simply way of living.’”

“The more simple (our lifestyle), the more natural it is. The more natural it is, the less opportunity for ‘I’ and ‘mine’ to be born. Thus, it automatically becomes correct and beautiful according to our monks' way.”

“Live naturally and it will be Dhamma (Natural Truth) and *Vinaya* (Natural Discipline), or Nature, in and of itself. Living naturally is near to nibbana, because nibbana is naturally clean, clear, and calm. Live naturally, it helps make us clean, clear, and calm more easily.”

“The Law of Nature is Buddhism -- it's the Natural Truth. Try out this natural living which automatically has lots of cleanness, clarity, and calm -- until you know how the Buddha lived.”

“Lord Buddha was born outdoors, awakened outdoors, realized nibbana outdoors, taught outdoors, lived outdoors, had a hut with an earthen floor, and so on. We sit on the seat of the Buddha -- the ground.”

“In nature, one lives a materially and physically simple way; and the mind is free to go its own separate way. [The mind] takes a higher course, because when we live simply, the mind isn't preoccupied. The heart is free to fly. If we indulge in comfort like wealthy people, that comfort intoxicates the heart. It traps the heart,

confines the heart without escape.”

“So live and sleep more lowly, since humble things won't trap the heart. Live humbly and the mind will soar on high, will think lofty things. Living in a humble condition, the mind can only proceed in a higher way.”

“It's easy because the mind isn't loaded down with anything. The mind can be free in its reflections and actions. Since the mind is heedful, there are no mistakes.”

“If something is in line with original nature, it's 'natural.' If it goes after new pleasures, artificial pleasures, it's 'unnatural.' They're truly different.

“If we live simple, natural lives, the defilements arise with difficulty. If we live in an unnatural way, it's easy for the defilements to be born.”

“To accept exactly what nature provides is sufficient, is good enough. Make things humble so that they don't trap the mind. Then our hearts are free to think, consider, decide, and choose.”

“Now, as monks, you have the opportunity to live in nature. The heart has a chance to know the peaceful flavors and solitude of Nature.”

“The Arahant's heart is just natural. Now, we may have a taste of a heart like that -- but only momentary, temporary. The next moment it changes off in another direction, and we can't pull it back. Try to penetrate this heart of nature.”



“Pure nature is simple, humble, fresh, peaceful, cool. If you know this flavor, you know the flavor of Dhamma.”

“Here we can catch the substance of cleanliness, clarity, and calm -- the body of Dhamma. To have grasped it and seen even for a moment, is better than never having grasped, known, or seen it at all. We must pass through, must arrive at, and receive "something."

“We'll do something, find some method, which takes the heart all the way to that city: the city of peace, the state of peace, the nature which is peace.

Keep searching for and aiming at only the peaceful mind.

The word "peace" means "not troubled, not anxious, not agitated, not disturbed, not painful, not pierced." I only want things to happen peacefully.”

“Worldly people think this runs counter to human existence in the world. They don't want peace, they want stimulation -- pleasure through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, flesh. They want excitement. They don't want peace and calm.

“But we must make a decision, a choice. Do we want stimulation, the constant state being driven and manipulated by passions -- desires and aversions? We must consider where will it end? The rich have wants that never end. They follow endless desires, then what kind of world will that be? “

“This is why the cities are so different from the forests. People [in cities] don't want peace. How will we pursue peace, living amongst people who don't want peace? How can we be peace? How can we use our understanding of this peace to solve those problems?”

“I still think that it can work. When we work with a calm mind amongst those non-peaceful people in those incredibly chaotic cities and capitals, we can be peace.”

“We can have minds that are under control, are "normal," are on track, are disciplined, are at peace; they do what they should. Finally, if we must work for people who are not calm, we are up to it.”

“This calm mind gradually transforms those who aren't calm, making them more calm and in love with calmness. One makes blessings without being conscious of it. People with Peace who work together with people who lack Peace will do good without being aware of it. They'll cure the people without Peace, so that Peace develops in them steadily.”

“I believe that Dhamma is (commendable) for use in a world lacking peace and coolness. If we want peace, we have the right to find a peaceful place. But wherever the nature monk goes, he automatically teaches the "Peaceful Creed" right there. There will be some success, and some automatic "blessings," too. Be an example of peace for them to see, be truly happy for

them to see, they'll be interested and some will even follow. You'll get "merit" and the world becomes a better place."

"The Arahant can never get hot again. He can dwell in the city without dying – although he would probably get fed up beyond toleration, then have to flee....To get what the Buddha got, you must live as the Buddha lived. He lived and maintained life in such a natural way. If we live this way, we can experience the Buddha's life."

"The Buddha, and all founders of religion – Jesus, Muhammad -- all started life intimate with Nature. All of them awakened in forests or wilderness surrounded by Nature."

"To awaken as a Perfectly Self-Awakened Buddha; or to become One with God, to communicate with God – is experienced living in nature."

"The Lord Buddha is a real Awakened Being. The Lord Buddha taught suññata (voidness) -- a heart void of "I" and "mine" -- as most beneficial for everyday people."

"Therefore, to live in harmony with nature is to understand voidness."

"By trying to live in harmony with nature like nature-monks in the forest -- even temporarily -- you'll understand voidness."

"You will experience a heart which is void and

cool, which is clean, clear, and calm.”

“You will do your work with a free heart, receive the fruits of labor. You can work more, with a cool and peaceful different heart. Very few folk are naturally cool, but it is possible.”

“Especially this modern world, things change constantly, so fast, so suddenly. Progress is violently and speedily destroying the world. So hurry and study-practice, hurry to try it out, hurry to find peace.”

Ajahn Buddhadasa in Suan Mokkh



“Speak little, keep to yourself, and constantly observe the heart. That's vipassana -- continuously watching over the heart -- that's meditation. In the end, you will find the truth exactly as the Buddha taught... This is the Buddha's supreme aim.”

“If we must speak for the benefit of others, we speak according to experience.”

“So we hurry to know Dhamma. We study Dhamma from within, by living in the midst of Nature which reveals and demonstrates the Dhamma all the time.”

“Maintain a way of life as a nature monk in a forest temple. Bathe yourself in coolness until, understanding coolness, you can't do wrong or get hot. You'll get cooler and cooler because it's something naturally attractive: peace.”



Part 2:

Buddhist Practice for Everyday People

Buddhadasa was concerned that Buddhism in the early 20th century, was becoming irrelevant to the modern civil society that was emerging. He worked tirelessly to translate the Buddha's teachings into vernacular language, and place Buddhism squarely in the center of modern life.

This, Here And Now

Through his life, writings, talks, and meditation teachings at Suan Mokkh, Ajahn Buddhadasa influenced many individuals who became civic leaders, and intellectuals in Thai society, have in turn gone on to their own work, groups, and Wats. Many monks were trained in Suan Mokkh, and became great teachers throughout Thailand; after a few years of study at Suan Mokkh, they went on to start their own centers, or to take up teaching in established Wats.

