

A photograph of a beach scene. In the foreground, there is a sandy beach with scattered driftwood and a small green plant. In the middle ground, a small wooden boat is on the water, with a person visible inside. The background shows a calm sea and a clear sky. The overall tone is warm and serene.

THE FIRST TEN YEARS
OF SUAN MOKKHI

BUDDHADĀSA BHUKKHU



Echoes from the Garden of Liberation #06

THE FIRST TEN YEARS OF SUAN MOKKH

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Translated from the Thai [สืบปีในสวนโมกข]

by Mongkol Dejnakarindra

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« *The gift of Dhamma surpasses all other gifts.* » (Dhp 354)

Anumodanā

To all Dhamma Comrades, those helping to spread Dhamma:

Break out the funds to spread Dhamma to let Faithful Trust flow,
Broadcast majestic Dhamma to radiate long-living joy.

Release unexcelled Dhamma to tap the spring of Virtue,
Let safely peaceful delight flow like a cool mountain stream.

Dhamma leaves of many years sprouting anew, reaching out,
To unfold and bloom in the Dhamma Centers of all towns.

To spread lustrous Dhamma and in hearts glorified plant it,
Before long, weeds of sorrow, pain, and affliction will flee.

As Virtue revives and resounds throughout Thai society,
All hearts feel certain love toward those born, aging, and dying.

Congratulations and Blessings to all Dhamma Comrades,
You who share Dhamma to widen the people's prosperous joy.

Heartiest appreciation from Buddhadāsa Indapañño,
Buddhist Science ever shines beams of Bodhi long-lasting.

In grateful service, fruits of merit and wholesome successes,
Are all devoted in honor to Lord Father Buddha.

Thus may the Thai people be renowned for their Virtue,
May perfect success through Buddhist Science awaken their hearts.

May the King and His Family live long in triumphant strength,
May joy long endure throughout this our world upon earth.

from

Buddha dāsa Indapañño

Mokkhabalārāma

Chaiya, 2nd November 2530

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Preface to the English Edition

This English edition of *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh* is published in commemoration of the Venerable Ajahn Buddhādāsa's 84th birthday on 27 May 1990.

The original Thai version of this book was first published in 1943 as an article in the *Buddhasāsanā*, the journal of the Dhammadāna Foundation, Chaiya, Surat Thani, Thailand. Since then the work has been republished several times in both article and book forms with various titles. For example, it appeared as the article, 'Ten Years of Suan Mokkh,' in the book, *Fifty Years of Suan Mokkh, Vol. II*, published in 1982 by Suan Usom Foundation; the book, *An Autobiography of Young Buddhādāsa*, published in 1984 and later reprinted in 1986 by the editorial board of the magazine, *Pacharayasan*; and the book, *Ten Years of Suan Mokkh*, published in 1989 by the Vuddhidhamma Fund for Study and Practice of Dhamma. This latest edition is the one we translated and published into the English version.

As was mentioned in its Thai edition of 1989, this inspiring work of Ajahn Buddhādāsa's describes the formative years of his forest monastery, Suan Mokkh, in Chaiya, Surat Thani, Thailand, and the movement under his leadership; it is both linguistically and descriptively well-written in Thai and is accepted as an excellent

Thai essay of the present time. In this English translation, we tried our best to convey accurately the meanings of the Venerable Ajahn's original words. Therefore, we hope that this book would benefit its non-Thai readers as its Thai edition has done the Thai readers.

The publication of this book is achieved through the assistance of many people, to whom the translator and the publishers are greatly indebted. Particularly, we would like to thank Sāmaṇera Niravano of Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, Surat Thani, for his help in reading and editing the manuscript of this book.

Vuddhidhamma Fund
for Study and Practice of Dhamma
May 1990

The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh

Phum Riang, Chaiya, Surat Thani, 1943

Near the end of 1931, while I was studying in Bangkok, I had frequent correspondence with Mr. Dhammadāsa Banij¹ about arranging the promotion of Dhamma practice to the best of our ability. Finally, at the end of that year, we agreed to set up a retreat that would particularly facilitate Dhamma practice and offer convenience to monks and novices, including myself, who wished to practice. We went so far as to hope that this would play a part in helping to glorify Buddhism, in the age we presumed to be the middle of the Buddhist Era. As there were no other places more suitable for us than one at Chaiya, we all agreed that we had to build the retreat there even though the district did not have any naturally beautiful caves or mountains at all. And since we had limited resources, we would work in accordance with them; but if those who had more power took our work as an example, they might follow suit and help propagate the work. Or at least it might catch our fellow Buddhists' eyes or their

¹ His younger brother, who had left university to run the family store so that Tan Buddhadāsa could continue as a monk. For the author's letters, see Appendix A of the printed editions and *Suan Mokkh: The Garden of Liberation*.

thought, inciting them to become interested in promoting Dhamma practice or to love practicing Dhamma by themselves a little bit more. It would be greatly meritorious for us to act even as stimulators. Having reached the agreement, I left Bangkok at the very end of 1931.

I stayed for about a month at Wat Mai, Phum Riang, which was the first monastery I had ever lived in. Then we found a place, apparently the best one we could find, in that area. All four or five of us who were good friends pitched in and built a hut. It was not until May 1932, around the 12th or so I vaguely remember, that I moved into the place. Later in June, there was a change of the Thai government system from absolute monarchy to monarchical democracy. Therefore, the starting point in the calendar of Suan Mokkh can be best remembered with a rather short phrase: 'In the same year as was the change of the government system.' We considered this coincidence a good omen for our new change, whereby we hoped to correct and improve many things as best as we could.

The readers may be surprised to know further that the matter about Suan Mokkh in the first two years mostly involved myself. This was because there were no other people at Suan Mokkh during that period. I stayed there alone. No one in other provinces knew of Suan Mokkh then because we began to publish our tri-monthly religious journal, *Buddhasāsanā*, later on in the second year. And there were no other monks or novices who visited the place until the third year. This means that I stayed there alone for two years, both in and out of the Buddhist Rains Retreat periods.

The establishment of Suan Mokkh and my stay there were known only among those of us who shared this common interest. Among the local people, there were many who did not understand our intention, especially those Thai Muslims who lived closest to Suan Mokkh. They could not have guessed what it was all about by themselves. During the first few days of my stay, when I went out to take alms in the morning, their children would run away from me, shouting excitedly: 'That mad monk, here he comes! Here he comes!' The children would say among themselves that I was a mental patient being kept there as the caretaker of the uninhabited temple and that they must be very wary of me. Such misunderstanding was not completely dispelled until many months later.

The incident was rather amusing but at the same time seemed to confirm others' suspicions of our true business there. When the activities of our Dhammadāna Group were revealed nationwide by the press, there were many compatriots of ours who misunderstood us and thought that our activities carried a hidden profitable purpose, with the religion as a front. There were some people who thought that we troubled others by revealing statements to the Buddhist followers that the monks did not want them to know, thereby harassing monks and novices in general. Also, there were some who sent poison-pen letters to the top monks in the ecclesiastic hierarchy, inciting them to misunderstand or even hate us. Those monks, however, kindly told us of the letters and of what they actually thought of us. It took about ten years before all parties could reach mutual understanding. But this does not mean that none understood

us from the beginning. In fact, there were so many supporters of our cause that we could not keep all of their admiring letters.

The point in my taking time to tell all of this is that any uncommon movement will naturally be viewed pessimistically in some parts, regardless of the power and influence of the movement operators. A difference for influential campaigners is that those who disagree with them dare not speak out face to face. Therefore, those who think of taking an action to revolutionize, correct, or improve something should not heed the falsely accusing words of misunderstanding people, who are naturally ever-present in this world. They should act truthfully, for the results will be worth their truthful actions. We ourselves had been aware of this beforehand, so we did not pay much attention to these incidents, though we were amused by the fact that what we had expected really happened, seemingly making us accurate fortune-tellers.

My first residence at Suan Mokkh then was just a small earth-floored hut with a thatched roof, attap-strip walls, and a floor area of three or four stretchers. It was built next to a galvanized iron-sheet covered shack which was built to house a big Buddha statue. Formerly, the shack was wall-less; it was built over an old ruined *uposatha*² to shelter the Buddha statue. Because the temple had been neglected for no less than eighty years, big trees with widely shading branches had encroached upon the temple's boundary. Aside from

² The main monastery building where monks hold important meetings and ceremonies, like the fortnightly recitation of the monastic code and ordination ceremonies.

my hut and the shack, there was nothing except the surrounding dense jungle. At the time of my arrival, the place was a feared no-man's land; many men did not dare go alone to the *uposatha* even in broad daylight, for they were afraid of ghosts and supernatural beings. Therefore, trees and climbers were growing densely all over the place. Except for an old, dilapidated water well about five hundred meters from the *uposatha*, there was nothing that could be considered unnaturally existing.

This was the picture of Suan Mokkh in the first two years, which is incomparably different from the photograph printed in our journal *Buddhasāsanā* and the view you will see when you visit Suan Mokkh nowadays by yourselves. Truthfully, however, I was pleased with the situation of Suan Mokkh then, which, as I realize, gave me some benefits that Suan Mokkh in the present state of clearing, cleanness, and comfortable residence cannot offer. This is a point that one who is interested in spiritual training must not forget. So I should say a little bit more about the situation at Suan Mokkh in its early years, as a case study for those who will begin their life as practitioners of spiritual training.

Whatever kind of frights was told of by the Buddha in the *Bhayabherava Sutta*³ of the Pali Canon, I experienced them all quite profoundly. This was because, like most of you readers, I myself was not familiar with the jungle, as are those who were born and raised in it. Even though I had studied the *Bhayabherava Sutta* before, I,

³ Bhayabherava Sutta MN 4

while staying alone in such a secluded place, could not help myself much in spite of that study. A part of the sutta goes as follows:

‘... A secluded dwelling in an inhabited or uninhabited jungle is one that is difficult to stay in. Seclusion is difficult to get; staying alone is hardly pleasant. Forests seem to take away hearts of *bhikkhus* (monks) who have not reached *samādhi* (concentration)....

‘Brahmin, a thought occurred to me that, in the night of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth days of the fortnight, I should stay in a supposedly sacred *ārāma* (temple), in a supposedly sacred forest, under a supposedly sacred tree, or in whatever place that makes one’s hair stand on its end. Maybe I can catch the embodiment of fear and fright. Brahmin, I have stayed in such dwellings during those designated nights.

‘Brahmin, while I was staying in one such dwelling, and a peacock caused a dry stick to fall from a tree or a wind blew down debris, tree branches, or tree leaves, I was frightened and understood that such things were terror. Then I further thought about why I kept being worried by my fright. I decided to stop the fright by keeping the posture I was in when the fright caught me.

‘Brahmin, if I became frightened while walking, I resisted the fright by compelling myself to keep on walking; during that time, I never stood still, sat, or lied down. If I became frightened while standing, I resisted the fright by compelling myself to keep on standing; during that time, I never walked, sat, or lied down. If I became frightened while sitting, I resisted the fright by compelling myself to

keep on sitting; during that time, I never stood up, walked, or lied down. If I became frightened while lying, I resisted the fright by compelling myself to keep on lying; during that time, I never walked, stood up, or sat up...'

This is enough to indicate how difficult it is to fight fear, one of the animal instincts. A rough plan I had made while still living in Bangkok – that I would set up principles to solve such problems in such and such ways – was useless, for the most important thing was not much of a principle but was mostly the will-power, the speed of mindfulness, and familiarization.

The taste of staying alone in a secluded dwelling during a silent late night can neither be explained with written words nor be perceived by a non-forest dweller through comparison with his stay in a usual dwelling. There is a power which seems to have already taken away all of your will when you begin to realize that you will be alone in a place without any protection. Add to this a first-time, sudden disturbance or uproar, and you unavoidably get startled. But as your will becomes stronger, your mindfulness quicker, and your familiarization better, such incidents will gradually become a normality.

Therefore, you must give at least seven days to this first lesson so that you can practice until you get a satisfactory result.

Some days I came out in the morning to get alms. There, within the wide area of Suan Mokkh, in the middle of a narrow pathway between bushes near a big pond, I once took my time waiting for a

lone, big male otter to go away after having finished its business of rolling about in the sand and periodically spying me while standing on its two hind legs. The animal acted as if it were challenging me to a duel when it stood up, only eight or nine meters away, until its head was at my chest's level. I, like all of you readers, had not faced such a problem before. Besides, I was in the first stage of self-training in line with the Buddha's advice that one must neither fight the foe nor protect himself, and neither flee nor retreat in fright, so can you guess what else I could do, if not standing still, waiting for the otter itself to go away?

Another thing which should be considered very wonderful, because it has been my refuge a great number of times, is the love of study and experiment for knowledge. While I was full of will-power and mindfulness, I liked to experiment with everything, sometimes to such an extreme that I thought of having myself bitten by a tiger or a snake, or haunted by a ghost, or else asking a demon to come and talk with me. This would give me an opportunity to study them and at the same time test my own will-power.

But luck was seemingly never on my side: fright is really an illusion which serves no purpose, and being frightened served me right for my foolishness in so being. Therefore, if we have wisdom or reason just enough for our own protection, we can expect to have safety and an opportunity for progressively profound study.

What used to be a terror will become more normal, sometimes even amusing; and we will find that we have changed into an almost new person. The more progressive we are in this direction, the less

severe will be the fright-caused obstacle that hinders concentration of our minds. Eventually, the obstacle will be eliminated, and we can sit alone in an open area during a silent late night, without any protection apart from our clothes or robes, and can concentrate on self-training as we wish.