Buddhadasa taught that laypeople can fully participate in the practice of Buddhism – that it is not limited to monks and nuns living in seclusion. The Buddha's teaching is relevant to life, here and now, in the present world; it teaches us how to live free of suffering.

“If one acts well and correctly as a layperson, one may be able to avoid suffering,” Buddhadasa said. “Don’t accept suffering and tortured as an inevitable result of your karma, but see it as a problem which must be solved.”

We live in the modern world of materialistic consumerism, which values the material world as the source of human knowledge, and domain for advancing human wellbeing. Buddhadasa is speaking to people who live in this modern civilization.

Buddhism teaches people how to live in the world of modern man. It does indeed guarantee happiness in the next life, but no need to be concerned about that. “If we live upright and correct lives, then the next life will certainly be good.”

Cooking and cleaning, manual labor, teaching, crafts, education, taking care of children- all these activities are sanctified, if performed with love and understanding.

Daily life is sanctified. It is the field of our spiritual activity. Our daily life in this world, our social activities -- with its economic activities, political activities, leisure choices and activities -- are full of moral and spiritual consequences, and religious meaning.

Appealing to the modern love of science, Buddhadasa described Buddhism as a “science” of mind. “Buddhism is not a philosophy, it is a science. It is of a

kind with material science but it is a mental science or a science of *namadhamma* (mentality).”

Whereas philosophy is speculative, Buddhism is experiential or experimental.

He returned to the scriptures of the *Pali* Canon as his authority. “The Buddha laid down a principle for testing: examine and measure against the suttas and compare with the vinaya.”

“Nibbana must be something we can experience in this life,” he said. “The purpose of Buddhism is to allow everyone to live in the world victoriously... Dhamma or religion exists as a refuge of people of the world. I don’t want good people to abandon the world but I want people to live in the world beneficially without suffering.”

It is possible for laypeople to attain Nibbana in the midst of their routine, everyday duties, Buddha-dasa said: “We use mindfulness to be alert and block the way of the mind attaching to *kilesa*...because the fundamental nature of the original mind is free. Nothing whatsoever should be clung to as “I” or “mine”.”

If you are mindful, you are a Buddha.

“Having mindfulness is to wait and be cautious with every inward and outward breath. Don’t get lost in attached clinging, to having, taking, and being.”

“Don’t identify as ‘I’ or ‘mine’; act with clear awareness and there will be no suffering.”

“The suññata of the Buddha means the absence of anything that we might have a right to grasp at and cling to as an abiding entity or self...The world is described as empty because there is nothing whatever that we might have a right to grasp at. We must cope with an empty world, with a mind that does not cling.”

Dhamma Is Duty

Often, Buddhadasa spoke of Dhamma as Duty. Our work is our religion. Our duty is what makes life meaningful.

Whereas in the west, we tend to emphasize “rights”, Buddhadasa recommended we pay more attention to “duty” – responsibility – as a more satisfying and meaningful way to live in the world.

Dhamma is duty, Buddhadasa taught. Duty is merely to do what needs to be done for the benefit of other people, and other living things. Duty is to put the needs of others before our own desires. Duty is to place the common good before self-indulgence. Our lives become meaningful when we act, not out of self-interest, but “duty,” he said.

Learning how to be content with life, as it actually is, as we fulfill our duty in life, is what makes life meaningful. “The actual practice of Dhamma is (our daily) work” Buddhadasa said.

“Work for the work, to work for the sake of

Dhamma,” he said. “If we have Dhamma it will make working or development free from suffering... Working is the same thing as practicing the Dhamma. There are no ways of the world (distinct from) the ways of Dhamma.”

“The world is working, and working is the world, life is working and working is life. They are one and the same thing. If we were to live in the world or have a life devoid of working then such a life would be without meaning; it would, moreover, already be dead.”

“We will consequently feel successful in our work. That is, the work will go well and the person who does it will be happy and want to work because he or she enjoys working. If we act in this way, it is Buddhism or gong to the heart of Buddhism.”

“The word ‘working’ is right livelihood. When there is right work, then it is one component of the Noble Path’s set of practices advancing towards the blessed nibbana.”

Our daily life is sacred, Buddhadasa said. “People must act in order to be human... Working is something sublime, holy, exalted. As for being human, if that which is called work is abandoned, we will inevitably lose our correct humanity.”

The Importance of Individual Liberation.

Individual liberation through meditation is the heart of Buddhist way of life.

Craving and attachment is the basic cause of suffering. Nibbana is the state free of craving and attachment. Nibbana is the highest truth of Buddhism.

Buddhadasa said that nibbana is not the goal of a solely monastic pursuit, but is a goal for everyone. He revived nibbana as the center of Buddhist practice, rather than “merit making” and ceremonies of folk Buddhism, to show people how to live in the contemporary world without suffering.

The principles of nibbana are for everyone because the state of non-attachment is our goal, true nature and what we strive to rediscover in the midst of our present state of stress and *dis-ease* (dukkha), Buddhadasa said; “to be non-attached means to be in our true, original condition – free, at peace, quiet, non-suffering, totally aware” Buddhadasa said.

Those who live in the modern world experience tremendous stress: “Those who are hot and bothered need to cool off. For this reason the Buddha intended the teaching about emptiness (suññata) as the basis for action on the part of ordinary people.”

How is it possible to attain nibbana, we may ask?

Buddhadasa often referred to the Buddha's teaching in the *Sammyutta Nikaya*, when a monk asks the Buddha, "how is ignorance overcome, and true knowledge attained?"

The Buddha answered: "When a monk hears 'nothing whatsoever is worth clinging to,' that monk knows everything, he understands everything. Then he sees everything differently. He sees the eye different, colors different, contact different. He sees that they are impermanent. He abandons clinging and delusion."

Buddhadasa saw this as the heart of the Buddha's teaching: "We do not need to speak of the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, or any points of doctrine, or of the history of Buddhism. We have to forget about all those things, and begin our study by examining the words 'me' and 'mine', or rather the feelings in the heart which gives rise to these words. To truly understand me-and-mind leads to the extinction of suffering," Buddhadasa wrote in his essay *Me and Mine*.

"If there is no self there is no suffering."

Liberation, Nibbana, is open to all people, not just monks and nuns, and it can be experienced in this very life, here and now. It's our duty to free ourselves.

He said that our original mind is pure, but obscured by defilements due to our preoccupation with gain and loss in this world.

“Originally our mind is free from defilement. Defilements seize us later. Void mind is our normal state, a condition free from suffering, a state filled with mindful awareness. The original condition of the mind is one of non-attachment. When the mind attains to this non-attached condition, it is in a state of Buddhahood; that is, it knows the true nature of things,” he wrote in his essay *Working with Free Mind*.

The purity of the mind is achieved through meditation practice.