I used to think that we may rely on some kind of protection such as a fence or a *klot* (an umbrella hung around with a mosquito net) to lessen our anxiety while sitting alone in a secluded place. But I must tell you students of self-training that you should rather not use it, for you will not get a new mind which is completely free. Instead, you will still have anxiety and will not develop enough strength of will: later on, when you are without it as psychological reassurance, the fright of a mortal man will return.

At noon, the forest returned to its natural quietness once again. 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 such 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 used to note that this was really 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 its afternoon signal, but because there was an actual danger: some big birds of the eagle family flew by. While these big birds were still around, the forest animals never stopped their cries. At Suan Mokkh then, we had more than forty squirrels, and a 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 normalcy.

Late in one moon-lit night, I was awakened by a clacking noise nearby. While listening to it, I slowly sat up and gently pushed the window blind aside. As I looked in the direction of the noise, I saw four wild pigs eating something together only seven or eight meters away from my hut. It was not a fearful sight at all, more of a pleasant one I would say. It must have been these wild pigs that once before ran away noisily into the woods when I opened the door of my hut early one morning.

A mouse-deer with a suckling offspring and a quail with its young brood following 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 pit 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 mosquitos. All of these were the natural environment which gave many never-boring lessons.

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

Is it true that all go to sleep at night? Absolutely not. By studying nature, we will know that nighttime is indeed when the world is most wide-awake; it's the state of extremely delicate waking.

As far as all kinds of animals were concerned, I found that they were awake and working in a number no less than that in the

daytime, and no less busy nor less tumultuous than in the daytime. Only the worldly men and certain kinds of animals seemed to be asleep. For the Dhammic men, however, nighttime is most awakening because their minds during daytime are almost completely drawn into various aspects of living and are unable to settle deeply into calmness. But when nighttime comes, freedom from interferences comes with vigor, and clarity of the mind is more acute than during daytime. Therefore, the men are brightly illuminated internally, for they see something brightly shining. Their minds are awake with vitality. Their bodies may go to sleep but their minds are always awake, ready to perceive things as they really are, and without getting tired. During daytime, there are various kinds of work to do, guests to entertain, and others to help. Weariness due to the daytime activities can cause giddiness and exhaustion to the body and dullness to the mind, much like being in a sleep; and this is different from serenity which can be present late at night.

Therefore, I have the opinion that Dhamma does not fall asleep at night as the world does; they are the direct opposite of each other in this as in other aspects. Indeed, some of the smaller animals are awake and vigorously active. Termites, for instance, move much swifter at night than during daytime, but whether they are also Dhammic animals is uncertain. For the worldly men, one thing is certain: they neither have Dhamma with themselves while awake during daytime nor stay awake at night. This is perhaps the reason why the world lacks permanent peace, the kind of peace we are asking for.

When staying alone, there is nothing better than practicing the lesson of being awake and in control of your waking up so that it is a smooth one consistently following your command.

As one's stay in the forest settles down, the mind will transform in such a way that its chance of easily attaining concentration is more than one half; and there are many child's plaything kinds of concentration that one can easily find because the mind can concentrate without much effort. For example, I looked at a number of small fish that gathered in the yellowish brass lid of an alms bowl carrying some cooked rice as an offering under a shallow water. After having casually gazed at the fish for just a short time, I could retain their picture in my memory for later review during many subsequent nights. I could enlarge it or contract it while it moved as though it were of real, live fish. I called this a 'child's plaything kind of concentration,' which is similar to that of a serious adult in many respects. The difference is that the former is casually taken from the immediate natural surrounding and is rather unconventional as an object for the mind to take on. But if we take on such a plaything often, we will find that a difficult sense-object unbelievably becomes more easily manageable.

Even for study or something of that kind, staying alone is definitely beneficial. Reading of the Tipiṭaka in Bangkok was, for most of it, four to five times less profound than so doing in the silent forest. I would say that many subjects in particular are not beneficial, or even useless, being read in a crowded area.

Most, if not all, subjects can be scrutinized more effectively and continuously in the forest. Similarly, writing is more lively there. But whether this is true for a particular individual must be proven by further observation.

About different, new tastes for the mind, it could be believed that we certainly cannot find them in a densely populated place like Bangkok. In such a place, the climate never helps. The crowded environment is full of another kind of mental stream which is directly opposed to that in the forest.

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

About possessions or properties, they are also another subject of study. When I first came to stay at Suan Mokkh, my sole possessions were an alms bowl with a brass lid which could double as a drinking utensil, a small pail for fetching well water, necessary robes, and a coconut-oil lamp made from a drinking glass and used for everyday lighting in front of the Buddha image. I could go out anywhere any time, without closing the door or locking it and without telling anybody, because I was alone. I could come back any time, without having to worry about anything. There was nothing to

oversee or look after; nothing and nobody were under my responsibility. I felt myself as very small and free like a bird. My thinking was smooth; I could even think of nothing. There was only the lightness of the mind, which was hard to describe but was always pleasant, and never boring, like a drink of very fresh water. Since the day I was born, I have never felt so much lightness – like my body did not exist at all – as when I came to study in that way.

The contentment that I felt in my undergoing, as such, was great enough to suppress my worry for the future. I was confident that I could find happiness or satisfaction for myself without having to deal with anybody or ask for anybody's favor. I even went so far as to think that I could live alone in this world, or stay alone without contacting anybody, much like those yogis who live in the Himalayas.

Later on I had more possessions. When we thought of publishing the journal *Buddhasāsanā* it was necessary to have paper, pencils, and some books; and two kinds of feeling occasionally opposed each other. Sometimes books were borrowed, so when I went out, they had to be put away in a box, and the door had to be closed and locked. Coming back to see that they were all right was a relief. Once, after having gone and spent a night away, I came back just in time to find termites approaching the stack of the books. The books were some volumes of the Tipiṭaka which I had borrowed from a monastery, for the Dhammadāna Group [the supporter of Suan Mokkh] then did not have the Tipiṭaka of its own. If the termites had successfully eaten them, causing their disappearance from the series, it would have been a great headache for me. And it would have served me right for

having acted as a town monk while my true nature was that of a forest monk.

This was when two kinds of feeling often confronted each other; they sometimes made me think of abandoning further publication of the journal. Eventually they came to terms. The compromise was also due to my experience of lightness in having no possessions. Although living without possessions caused a new kind of lightness of the mind, there was also a kind of knowledge which told me that the lightness was caused by dispossession and non-attachment.

Non-attachment occurs not only because there is nothing to attach to but also because we do not attach to whatever we possess. Was it then possible to possess a few things, just enough for doing good to greater humanity, but without burdening myself with attachment? This was the question I tried to answer.

As this challenging thought came to my mind, the courage for and fun in taking on the responsibility of something binding spontaneously arose. One feeling suggested that I not give up the new-found happiness, but the other tried to compromise this so that I would not lose any of the two. Finally I could have both of them. This was because I had initially experienced the taste of total dispossession, which gave me important knowledge; I knew how to let go of those possessions which were newly added to the old list. It was different from when I did not know how to give up things, but only knew how to grasp at them.