“To develop non-attachment is at the basis of being able to act without concern for one’s self, to act unselfishly, to work for the sake of the work itself, rather than for one’s self.” He said.

He emphasized meditation practice, not mere study, especially the practices of insight meditation as taught in the sutra - *Mindfulness with Breathing*.



Part 3: Meditation

Meditation practice is central to attaining personal liberation, here and now. Meditation is the practice that leads to the insight into Natural Truth. Buddha-dasa revived the importance of meditation practice for all people, and not merely for forest monks. He taught that meditation is the way to purify the mind and realize this free-state of mind he called “empty mind.”

He emphasized the most basic form of meditation, *anapanasati*, mindfulness with breathing, to develop insight into reality.

“I have been trying my best for many years and I am always willing to do whatever I can to help everyone understand anapanasati and practice it successfully, in order that all of us can escape from all aspects of humanity’s prisons.”

“The purpose of anapanasati is to remove all vestiges of clinging (*upadana*) regarding self. The removal of attachment toward self is the final and perfect quenching of suffering (*dukkha*), which happens to be the meaning of liberation and salvation.”

“The heart of Buddhism is just to uproot or cut out attachment. Then suffering will be finished.”

“Attachment is the cause of suffering. Suffering is born out of attachment...We study and practice *samadhi* (concentration) and *vipassana* (insight) in order to destroy attachment.”

We voluntarily put ourselves in mental prison, he said, by our attachment. “Prison exists right here... we are captured, incarcerated, enchained, and put through difficulties and torment in suffering...Understand clearly the meaning of attachment. Wherever there is attachment, there is prison.”

“Escape from the prison of [attachments], break out of the prison, into the voidness free of soul and self. Not having any self, living free from self, void of self – of any sense of self, void of all ideas and notions about self – this is true purity.”

“Training in *samadhi* and *vipassana* (concentration and insight), that is, development in mindfulness with breathing (*anapanasati-bhavana*) is learning inside.”

“*Samatha-vipassana* is one thing, not two separated things...Both *samatha* and *vipassana* are developed at one and the same time. Looking around us, we will see nothing but the flow of *idappacayata* (cause and effect).”

Samatha sees the object fixed in the mind. *Vipas-*

sana sees the characteristics and conditions of the object – that all things are empty, impermanent, incomplete and incompletable.

Samadhi is the mind steadfastly focusing on the object. *Pañña** is seeing what the thing is about, what characteristics it has, and what its truth is.

(* *Pañña* pronounced *pan-ya*)

We use concentration and wisdom in everyday tasks. Meditation is when we bring these powers to a very intense and purified focus.

Consider a car in motion -- we see it as a unified experience; but it is actually two things – the object and the motion. “Observe the power aspect as concentration and the activity aspect as knowledge and wisdom,” Buddhadasa said.

“Samadhi and *pañña* can’t be separated, and *sila* is always present. Morality, concentration, and wisdom are revealed in the secret of nature and that all success comes through morality, meditation, and wisdom.”

Meditation practice for the modern age must be fast and powerful “because we are speeding forward more powerfully, and increasingly pressing in upon us. We must prepare to meet the challenge of this out-of-control time,” Buddhadasa said.

“As we enter the nuclear age, suffering will dominate and trample more and more strongly, thoroughly,

and heavily....As the nuclear age progresses the suffering increases to nuclear strength. Buddhists must have the knowledge and whatever else is needed to resist and solve dangers.”

Three Universal Characteristics

In meditation, the mind will develop “insight” -- penetrate the deepest insight into nature, reality: Impermanence (*anicca*), not-self (*anatta*), and dis-ease (*dukkha*) are the three characteristics common to all things.

“All things are unstable and constantly changing incessantly,” Buddhadasa said.

“All things are unsatisfactory; they evoke disillusionment and disenchantment, for anyone having clear insight into their nature.”

“To our imperfect vision, things appear as selves; but as soon as our vision becomes clear, unobscured and accurate, we realize that there is no self-entity present in any of them.”

“The Buddha stressed these three characteristics, more than any other. The entire teaching can be summed up as simply: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-selfhood.”

“The doctrine of non-self tells us ...that nothing whatsoever is a self or belongs to a self.”

“Now intuitive insight, or what we call "seeing Dhamma," is not, by any means, the same thing as rational thinking.”

“Intuitive insight can be gained only by means of a true inner realization.”

“If, on looking closely at the actual course of events, we become genuinely fed up, disillusioned and disenchanted with that thing, we can be said to have seen Dhamma, or to have gained clear insight.”

“This clear insight may develop to such a degree that it has the power to bring liberation from all things.”

“Insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-selfhood amounts to realizing that nothing is worth getting or worth being.”

“The word *suññata**, means voidness, voidness of selfhood, void of any essence that we might have a right to cling to with all our might as being "mine.”

(* *Suññata* pronounced *soon-ya-ta*)

“Mindfulness, which leads to the insight that all things are devoid of any essence that is worth clinging to, is the real core of the religion.”

“Mindfulness is the key to Buddhist practice.”

“When we have come to know clearly that everything of every kind is devoid of selfhood we can be said to know Buddha-Dhamma in its entirety.”

“The single phrase ‘empty of self’ sums up the words ‘impermanent (anicca), unsatisfactory (dukkha)

and not self (anatta).’

“As soon as any individual has come to perceive the emptiness of things, there arises in him the realization that it is not worth getting or being any of those things.”

“This feeling of not desiring to get or to be has the power to protect one from falling slave, to the de-filements or to any kind of emotional involvement.”

“Once an individual has attained this condition, he is incapable of any unwholesome state of mind. He is not carried away by anything. He is no longer seduced by anything. His mind knows permanent liberty and independence, and is free from suffering.”

“Suffering arises from desire -- namely desire to have and desire to be -- in short, from desire. And desire arises from failure to realize that all things are inherently undesirable.

“We have seen that suffering has its origins in desire, which is just what the Buddha set out in the Second Noble Truth.

“There are three kinds of desire:

1) The first kind is sensual desire, desiring and finding pleasure in things: in shapes and colors, sounds, scents, tastes, or tactile objects.

2) The second kind is desire for becoming, desire to be this or that, according to what one wants.

3) The third kind is desire for non-being – desire

for destruction.”

“To succeed in overcoming these three forms of desire is to attain complete liberation from suffering.”

“We can eliminate desire, extinguish it, cut it out at its roots, and put an end to it by insight into the simple truth of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness (suffering) and non-selfhood, until we come to see that there is nothing worth desiring.”

“Everything whatsoever is a burden simply by virtue of its characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non selfhood.”

Buddhadasa said that the object of desire is, by nature, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and “nobody's property.” “It cannot conform to the aims and objectives of anyone. It will only change as is its nature. All our efforts, then, are an attempt to oppose and withstand the law of change; and life, as an attempt to make things conform to our wishes, is fraught with difficulty suffering.”

The *arahants* liberated themselves by the power of insight, clear and thorough knowledge of... the true nature of things.

“They did not desire to get or possess anything, and as a result others were benefited thanks to their benevolence. Their wisdom told them to make it known rather than remain indifferent, and so they were able to pass the teaching on to us.”

“Freedom from craving brings many incidental benefits.”

“If we wish to break free from suffering, following the footsteps of the Buddha and the arahants, then we must train ourselves to act with discrimination rather than with craving.”

“It is essential, then, that we are continually aware that, in reality all things are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not selves, that is, that they are not worth getting or being.”

“If we must be involved with them, then do so with discrimination and our actions will not be contaminated with desire. If we act wisely, we shall be free of suffering right from beginning to end. The mind will not blindly grasp at and cling to things as worth getting and being. We shall be sure to act with wakefulness, and be able to proceed in accordance with tradition and custom, or in accordance with the law.”

“All things are impermanent, perpetually changing. Realizing this, we need not become upset about anything.”

“Being is the same. There is no need to cling to one's state of being this or that, because in reality there is no satisfactory condition at all. All conditions bring about suffering of one kind or another.”

“The simple technique of *vipassana* (insight), the direct practice of Dhamma, consists of close in-

trospection, which reveals that there is nothing worth being, or that there is really no satisfactory state of being at all.”

“We must understand things and live wisely, involving ourselves in things in such a way that they cause a minimum of suffering, or ideally, none at all.”

“We must share this insight with our friends and relatives. There will then be harmony in the family, the town, the country, and ultimately in the whole world.”

“Each individual will be guided by insight, by the ever-present, unobscured vision that there is in reality nothing that we can grasp at and cling to.”

“Everyone will come to realize that all things are impermanent, unsatisfactory and devoid of any self-entity, that none of them are worth becoming infatuated with.”

“When we really know everything as impermanent, unsatisfactory and devoid of selfhood -- the mind does not cling to anything.”

Void Mind

Meditation leads to insight, wisdom, understanding. Buddhadasa called this state of awareness “void mind.”

The highest attainment of Buddhist practice and wisdom is Void Mind. Void mind is a mind which is free from moral impurities and in a state of peace and equa-

nimity, the foundation of nibbana, suññata -- emptiness or voidness.

Buddhadasa insisted “Nibbana must be something we can attain in this life.”

“Buddhism exists in order to allow everyone to live in the world victoriously, without suffering. We needn’t flee the world.”

“Dhamma or religion exists as the refuge of the people in the world. I don’t want good people to abandon the world but I want people to live in the world beneficially without suffering.”

Nibbana is possible, in this very life, Buddhadasa taught.

“At the basic level, Right View is correct understanding, in the sense that it effects beneficial development of this world in every way that people want. Right View of the middle level is correct understating that effects beneficial development in worlds higher than those people wish for, which is called ‘other worldly.’; the world beyond, or the next world, and which are better than or different from this world. As for the highest level of Right View, this is correct understanding that effects ‘crossing over’ or transcendence of each and every world in all ways, which is called the attainment of Nibbana or *Lokuttara* and which is beyond the world.”

There are three kinds of Voidness;

- Emptiness of self
- Empty of greed, hate and ignorance
- Empty of karma

The external world is empty. *Khuddaka Nikaya* says: “Because of being void of self, or of things due to self, it is consequently said that he world is void (*suññata*).”

One acts not out of self-interest, but out of other-interest, for the benefit of the common good, Buddha-dasa said.

“One does not cling to anything, is not anything, does not feel that one gets anything, or that one gets to be anything,” he said. “The mind is ‘free of suffering, free of dogmatic clinging and attachment.’”

“The Lord Buddha said ‘*nunnato evekhassa, nogharaja sada sato* – One should be a person with mindfulness, always seeing the world in the condition of being a freed thing.’ Whosoever sees the world in the condition of being a freed thing will not have suffering because they will see it [the world] as something completely without birth and extinction, and so there cannot be suffering.”

“The *suññata* of the Buddha means the absence of anything that we might have a right to grasp at and cling to as abiding entity or self....The world is described as empty because there is nothing whatsoever that we might have a right to grasp at. We must cope

with an empty world with a mind that does not cling,” he explained.

Void mind is our natural state of mind, happy, content, free of neurotic desires, resentments, jealousies, and so on...

“I consider a mind freed from defilements [of greed, hatred, ignorance] to be fundamental... Normally the mind is fundamentally free from defilements; hence our only spiritual duty is to wait and block their way with mindful wisdom. Don't give them [*kilesa*] the chance to rise up. Let them continuously be free fundamental, original mind.”

“Having mindfulness is to wait and be cautious with every inward and outward breath. Don't get lost in attached clinging, to having, taking, and being.”

“Empty mind is the state in which all the objects of the physical world are present [and being perceived] as usual but none of them is being grasped or clung to as ‘mine.’”

“Thus empty mind is not a vacuous mental state. It is not ‘void’ of content. All objects are there as usual and the thinking process are going on as usual, but they are not going the way of grasping and clinging with the idea of ‘I’ and ‘mine’.”



Part 4:

Social Teachings of Buddhadasa

Buddhist practice is not only for personal happiness, but also for social happiness; for universal happiness. Buddhist practice serves the common good.

Liberation, void mind, allows us to act in beneficial manners toward others in society, to act in a natural way. Nature, life systems, is a cooperative harmony, a society, working for mutual benefit, he observed. Inter-being. Buddhadasa called this “Dhammic Socialism.”

In the 1970’s, during the Vietnam War, Thailand was being increasingly wracked with political turmoil and fear, assassinations of students and liberal activists, military takeovers in fear of communists. Buddhadasa was moved and troubled by these developments in his country, and began to speak out on the social issues and political issues facing Thailand, applying the Buddha Dhamma as a healing balm to the suffering of social upheaval.

Did Buddhism have anything to say about problems facing the world – communism, capitalism, materialism, consumer culture? Did Buddhism show a way to move forward through these social turmoil, and bring harmony and peace to society?

Dhamma is the society that considers the other, rather than putting self-interest first. He said the social principle taught by the Buddha put the “common good” above self-interest. A harmonious society was based on self-restraint and generosity as primary values, and the ethics of loving-kindness and compassion.

The society is placed above the individual.

“Whatever political system of the social order, must be to serve the common good of the society as a whole, and not just for the individuals or any one person. In a society that puts the interests of the individuals above those of the community, social problems cannot be effectively addressed because the context of the problems is the way the society operates as a whole,” Buddhadasa said.

Generosity, rather than profit-making, was the foundation of social life. Society is cooperative, not competitive.

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

then we shall all perish.”

“Killing others will only lead to being killed. The only way to live with others harmoniously is to act out of loving-kindness,” he said.