But the fact still remains that staying alone without getting involved in benefaction for others brings more happiness. However, we human beings probably have a naturally inherent debt: for instance, we have become what we are nowadays because of our selfless ancestors' sacrifice. Therefore, it is natural that some of us are courageous enough to sacrifice their own interest in order to benefit others.

But how we can be good Samaritans without suffering too much loss is a problem that we must try to solve. I can give an answer here by assuring you that there is no other way than going out to live alone without any possession for some time. This will finally help you to find the solution and to gain spiritual capability that can successfully overcome very difficult problems.

Those who decide to undertake spiritual training must necessarily pass this test with mindfulness, awareness, and keen observation. This is because knowledge that comes through our own minds and knowledge logically learned from reading books are quite different from each other. So I would like to remind my fellow practitioners who are taking the lesson on this level that you must go through the test of possession and dispossession to the best of your ability – your training and experiment on dispossession must be most refined and most profound.

Because we began to take up literary work and publication of our journal, and because there were more laymen and monks who came to visit us, my stay at Suan Mokkh changed from isolation to group living, or living in association with many people.

Finally we had to build a hut for newly coming monks and novices, and another for doing our literary work and keeping books without worrying about termites or thieves. We had facilities for many people, both healthy and ill. We had a place for visitors and cooperated with other monasteries. The way we lived and the rules of our living were changed; some new rules were added to suit the developing situation. Most importantly, as we could hardly find ideal Dhamma-practicing friends from other places, we had to develop them ourselves by training younger monks and novices at Suan Mokkh. This was done together with the literary work so that our activities would be complete and up to date in the future. It put more burden on us, but there were rules for the new activity which gradually taught us how to manage it so that it could run smoothly.

Summarily speaking, establishment of a Dhamma practice promotion center for Dhamma practitioners has its own special methodology, just as any other kind of business requires its own methodology.

In our case, we ran the Dhamma practice promotion center as an innovation without precedent. It was a study and an experiment within itself. There was both the personal work and the subsequent dissemination work, a kind of communication to others which facilitated the exchange or direct presentation of knowledge. At first, when our activities were not clear cut, there were many things at Suan Mokkh that were not separate. Later on, some of them were transferred to the Office of the Dhammadāna Group and the Dhammadāna Library, which were separately situated in Talat

Subdistrict, away from Phum Rieng Subdistrict, which was the original location of Suan Mokkh and the Dhammadāna Room during their earlier days.

Those who are interested should note that, if an organization for the promotion and propagation of Dhamma practice should be set up anywhere, its administration should be such that different activities are separate from one another, and there should be enough personnel for each of the activities from the beginning. This would bring good results as quickly as one wishes.

In the third year of my stay at Suan Mokkh, I started to have a fellow monk who joined me in staying there throughout the Buddhist Rains Retreat. About this monk, I think I have something to write as a remembrance. His layman name was Mai, his monk name was Sāsanapajoto, and his surname was Thumsathan. He was from Chaiyaphum Province in northeastern Thailand. After having stayed with me for many years, he fell ill and went back to pass away in his home village. To come to Suan Mokkh, he walked all the way from his home. He was strong, extremely tolerant, and openly truthful as a perfect Dhamma practitioner should be. He never had a diploma in the Pali language and never completed the third grade of monastic education, but I particularly accepted him out of respect for him. It turned out that everybody respected him, and this made me understand very well why those monks who were proficient in Tipiṭaka matters in older times came to respect some monks who apparently knew nothing about the Buddhist scriptures. Monks such as these are undisturbed by emotions; they are steady, truthful, and

sincere in all respects. As they are less educated, they study diligently, ask questions and are tolerant to admonition; after some time they know quite well what they have wanted to know. They are humble, silent or speak only a little, incapable of delivering a sermon, but most pleasant to listen to. The longer they stay with us, the more trustworthy their behavior becomes, making us realize that this kind of morality is enough to earn them a salute from gods.

I myself felt that even only one such person was enough for Suan Mokkh to be called a Dhamma practice center. I considered myself very lucky to have had as my first companion a person who was so much satisfactory. I later realized that our rule to accept only those monks who had a diploma in the Pali language or passed the third grade of monastic education would probably not result in what we expected, but we couldn't do anything about it. So we had an amendment that I had a right to accept a special person by my own judgment, apart from the right usually exercised by the Dhammadāna Group.

For this matter, those who are interested in setting up a Dhamma practice center may be pleased to take ours as a precedent for setting up certain rules, because we cannot forgo rules, and yet cannot afford to set them up wrongly.

I would like to suggest as a remark here that a well-known saying – that it heeds a long stay together to determine whether a companion is good or not – is very true indeed. And this causes difficulty in setting up a rule and standard to accept or reject a person as a special case. Therefore, where possible, it will be best to

selectively accept those who have been familiar to us, our own disciples who grow up in our own school, or our judgment sharing friends' disciples whom we have recruited for training together for a long time. And because spiritual training such as ours may take many years or even a whole lifetime, it is not necessary to often accept newcomers; we had better stop accepting them when all the tenements are occupied. Or if you don't want a great merit, I would recommend that only a few good friends are enough for you to find happiness for a lifetime without having to accept any other people.

In the following years, there were monks and novices who came to stay with us; each admission increased the number of dwellers by one or two. In some later years we totaled up to ten monks and novices during the Buddhist Rains Retreat. Some of the newcomers received satisfactory results and were our good friends, but others were the opposite: they freely said some nasty things about us. For those satisfied friends of ours, their important characteristic was that they set up standards within their mind at about the same level as ours.

For example, when there was a problem of defining 'contentedness' or 'simple living,' they agreed with us upon a certain standard of living that we set. But some other dwellers thought that it was so harsh as to border on self-mortification.

In another case, when there was a question of what the resident monks and novices should or should not do, some said that they should neither do everyday chanting nor read a newspaper. But as some other dwellers had been doing so, the non-doers took the

practices as improper. Another group of dwellers took things literally according to the words in the Buddhist scriptures. For instance, they always filtered drinking water even though the water was already clean, sometimes contaminating it in the process because of the dirtiness of the filtering cloth, which had to be available just by custom. This was done out of the belief that the thin filtering cloth would take out those tiny, invisible creatures that lived in the water. If any of the dwellers did not follow this practice, the practitioners would ostracize him. On the other hand, the opposers to the practice would consider its practitioners as too old-fashioned. Still another group, which was the majority of the dwellers, minded its own business. They considered the difference in the practice as personal; they did not ostracize anyone but befriended everyone, and thus could be counted as true Dhamma practitioners.

About all these, there is a noteworthy point that, among those who claim themselves Dhamma practitioners, there is also a kind of people who are mentally impaired. This compounds any difficulties and creates a hard-to-solve problem.