He opposed and criticized both capitalist consumer cultures, and Marxist communist ideas of class-warfare.

Strong Practice for a Powerful Age

The Modern Technological “Nuclear Age” presents us with unprecedented challenges, as we face ever accelerating speed and energy, as we race toward catastrophe. Great Souls must arise and arouse unprecedented energy and spiritual development, in order to meet this challenge.

Intensification. Everything has changed, says Buddhadasa. Nothing is the same as the past. We find ourselves in unprecedented catastrophic circumstances.

“This modern world gets closer and closer to disaster each day. Progress! Progress destroyed the world! It’s hard to believe people can say this world is ‘civilized.’ When that civilization is destroying this very world by bringing upon it the dangers of the nuclear age,” said Ajahn Buddhadasa in 1984.

“Progress in the modern world only serves to encourage stupidity – infatuation with the new, the strange, the delicious, the seductive,” he said. “Why

not take a happier view of the situation? Because it is impossible! Material progress has led people to infatuation with sensual pleasures and stimulation and blocked the way to peace.”

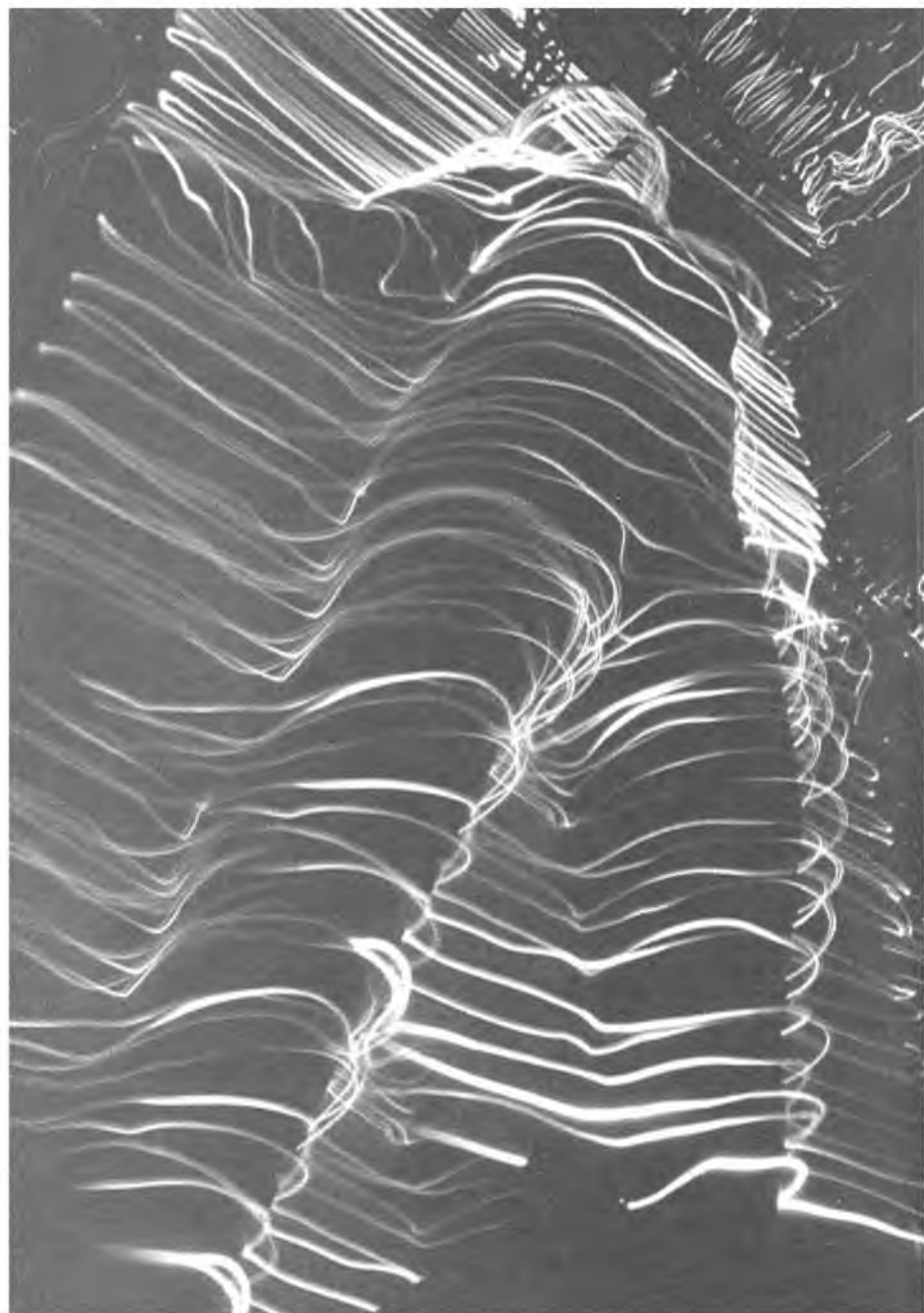
Such intoxication with power, pleasure, and ‘progress’ has unleashed unlimited selfishness. Everywhere we look we see “tragedies, disasters, and crisis – the opposites of peace. Disasters come one after the other, continuously.”

The onslaught of sensational speed, progress and power “dominate the mind completely...beyond reckoning.”

The overwhelming oppression of material progress are destructive to the human spirit, and the natural world. “This is an enormous and absolute danger,” Buddhadasa said. “These days the world grows more and more stupid.”

The proliferation and growth of development of materialism, “these things are totally unnecessary... They’re only used to fall into deeper infatuation with beautiful and delicious experiences. These magical things...grow more stupid and sink more deeply into the mire of delusion.”

“The marvels of progress are examples of human foolishness – increasing greed. Our leaders are increasingly stupid in the arts of peace, though they are clever in creating crisis. But these things aren’t created



for peace, they're created for war.”

“All these luxuries and conveniences with which we fill the world answer only to our defilements...There are too many things that have been made to mislead people and sink them into the mass of suffering, more than too many.” Buddhadasa said.

Consequently, we need strong and sharp spiritual practice – samatha-vipassana to cut through all this idiocy.

We need not fear or resent the modern world of progress and development, he said. The Dhamma can help us face the challenge of modern progress.

“Samatha-vipassana will stop all the crises, and then there can be permanent peace,” Buddhadasa said. “Dispel the darkness, let the light in, then walk the correct path. When the darkness is gone, the light can shine, and it will be possible to walk in the right path.”

Crisis and peace are opposites. The more we develop peace, the more the crisis will fade away, calm away.

Meditation can help us, by seeing the impermanence, voidness, and dis-ease of modern life.

We live in a time of enormous energies and consumption, and we must arouse the same energies and persistence to meet and equal the challenge.

“All things must be like lightning bolts in their arising, in their ceasing...” Buddhadasa said. “All things must be as fast as lightening bolts. They must be deeper than the ocean and strike like lightning bolts, so that nothing can resist.”