A central establishment that accepts visitors from all directions is much different from a regional one or a monastery that is rather restrictive. In the former, there are almost all kinds of visitors. Even when they do not intend to stay, but just come for a stop-off or a visit, there will be something that can create a problem. Anyone who maintains the concept that anything different from what he is practicing is nonsensical or laughable will have the most difficulty. I noted that strange practices were really unavoidable. Once, for

instance, a visiting monk who was about to have his breakfast put his alms bowl on a high stand, squatted down, and put his hands together while mumbling a short prayer before taking the bowl to his dining place. During the prayer, those monks who had never performed such a rite could not help being amused or giving one another a wink, for such a practice was really amusing in the eyes of those who had never seen it. Even after an explanation had been given that it was done as a dedication to the Buddha, thanking Him for having established a religion which provides food for the disciples – a rite that can be considered as good and logical – most of the monks still shook their heads in disbelief at such a practice, which I suppose is upheld in some localities only. Those who were steadfast in the practice asserted that the non-practitioners were ungrateful to the Buddha. The non-practitioners replied that they had other ways to thank the Buddha rather than following such a practice, which looked like offering food to ghosts or the Buddha's spirit. These are examples of the many practices that can be found in a central dwelling where visitors of almost all kinds stop off.

Monks and novices who claim themselves Dhamma practitioners or members of the Sangha all nominally seem to be the same, but in reality there are many different kinds of them, more than those of the monks studying in municipal monasteries. Since there are some Dhamma-practicing monks who have never studied the Buddhist scriptures, there are various small meditation centers, each doing as they want according to their beliefs or what their masters have successively taught. Without scripture study as a

guiding center line or a trail-blazer, their viewpoints greatly vary to the extent that some practitioners do not believe in scripture study as the foundation of the practice. As some practitioners, especially those who take scripture study as an enemy of the practice, stray farther away from the center line, they naturally see other practitioners as false or nonsensical. This wrong view is particularly held by forest monks and town monks, who scarcely have a chance to settle the dispute together.

I have an idea that the central dwelling itself, if well managed, can become a place for settling differences among various schools and for mutual understanding. As far as I have noted, most of the practitioners, except for those who basically have ill will, have good intention and wish for merit. Although they are from schools of different views, they can compromise with one another by realizing that such matters are really trivial and also personal. If one holds a particular view which others don't share, but most or the major part of his view is right, others should not despise him.

Holding a view too tightly may result in negligence and in raising a trivial practice over the Dhamma-Vinaya. For example, one may overlook the importance of unity as a foundation for the group, or lose benefits which one would otherwise receive from befriending fellow Dhamma practitioners in general. While there is dispute among fellow followers of Buddhism, it is hard to imagine how they could communicate with peoples of other religions. Such Buddhist disciples, who should otherwise be very knowledgeable, will become short sighted and untutored because of this negligence.

From what our visitors from various places told me, I could draw the conclusion that meditation centers mostly hold something as their special feature, something comparable to the logo or the trademark that characterizes them. Desire to look better or holier than other centers leads to the introduction of something or another that is different from what other centers have.

The more there are meditation centers, the more there are specially characterizing, ego-raising features, leading to contesting and hostile attitudes among the centers, and thus making it difficult to compromise. The contest is very good if the contesting schools have their own good points and perform beneficial deeds in accordance with their skill and experience. But if they act out of the desire to make their trivial features look good, then the religion as a whole will suffer. I suppose that this is the reason that the standard of spiritual practice in most of the centers gets stuck and cannot be raised, invariably dimming the status or prestige of this kind of work.

Dhamma practice centers should be the places for eliminating such undesirable features as described here while at the same time disseminating the higher teachings of the Buddha by rightly behaving as good models. Eventually, the centers would repay the whole investment and would definitely be more pleasant than investment in the construction of other places.

Personally, an individual in a meditation center must diligently train and study. Socially, he must be open-minded enough to accept others who disagree with him. And in teaching others, he must try to do his best and do it truthfully without expecting anything in return.

With this, Dhamma practice will progress and the religion will prosper without much payment from people's or the national pocket. Finally, Dhamma practice centers will be small places with low operating costs and frugal living, but many times more pleasant than, and truly incomparable to, places of opposite activities.

The reason that these expectations of mine are difficult to realize now is, I suppose, that this kind of work looks too difficult and incomprehensible to the general public for them to cooperate in its promotion. Even the influential circles in the Sangha order have not earnestly promoted or controlled it, but have let it be a private matter to be done voluntarily.

To make the matter worse, some influential circles wrongly understand that the activity belongs to those who selfishly abandon the society, or that those who wish to attain nibbāna take advantage of others; and this is a reason that this type of activity receives less attention from the majority of the public than it should. Therefore, our religion has too little in some parts but too much in other parts, which indicates that it has not fully given out its ambrosia to our nation.

Since the influential circles have not conceived a way to promote or honor this particular kind of work, it is then a personal duty of those who happen to like the work very much. But it is infrequent that a learned one takes up the task and carries it on quietly. And this will not attract the attention of young new graduates, the majority of whom tend to accept administrative work, which will clearly lead to honor and benefits, instead of wishing to attain *nibbāna* or having a

try at steadfastly practicing the higher *dharmas* for a while before taking up a world-benefiting work with a really big heart or high-level spiritual conviction.

For these reasons, there are only few practitioners who have practice-loving spirits, naturally resulting in fewer advanced practitioners or probably none at all. Therefore, if any of the established or would-be established Dhamma practice centers has too few or no practitioners, the responsible people should not be surprised or sorry. Having a vacant center may at least stimulate some courageous young students to act out their courage some day, and very well constitutes a reminder on behalf of the practice aspect of the religion. If the center is not well populated with Dhamma practitioners, in the meantime it may as well be a meeting place for independent thinkers or those who are preparing themselves to become practitioners; and this will be greatly worthwhile. Or at least it can very well be a meeting place for the infrequent study of those who wish for solitude, which is also very beneficial.

Since I have indicated the number of monks, novices, and laypeople at Suan Mokkh, it is proper to say something about visitors too.

Visitors who were monks and whose extreme graciousness we could not forget were numerous. Especially, the Rev. Somdet Phra Buddhaghosācāriya (Ñāṇavaro, Charoen) of Wat Thepsirinthrawat, the present [1943] President of the Sangha Council, paid us a visit

whose detail was referred to in the *Buddhasāsanā*, Vol. 5, No. 2, in which interested readers can look for their reading.⁴

Among visitors who were laymen, Phraya Latphlithamprakhan, the present [1943] President of the Supreme Court Committee, especially helped in the general activity of the Dhammadāna Group, and particularly and personally helped me in taking care of and educating another extra group of monks and novices, thus making this activity run smoothly all along.

Among these visitors, some stayed for only one or two days, or a week at most. But another group of monks, who had enough time to stay for one or two months, looked for satisfaction as they wished and exchanged knowledge amongst themselves, who had never met one another before. On the estimated average, we had for each year four to five such visitors, which I supposed was quite numerous.