We must arise from our lethargy and stupor, and meet the challenge with power and speed.

Modern life is like living with an adulterous wife, Buddhadasa said. She keeps promising to make us happy, but only betrays us, failing to keep her promises, delivering only suffering and disappointment.

We want to believe, and become “addicted” to our dreams that the false promises will be made good. We must endure the ever-increasing pain, until we eventually wake up to the realization that we’re living in a dream. We must face the truth.

Then we liberated from our illusions.

“One lets go of everything with the realization that all things are not-self, are free and void of self,” and stop trying to indulge the self.

“So cultivate the mind. Increase samatha-vipassana to higher levels and the mind will incline toward genuine truth...Hurry to increase the powers of samatha-vipassana as quickly as possible to cope with these nuclear times.”

This is the most urgent of all matters.

“If we understand suññata (voidness) the condi-

tion of being void of self, because there is only idappaccayata (the law of conditionality), there is no self ...If we practice contemplating these truths – impermanence, not-self, suchness, natural elements, purely idappaccayata – that will be the end of self. The self gradually disappears until there is no self whatever. That's it. The matter ends there.”

No self-ishness.

Dhammocracy

Buddhadasa called on Buddhists people, and Buddhist societies, to examine the teachings of Buddha in order to find ways of organizing governmental structures, and not to blindly imitate western nationalistic models, which appear to be failing.

“We have strayed far from the (correct way) quite far, indeed – so far that one might say we have turned our backs on religion, on God, on Dhamma. If we push on like this much further we will fall into an abyss, we must back up and get ourselves turned in the right direction so that we can go on the path of the Dhamma,” he said.

“We are getting away from religion, both in terms of morality (*siladhamma*) and absolute Truth (*paramatthadhamma*). By *siladhamma*, I mean a kind of social order. By *paramatthadhamma* I mean Dhamma on an individual level, a kind of self-discipline that en-

ables us to realize ultimate reality to whatever extent we are capable. Religion combines both dimensions. Nowadays, people are getting further and further away from religion, from both morality and Truth. There is only one solution to our immediate problems of *dukkha*: to go backwards, to find the Dhamma, so that we might go forward in the right direction.”

Our spiritual traditions can be a source of renewal of society. “True religion is practice (*patipati*). Without actual practice, there is no religion....This is why it can be said that religion is disappearing. The practice of religion, which could bring peace to all of humanity, is disappearing. All that is left is the study of religion – thinking and theorizing rather than practice.”

“In order for people all over the world to live in happiness, then, we must all go backwards and return to the correct way of the Dhamma. This is the most important point to bearing mind in performing any kind of social service,” he said.

“If we were to put our religious principles into practice, even the problems of global shortages would disappear. People are destroying the earth’s raw materials, the natural resources that belong to Nature, to God, to whatever one may call it. The earth’s resources are being dug up in unnecessarily large quantities, only to be used carelessly and wastefully. Not only are they often not put to nay constructive use, but they are

turned into instruments of harm. Minerals are taken from the earth and made into weapons for fighting and killing. How could that possibly lead to any good purpose? Eventually those resources will become depleted, and for wasteful, utterly useless ends.”

“If we were to use the earth’s resources according to the law as of Nature and within its limits, we would not need to use as much as we do now., there would be plenty for everyone for years to come, or even indefinitely. Nowadays, however we are squandering the earth’s minerals so destructively that before long they will be gone. Acting in such a way is contrary to the Dhamma, to religion, to God. If we were to use them as we should, according to the laws of Nature, there would always be an abundant supply.”

“If we were all to live together according to Nature’s plan, we would see that Nature’s way is one of peace. When people go against Nature, the result is confusion and turmoil. The role of religion is to solve our basic human problems in order to bring about peace, to put an end to turmoil and confusion. It performs this role by showing us the perfect absolute power of Nature. We need to live in harmony with Nature. When we do not, we are not fully human in that we cannot experience peace and fulfillment in a way that only humans can. When such is the case,

we are no better than animals. Animals at least live according to the way of Nature, and so they experience relatively little suffering. Humans have used their advanced intelligence to take advantage of one another, going against the way of the Dhamma and the way of God. Actually, we should experience fulfillment on a higher level than animals, but we make our condition a kind of living hell, a suffering (dukkha) even worse than animals, when we go against the way of Nature. Animals, on the other hand, do not experience this particularly human kind of dissatisfaction or pain.”

“These days we are lacking those special qualities of mind and spirit that make us human. We are only creatures with human forms....

“We are so far off the path now, though, that we can hardly be called human beings in the fullest sense of the word... We have strayed so far of the path that we are only creatures with human forms. We are no better than animals. We only have the feelings and desires of animals - eating, sleeping, procreating – and so we are basically on the same level with them. We are not living according to our human potential, according to the way of the Dhamma. In order to do so, we must go backwards and get on the right path....

“Today we are in a state worse than death and the most excessive degradation because humankind is

under the domination of kilesa. Physical death cannot equal the cruelty of suffering brought about by the power of the most overwhelming kilesa. Solving social problems really means going to their basic cause: kilesa.”

Symptoms: Why has the world gone wrong?

The world seems to be heading for catastrophe. “It is almost laughable to simply speak of solving the problems of hunger, illiteracy, and illness, because these are not the real problems at all: they are only symptoms. The fundamental problem is the lack of religion (*sasana*) and moral principles (*siladhamma*) in modern society....

“Because people have deserted religion and the way of the Dhamma, numerous problems arise making social work necessary. If people would just hold firm to the way of the Dhamma and to religion, none of the social problems would exist. Modern society lacks compassion because people have become selfish and are attached to the idea of a self and what belongs to it.... [rather than] loving one another [and] considering the common good before we think of our personal gain. For this reason, society’s problems will continue to increase....It is pitiful and ludicrous that we continue to deal with these [social] problems by treating the symptoms rather than the basic cause.”

First: “The highest form of social work one can

perform is to help people back up and get onto the right track.”

Second: “Social work means service to society. ... All religions are socialistic, not individualistic democracies where people can do whatever they like....Whenever anyone puts personal interest before the common good, kilesa takes over – that is, one becomes ruled by selfish desires.

“Dhamma teaches us to be content with what we have, to accumulate and own just enough to take care of our material needs. It places great emphasis on being generous with what we have.”

“A socialist democracy is, then, in keeping with the principle of Nature (*dhammajati*) that would have us take only what we need, there by respecting the rights of all beings.”

“The goal of socialism is the Way of Nature.... Notice that in [life systems] no one kind takes more than its share....Nature would have each of us use no more than we actually need. For years people have failed to heed the way of Nature, competing with one another to take as much as they could, causing the problems that we live with to this day. If we were to take only what is enough, none of these problems would exist, because then people would not be taking advantage of others and oppressing them.”

“Socialism is based on this one simple principle in accord with the way of Nature, that none of us should take more than we really need. We should share whatever extra we have with those with less.”