Most of these visitors, I believe, were satisfied, for some came back and would come back again later. But I believe also that there might be a few percent of them who were dissatisfied because they did not agree with our methodology. After the country was affected by World War II, Suan Mokkh almost never had any visitors, especially those who were laymen. It was reported that they did not have spare time, although they always wished they could come. Thinking about this, I felt sympathetic for them all.

Having indicated the number of dwellers at Suan Mokkh, I would like to describe subsequently the way we lived. About our dining

⁴ See Appendix B of the printed editions.

during the past ten years, we depended only on what we received from direct alms, namely, cooked rice and side dishes which were enough for anyone who wished to live frugally. But in the tenth year there was an exception: each day a special food was prepared and offered. This was done because it was deemed better than not to do so.

For convenience and respect to self-discipline, each of us has been eating from a single simple utensil all along. The so-called single utensil is partially filled with rice and then topped with condiments from the side dishes as required. The diners take samples from the common utensils of food available for the day and sit down to eat at whatever place they find convenient. Some of the diners use the alms-bowl as the eating utensil but other diners use other kinds of utensil that are more convenient. This is because alms-bowls are not exactly suitable: presently, they are not made with a wide mouth and a drinking bowl shape as in the Buddha's time; also, they are more difficult to deodorize by washing than other utensils, such as enameled bowls, thus requiring much time for keeping them clean. If we would eat simply for the rest of our lifetime, we had better use a more proper utensil; for example, a medium-size enameled bowl would do the job. Considering the main purpose, I would say that using this utensil instead of the alms-bowl is not a breach of frugality but still fully *dhutaṅgha*, or austere practice, just the same.

This way of eating is oddly understood by some people that rice and condiments must be thoroughly mixed into a uniform consistency in order to conform to the right practice. But this is a

personal opinion and preference, or there is a private reason, for some individuals just want to measure their will-power.

We have been practicing this way of eating since the beginning at the old Suan Mokkh, the Dhammadāna Library, and the new Suan Mokkh which was built last year. We have breakfast as early as possible. Those who decide to have only one meal can do so; but sometimes those who must have physical exertion, namely, those who must do the construction work or those who are small novices, can also have lunch if they have a proper reason. We eat normal food offered by the people. If anyone wants to forgo some kinds of food or wants to take special kinds of food, he has to find a special occasion, which comes once in a while.

I myself once ate only fruits for some time and felt so comfortable and strange that I would like to suggest that everyone also try it at least once. While being on such a diet, I felt my body comfortably cool, having no odor; the color and smell of the excrement were not revolting at all. All of these, I think, are accessories for peaceful living, which is better than normal living. The only drawback is that in some places there are not enough fruits for convenient practice of such dieting. And becoming a vegetarian, by eating only vegetables or taros and yams, is much more difficult than living on the fruit diet, for, unlike the latter, the body in the beginning cannot abruptly adapt itself: the digestion cannot increase its operating level in keeping with the diet.

Moreover, living on the fruit diet especially has additional inconvenience, that is, one must eat more often than normally;

otherwise, he will lie hungry at night. Fruits cannot be eaten so much as rice but can be digested rapidly, resulting in the eater getting hungry earlier.

While I was on this kind of diet, I noted also that my senses of sight, hearing, and smell were many times more sensitive than usual. Aromatic leaves, such as those of the sweet basil, which usually send out smell only when they are mashed by some means, were detected through the nose even when I stood two to four feet away. Flowers smelled very strongly, sometimes too overwhelmingly, even though they do not usually do so. For all of these, I myself did not know exactly whether they directly resulted from the diets or from some other diet-related causes which we made occur just the same by other means. For the sense of taste, although it was not so sensitive as the senses of sight, hearing, and smell, its sensitivity also increased above the normal level.

That's why I said that everybody should try and experiment like this and see the result, which is study at least. However, we should not forget that when the mind is calm with mindfulness or is refreshed and cool by whatever method, the senses are in themselves more sensitive than usual. They will be enhanced by eating good fruits such as bananas, papayas, custard apples, and other similar kinds.

Having the fruit diet leads to a spiritual result, that is, the knowledge offered to us that they are just food: There are, for example, neither condiments nor desserts, there is neither hearty eating nor nibbling, nor biting, of food. There is neither doing good

nor doing evil, the latter can be protested against the doer. So it is a model among the many ways to lessen defilements.

Having talked about food, I would like to say something about water. People who would settle down in a home consider water as an important necessity; and this also applies, probably with greater concern, to the places that would be Dhamma practice centers.

We tried to avoid fussy businesses: unless absolutely necessary, we would not seek anything that would burden us with investment and acquisition or would waste our time. If we had a source of good water, many things would be well manageable; and we would be fully comfortable as we wished. Bad water, if drunk often, would harm the body; if used for washing without soap, it would not clean the clothes; if used for a bath, it would not cool us but would cause a terrible feeling and possibly some skin diseases for us. These would make waste and undue responsibility.

The water at Suan Mokkh tasted well and was clean, but that at the Dhammadāna Library was awful. I used to stay at both places and often compared them. Therefore, I got such a feeling about this matter that I talk about it here so that those who are interested in a Dhamma practice center may take it for consideration.

At the new Suan Mokkh [under construction back then in 1943], the water is much better than that at the old Suan Mokkh; the area of the new place is also more enchanting. We hoped for this effect; so we built the additional center. We hope that in a few years from now

we will have a new dwelling which is more facilitating in many ways, with the help of nature, and not so wasteful.

For an austere living like ours, going on alms rounds is the most proper practice. Setting up a kitchen or catering is improper or less effective, and dining out at households should rather be avoided.

This is why the monks and novices at Suan Mokkh excuse themselves from dining out; and it is generally known that they do not accept an invitation to dine out except when there is a really special reason. The purpose is for them to have more free time and the naturally comfortable feeling that they deserve while being under special self-training for a period of time, which can be any number of years. It is the reason that they abstain from such unnecessary religious rites as taking a robe at a funeral, witnessing an ordination, and the like. This is beneficial for their study and experiment on something worthwhile, for the less there are such rites, the better their spiritual attainment becomes.

Living in an unfurnished small hut without many belongings and eating from the so-called 'cat's plate' – the practices we have undertaken from the beginning up to now – have proven themselves by an indication that there are definitely no other better practices; and this can be taken as a rule. Outside people are often misled by our way of living and are afraid of it.

There is an amusing anecdote that a parent of a novice concernedly asked the youngster before he came to join us at Suan Mokkh, 'Can you eat from a cat's plate?' Actually, nothing has affected

the novice's mind from the beginning up to now, for the living he has taken to is a normal one. Only those who have never tried it will feel that it is like a torture. Therefore, I hope that those who will in the future manage Dhamma practice centers similar to ours will think much about this matter and consider it in detail so that they will not be deprived of a great benefit through misunderstanding or undue kindness to the Dhamma practitioners.

About clothing, thick-fabric robes well-dyed in a blackish color are economical and greatly lessen the trouble. The rule for the monks to use patched robes not only complies with the *ariyavaṃsapatiṭṭhā* [practice of the noble ones] but also profoundly upgrades and cleans their minds.

I have to admit here that I used to misunderstand and look down upon these practices. Later, I saw my own ignorance and felt fortunate to gain an open-minded understanding and, without having to invest anything, to have gained a supply of robes for use without shortage.

What is called merit means intelligence in overcoming troubles and difficulties. But spiritual wholesomeness, knowledge, and material things that are lost because of misunderstandings like mine can be considered very unholy. If the monks or the ascetics follow the principle mentioned above, they can save a lot of labor, money, and time for the country and can be a good model for the laymen.

We have a principle that whatever is suitable for experimentation or can be used to benefit the mind must be acquired

and tried until we understand it profoundly, become happy and have fun with it, and feel heartened to earnestly practice Dhamma on further levels.

At Suan Mokkh, robes were offered to the monks once in a while; some people anonymously offered them through the postal service. I once received an under-robe sarong which was made of silk and coarsely hand-woven as a local handicraft. It was apparently mailed from northeastern Thailand. This happened a long time ago but I would like to reply and thank the sender on this occasion. The sarong has been used to its full lifetime; it was very durable.

Our request for keeping off disturbance was well respected. There was occasionally an unknowing person, or someone who was incapable of knowing, who strayed to our dwelling. For us, this was nothing unusual. A great number of people were sympathetic enough to abstain from coming to Suan Mokkh then, except when there was an extreme emergency. We would like to thank all of them here for their sympathy. They have done a good deed, which we really appreciate. For those who come for an errand, study, or even an occasional visit, they are always welcome.

But children seem to belong to the group that causes much problem. Noticeably, when a child wants something, he is oblivious to all others. Therefore, if a Dhamma practice center has anything that attracts children, naturally it will be disturbed to some extent. In the Suan Mokkh area, there are some children who poach on fishes, either for keeping or for food, and birds; they also collect vegetables or mushrooms. These things cannot be made to disappear, for they,

as well as firewood and wood for other uses, naturally exist in abundance. In setting up a Dhamma practice center, if this problem can be anticipated, avoided, or prevented in the first place, it will be greatly beneficial for the monks and novices who live in the center. It is hardly fun to ward off strongly-desiring and easily-forgetting children. If the place does not have anything attractive for children, there will be no problems. Sometimes those attractive things have to be considered for disposal or transfer from the place; these measures seem to outweigh the losses.

Some natural disturbances, such as singing birds, did not cause a problem because they were meaningless like the sounds of winds and waves. They were soon familiar and became subjects of study.

But there were some other matters that had to be studied patiently. At Suan Mokkh there were a lot of mosquitos; rarely did we find a day without them. However, there was no case of malaria because most of the mosquitos were of the smaller species, which came up from a salt-water canal. For this we needed to learn their nature and how to avoid them or defend ourselves against them. There were no mosquitos during the daytime but they came at twilight. Our defense against their following us to our living quarters was to stay outside for a while, or to keep the light out until it was late at night. We needed to schedule our work rightly, such as when there were no mosquitos, to match or suit their nature. Finally it appeared as if there were no mosquitos at all. To stop the problem at its origin, for example, by eliminating water puddles that would breed mosquitos, also helped a lot, and deserved proper attention.

On the other hand, mosquitos sometimes helped prevent us from oversleeping and exceeding the body's need.

Not using mosquito nets, stuffed beddings, and pillows, except when sick, was very beneficial. It helped us to expand our thinking, to feel unburdened, to wake up better, and to consider sleeping as a temporary rest of the body rather than a pursuit of or an indulgence in comfort. It also helped us to practice wakefulness to the best.

But this was only for the monks and novices who were training their minds without any distraction. If there were some other studies or works interfering, the practice might not be as fruitful as what has been described. When the mind rested peacefully while we were sitting still, we felt more comfortable than when we were sleeping. Thus we did not feel like sleeping, but preferred staying awake and refreshed with standing, taking a walk, and sitting leisurely, because they were more fun or more pleasant. The body that moves very little, one like that of a yogi, needs only a sleep as short as is apt to be called unusual. This is incomprehensible for most ordinary people who have not tried such a practice. Or, for comparison, if we observe ourselves when we are sick and lying rather still, we will see that we need little sleep. In fact, we are rather insomniac. But this is a matter involving sickness, which is opposite to peace and comfort.

Personally for ourselves at Suan Mokkh, we were contented with our comfortable facility, sensing no harshness whatsoever. This was because we had rightly tuned our minds to it. But some outside people considered it extreme or even a torture.

Actually, if one can adjust one's mind to see the path to calmness, he will wish to stay in such a place as ours, or in an even harsher place, for there will be few interferences and a good opportunity to enjoy oneself in deliberation and in the new-found lights in one's mind.

And even for monks and novices who are studying academic matters or other basic knowledges to love or get absorbed in their study, they too will finally have to resort to a place of few interferences.

A dwelling that is too comfortable directs our time and our thinking to pleasure and to the imagination of beautifying it. Or at least it costs us anxiety in taking too much care of it. Therefore, it hardly offers real benefits to the practitioner. Moreover, it is a thing blindly enjoyed by many people, who see it as an honor or a similar thing, which makes their minds more of a householder rather than a thoughtful contemplative. If most of the general public is also misled in this way, the religion will be inauspicious, without anybody's notice, for the nation; and this will be damaging both materially and spiritually.

At this point, I would like to say a few words about the playthings of our monks and novices.

Playing and playthings seem always to accompany humanity. Even for the poorest of the poor, they have some playthings or give up something for playing. The rich play with expensive playthings. Householders and monks alike have playthings. When they are

dissatisfied with inexpensive or naturally beautiful objects, laymen move up to such expensive ones as antiques and crystals. The noble ones also have playthings, namely, *jhāna* and *samāpatti*: they play with uncommon *jhānas*, acrobatically exiting one and entering another like some athletes who practice their difficult routine or enjoy creating new ones.

As for the newly ordained or those who are far from reaching *jhānas*, with what else should they play? I advised small novices to play with objects of general knowledge and to observe closely the nature all around us, namely, birds, fish, trees, and flowers, so that they could learn as much as possible, in a greater detail, about reproduction, growing, and growth in association with what they had learned from biology. For those things rarely observable, such as termites and earthworms, the novices had to spend a long time observing them.

Sometimes I advised them to play with construction work and to know how to use or make tools so that they would be better off doing other kinds of mock-up or real work in the future. Instruments for a scientific study in sound, light, electricity, or mechanics were also recommended for acquisition and playing with, as much as they could be found, and for experimentation, as much as the novices could do or I could show them on an educational trip. Although these were not actually playthings, they could lessen the instinctive power of love of playthings or playing and could turn the playthings into serious objects of study. They did not worry the mind and gave quite good results.