“We all have a natural right to take as much as we need, but not more...This world would be filled with a contentment such as we attribute to heaven: to take for ourselves only what we need, and to try to accumulate or produce something extra for the benefit of the society as a whole. This is socialism according to the laws of Nature.”

Third: The third greatest problem is the alarming degree “to which religions and morality are disappearing...All are disappearing from our lives, which is why the world is in a perpetual state of crisis....”

“Why do we not solve the problem by becoming human in the fullest sense of the word, according to the way of Nature, that is, putting the welfare of others before our own selfish interests.”

“In this world of selfishness and kilesa, religion and morality have been pushed aside. As a result, humankind has become a mass of suffering individuals. Our religions have become so superficial that they cannot rightly be called religions.”

When religion disappears, all that remains is philosophy and formulas: “Nowadays, it has become more and more common for people to approach religion

through literature, liberal arts, and philosophy. People are crazy about philosophy in particular. Philosophy is not religion. The study of philosophy uses reasoning to theorize about abstract things that we simply cannot know.”

Religion is practice: “Because we do not practice our religion, what we call religion only becomes philosophy or logic, we need to get back on the right tract, to bring true religion into our lives; that is, to put religious principles into actual practice so as to overcome suffering.”

“The goal of religions is to put an end to self-centeredness, to a ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ Accordingly, religion has certain practices intended to eliminate self-centeredness. Such practices are what constitute religion. If there were no practice, but only discussion about overcoming self-centeredness, then there would be no true religion...”

“Morality is also disappearing to an alarming extent. People lack self-discipline and think only of fun and the pursuit of sensory pleasures, of taste, touch, sight, smell and hearing. They have discarded morality, or worse, trampled it under foot, calling what is wrong, right; and what is evil, good.”

“All that remains of religion and morality is what children write about in their notebooks....what is to become of a world in which there is no religion, no

morality?”

“The science of the mind, identification of the thoughts which cause suffering and those which do not, is important. We must make every effort to understand the consequences of our thoughts and to preserve that way of thinking which does not cause suffering....

We do this by mind-culture, calming and concentrating the mind. “When the mind is silent, we can hear the grass speaking, that is we can hear the voice of Nature.”

“The Buddha was truly a ‘companion’ of Nature. He was born ‘on the ground,’ reached Enlightenment on the ground, sat, slept, taught, and died on the ground.... The Buddha reached Enlightenment under a tree at the river’s edge. He talked, talked, and preached while on the ground and lived in a hut on the ground.... He reached Nibbana and even died on the ground. We would do well to follow his example: to remain firmly ‘grounded’ in Nature. ...”

“We should be companions of Nature: instead, we despise it. We should live according to our Nature-given rights: Instead, we hoard resources in untold numbers of banks, warehouses, and granaries. We have things completely backwards, and the situation appears to be getting worse....

“The demise of religion and morality in our world becomes most alarming when we consider the serious-

ness of our social problems and realize that religion and morality which would have enabled us to overcome these problems no longer exist in practice but only in name. Philosophy is no substitute for religion,. When we practice our religion, with observation and commitment, our behavior and actions manifest a truly selfless way of living and thinking, free of possessiveness....

“There is really only one society in the world: the community of humankind. We must work together to overcome our common problem: selfishness. This me-and-mine mentality result from people trampling on the religion and morality. As a consequence, humankind is experiencing the retribution of Dhamma. We have only to return to the way of Dhamma to solve our common human problems.”

Buddhadasa on development

Buddhadasa also expressed views on contemporary social problems of sustainable development. He said material development must be balanced with spiritual or mental development, of our human nature. The inner-ecology and the outer-ecology are inter-connected. Social problems, political problems, economic problems, which arise from our present models of ‘development,’ are a reflection of our troubled minds.

“Whenever we are strongly inclined towards the material side of things we reach the end point of

material development, an example being the rapid advances of contemporary science. And whenever the world is collectively inclined towards the mental side of things we will reach the end point of mental development just as in the ancient period of the arahants.”

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

“The world now aims only for material development because of cowardice and the fear of not keeping up with ‘them,’ of not having the equipment to fight ‘them’ or to live well....consequently, the whole world is in a state of chaos and confusion. There are complicated problems without end which have arisen from moral degeneration.”

“Nature wants there to be peace. If there isn’t peace, there will be destruction and ruin.”

The present economic system is contributing to injustice.

The economic system, based on profit-motive, is contributing to social injustice, oppression, and conflict. The capitalist system is unsustainable, he said. "If the political system in the world is not good (in promoting justice and development) the people of the world will not have the hope of attaining paramatthadhamma (ultimate nibbana)."

"If in any country there are still people in need, it must mean that there is not equality in that society. As a consequence, disorganization of many kinds and varieties will necessarily arise; as, for example, conflicts in the country, the breaking up of social harmony, insurrection, changes in the system of government, changes in the economic system to socialism or communism," Buddhadasa explained. "Because when the poor can bear their situation no more they will look for a way to destroy the extremely selfish, wealthy people with no regard for anything at all. And many other kinds of disruption then follow, such as making war and killing each other."

Superstitious practices fail to meet the needs of modern man, and people will reject religion as irrelevant, if religion does not address real social problems facing the masses of people: "Because of wrong inter-

pretations people fail to apply themselves to religious practice so that their so-called 'religion' ceases to be an effective device for solving the problems of everyday existence. Only when a religion has failed to do its duty does materialism come into existence in the world.... If religious institutions interpret the tenets held by them correctly, especially the tenets expressed in the language of Dhamma, then religious practice itself will prove to be the 'decided opponent' of materialism in all its forms."

A renewed and realistic spirituality is the only antidote to the present disorder of materialism.

"Don't get the impression that morality is reactionary. Children, adults, and people with political and economic power, tend to look on religions or morality as old-fashioned and reactionary....The truth is that it [religion] has reached the point of being reactionary because it has been going in the wrong direction for so long."

Buddhism, along with other religious traditions, has the answer to social and political ills, and religious people must not be afraid of becoming involved in the world, he said. "In society people who have sharp and pure spiritual intelligence usually prefer to avoid getting involved in politics, accordingly aiming only for the pure, in-depth study of the humanities, literature, ancient history or the natural sciences. In Thailand

there are people who don't dare utter a word about politics, who don't dare speak about her problems of morality, who are afraid of being accused that they are involved in politics.”

“Consequently, they don't dare mention the word ‘peace’ or consider the thing called peace. They detest and are afraid of the word ‘politics.’ They are afraid because they think that politics is something dirty and deceitful....When it happens that intelligent people like this prefer not to get involved in politics it consequently seems that it will be left only to the stupid or to people with worldly [materialistic] mentality to get involved in political affairs. The people with true and pure intelligence have deserted it. This is called the degeneration of the world because of the failure to use intelligence for the purpose of peace.”

Buddha commanded his disciples to work for the happiness of the multitudes, Buddhadasa reminded us. “Here even among us Buddhists, some may doubt, ‘Why should we play a leading role in all the affairs of the people in the whole world? Let us only be interested in our own internal Buddhist affairs...’

“If there is anyone who thinks like this please let him recollect the words of the Buddha who says: ‘The *Tathagata* is born in the world for the happiness of all beings.’ Moreover, when the Buddha first sent groups of monks out to spread the teachings, he emphasized

this as well, saying, *'Go forth, Oh monks, to preach the divine life for the benefit and happiness of the world...'* it is proper for us to sacrifice ourselves to play a leading role in the affairs of the whole world as the Buddha intended us to do."

"In one sense Dhamma is indeed the opposite of the world, but it is opposite in that it helps get rid of problems. When the world is pointed towards evil, Dhamma will point it towards good...Wherever there is peace and happiness it can be said that Dhamma and the world have been able to show their amicable relations."

Buddhist leaders, especially monks and nuns, must not become merely politicians and social workers, however. Politics, and social work, will not solve the problems of the world.

Monks should not be social workers, but spiritual inspiration, he said: "Monks should not directly co-operate in social welfare activities or in any of the people's development works....They should be a group that provides the people with mental and spiritual development, progress and safety."

Nibbana is for everyone: "As for the matter of nibbana, which is the chief or head of peace, we should arrange for it to be something manifest in the pages of general publication, as a matter of everyday study for each person. This is because the matter of nibbana



*Ajahn Buddhadasa and
one of Bodhisattva image*

denotes salvation, which follows the wants and inclinations of the instincts of every sentient being.”

We must be concerned for others also, not only for ourselves. Buddhist practice has a social aspect: “Religion doesn’t only mean the actions of individuals to pass beyond suffering. We must still help others to pass beyond suffering also. We must have compassion towards our fellow man and towards all sentient beings,

because if we are completely without compassion we will be a self-centered person...As is said in the Pali words of the Lord Buddha in the *Nipata Sutta* of the Khuddaka Nikaya “ A person who only has wisdom in seeking out his own benefit is an impure human being...” Hence a religious person must assist others as one type of necessary human duty, or else it will be to have a religion in words only.”

Buddhadasa loved the *bodhisattvas*: “We should consider the kind of individual who is called the ‘blessed bodhisattva.’ That is, a person who sacrifices

the benefit or personal happiness which he should get himself, in order to help others to pass beyond suffering....In Mahayana there is a tenet which holds that the blessed bodhisattva should accept a moral principle with the gist that, 'We will strive to help every last one of those who have fallen into suffering before we will permit ourselves to enter the blessed nirvana.' This is the highest ideal of helping others or of aiding one's fellow man who is in need of both physical and mental sustenance, a situation which is a complicated social problem at the present time."

**On Capitalist oppression of the poor,
which drives them into rebellion:**

"When the country is made up of individuals who are destitute and desperately poor and the farmers are poor, starving, and weak; how can the nation be secure? They, the pillars of the nation, will be rotten and worn away."

"We are experiencing the problem that these evil-minded capitalists are sucking the blood of humanity to such an extent that the poor must rise up to fight and destroy their enemy, flooding the world with blood."

Revolution, or Communism, will not solve the social or economic problems of the world, however, because it is only another materialistic philosophy: "Communism cannot be the same as Buddhism. The

main point which should be noted is that the principles of Buddhism do not teach that we should acquire anything as being ours.”

“Communism will only arise when religion loses its power...Whenever religion loses its power it no longer has influence over the minds of human beings and then people will, of necessity, become so selfish that they consider no other person, and those who endure this oppression and exploitation then must rise up to fight it.”

“Whenever people think that mental matters are less important than material concerns, communism will arise. If religion still has the correct teaching, people will necessarily feel that mental things are more important than the material.”

“Our community of Buddhists is still too fatuously concerned with the next world, after death. In fact Buddhism doesn't fatuously place its hopes in the next world but is instead a system of correctly fighting kilesa here and now; with being able to completely eradicate thoughts and actions dangerous to humanity here and now for us to see the results in this life.”

Buddhism has the power to resist and confront the materialist philosophies, capitalist or communist: “Let each person have his own religion, enter into his own religion and then vigorously confront communism. Don't stupidly think that the coming of communism

would end Buddhism. Buddhism is not in such a poor state, it is not so weak...Buddhism must be like a mountain. When communism collides with that mountain it must die. We have and keep to the Dhamma which is the heart of religion. It must resist communism.”

A Buddhist politics would be “politics defined as performing duties so that the world exists happily.” That is “arranging our acting so that the many, many people who live in the world truly live together in peace and happiness.”

“Dhamma which is politics will make the world pass beyond kilesa, harmfulness, evil and the self-centeredness of ‘I’ and ‘mine.’”

“When there is no morality, politics necessarily splits into parties and factions.”

Like the Greek philosopher Plato, Buddhadasa advocated for a philosopher king, or a “Buddhist dictator”, as the best form of government: “If the King fulfilled his duties like that according to the *dasarajadhamma* there would be no problems, because the king did not think,;’ this national wealth is mine.’ He thought only that it was society’s, which is why the people give power to the king.”

“The king rules by observing the ten kingly precepts. He has pity on all his subjects. If he sees rice belonging to others he does not covet it and if he sees the wealth of others he does not become indignant.”



Buddhadasa did not admire the results of western democracies, and urged Buddhist societies to proceed cautiously in imitating the west. Western people speak so highly of “liberty” or “freedom” - but do not know what liberty means. In Buddhism, “freedom” means freedom from desires and craving.

“Liberal democracy opens the way for full freedom but doesn’t clearly define what freedom is. Then people’s kilesa snatch the opportunity to be free according to the power of those kilesa.”

“Democracy is extremely dangerous, because if the common person is not yet good it will immediately turn the whole of this world into a hell.”

He advocated Dhamma Socialism: “The Buddha

himself had the principle or ideal of socialism but his method of working was dictatorial.” A cooperative way of life of the Sangha, to actualize the potential of the person.

Heroic Sacrifices will be required

Buddhadasa called on people to rise up with courage, to engage the modern world.

“I call for some true bravery in the way of moral ethics, even if it were to entail, in perhaps some cases, the sacrifice of lives for the sake of the continued existence of morality in the world, for it is the only way of ensuring a healthy human existence. But the world’s modern education simply does not allocate much significance and value to morality and ethics the way it should,” he said.

“Allow me to emphasize again on the courage or bravery needed in the matter of moral ethics. It can be used to solve the problems of our human society.”

“We need to be brave in refraining from sinning, doing only good works, helping others to do good works, and suppressing all evils. In short, we need to be willing to sacrifice everything, including even our lives, for the sake of the Dhamma. And to die in the embrace of Dhamma will be the most supreme bravery.”



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