For older monks and novices, I advised them to observe nature on a higher level, until they could not dissociate themselves from nature, to the extent that they cease to differentiate between a plaything and a real thing. For a talk, a problem discussion, a pronunciation according to the linguistic principles, and a sermon practice, all of these, if well managed, were fun and took away the time that the monks and novices would otherwise spend fooling around.

To never laugh or to have no time to enjoy oneself would cause apathy to some of one's nerves and muscles, and might partially disable a person or might directly open the door for some illness to enter and attack. Therefore, even the Dhamma practitioners' circle must successfully solve this problem; it cannot consider this beyond its concern. That staying in some Dhamma practice centers caused sickness, psychosis, and narrow-mindedness to some people might, in my opinion, be more or less due to negligence in this matter. Fellow practitioners and those who are setting up Dhamma practice centers like this should carefully think about it.

Having talked about playing, I should now say some words about the real thing or the serious work.

Those of us here who can take care of ourselves in the study mindfully carry on with our everyday living so that it will be enlightening, happy, and free from defilements as much as possible. Those special groups of monks and novices who still have to be counseled have also resolved to follow this instruction.

All of us keep in mind the principle that we take as refuge: to study hard, work hard, eat and live frugally, have patience, purify behavior, and aim highly at doing good for both oneself and others.

We repeatedly remind ourselves every day to carefully observe everything that we experience: eating, sleeping, looking and seeing, listening and hearing, playing, straying, communicating, etc. All of these should be taken for study so that they can help us to quickly see everything as it really is, until we can finally associate with things without attachment and suffering; to work industriously to carry on with the duty of a still-unexpired compound body; and to mindfully know every movement we make. These activities will continue until we realize the supreme knowledge, thus having nothing to stir up our curiosity any more.

At Suan Mokkh, we have a small library, which is separate from the Dhammadāna Library in Talat Subdistrict. There are Dhamma books and Pali language books ranging from the Tipiṭaka and the Atthakathā to textbooks for the *Nak Tham* (Student of Dhamma) curricula. There are also some textbooks on general knowledge for young monks and novices.

Sometimes when they are free, some of them can learn the subjects that enhance their intelligence, for example, mathematics and literature. For this matter, we consider that monks and novices who will have adequate knowledge or versatility should get acquainted with all-around knowledge as a primer so that each of them can think in the right direction. It is definitely inadequate to learn only the subjects in the present-day curricula for monks and

novices, because it is suitable only for those who have gone through the worldly life.

To say this in a different way, which is most correct, the educational curricula, where feasible, should be arranged specifically for an individual. This will be better than other methods.

When there was a free time, we trained our monks and novices in the methods of dissemination of our work, such as writing various kinds of poetry. Some of the students were not at all endowed with the ability for this literary work. But after having trained together with those who had some skill, they also gradually developed their ability. Practicing and submitting the work for publication helped the development of skill.

When we had paper in abundance, I often encouraged the new students to write and publish their works for distribution among themselves. Some of them had some free time to help me in a position that could be called secretary or assistant for manuscript preparation and for articles that were sent for publication in the *Buddhasāsanā*, the journal of the Dhammadāna Group. In the process, they had an opportunity to criticize the articles; and this helped them to become proficient in the Thai language more quickly.

Having profoundly thought about it, I can see that it takes time for one to become really good or capable. To give a person only normal education is not sufficient; he also needs to be trained in both physical and spiritual etiquette, which includes self-discipline on the outside and inside, while he is getting an education. This is because

both of them take about the same length of time. And since this training becomes boring after some time, the students need continual consolation and motivation from the teachers or friends. I think that the latter work is a hard one because it involves reading the students' minds, and this is possible only when the teachers have a chance to observe the students closely and regularly. This work has to be undertaken seriously; otherwise, the students cannot succeed. Without the teachers' attention, the students will be no better off than castaways or poorly looked-after babies.

I always try to have all of us who are fellow residents know one another and become good friends who can console and motivate one another, having brotherly love as the prime principle. I also keep record of this just as I do for other noteworthy matters. To summarize, we have tried in all ways to have our activities push us upwards all the time, no matter how clearly we foresee the results. We hope that after we have lived here for some due time, we will be happy, or at least able to save ourselves.

If you read and understand what was printed on the inside of the front and back covers of the *Buddhasāsanā*, Vol. 4, No. 3 or 4,⁵ specifically about the dream of the Dhammadāna Group for the Swan Mokkh Department, I can say to you that we are most pleased.

Even though our endeavor to the best of our physical and mental power or ability is, as one can say, not much better than that of a child,

⁵ See Appendix C of the printed editions.

we have achieved tens of percent of what we dreamed about; we hope we will achieve it one hundred percent one day in the future.

The final and most important goal that we greatly hope to reach is capability in dissemination of the Buddha's religion. As other methods can no longer create peace, ours will help the world to become one that is filled with happiness of the individuals in proportion to their abilities. We are happy to sacrifice ourselves and to tolerate malice from those who misunderstand us. At the same time, we will be very pleased if there are others who continually understand and appreciate our work until it reaches its final goal.

The last matter I am going to tell you is that of our resources. Other matters are mostly what you might already have known; some are too personal to tell you here.

The first resource was money and labor. How much money has been spent on Suan Mokkh can be seen from the account shown in the announcement of the Dhammadāna Group. Most of it was for refurbishing the place, encircling it with a barbed-wire fence, constructing the dwellings, and for medicines as well as transportation cost, which we paid quite often, more in some years and less in other.

Considering the expense since the beginning of the project, we can see one fact: setting up the place was not wasteful at all. Looking at the results, we feel that they exceed what they cost. However, the results are not of the material kind that appear before our eyes like a cathedral, a monastery, a school, etc., which are built from

contribution money. Therefore, they are unappealing. For such a little expense as ours, there may be tens of thousands of people in Thailand who can donate, but those who are ready to do so do not know of, or have not understood, our project well enough.

The second resource was moral support. Where did we get moral support? You may have already known it from what I wrote at the beginning. This resource was more important than money and labor; without strong will-power to achieve something, and without constant support from friends and some events, the work would have been rather boring. Therefore, to know that there were readers of our journal who wanted to get knowledge or to track the development of our project was for us to receive good encouragement in a way. For this we are grateful to all of the readers.

The third and final resource was the group of people who dared to stand up and carry the burden without relenting, and were contented with the work done, even when they received little help or no help at all from other people. It is important to point out that those who donated the money or gave moral support could not come in person to do the work.

With the three resources described, the project could get started and carry on. For this kind of work, we can bluntly say that it is not naturally appealing like work that outrightly pays a wage or a reward. I greatly hope that any fellow Buddhist who decides to run a project like ours should collect all the three resources beforehand. Then, such a meritorious work without a wage or a salary, which does not

belong to the organizer but to the country and the religion, can be carried on with more or less success.

Finally, I would like to conclude my long story with a few words: We are pleased with the work we are doing; we are determined to carry on unrelentingly with our duty no matter how the world situation will change.

Buddhadāsa Indapañño

27 October 1943





About the Author

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was born in 1906, the son of a southern Thai mother and an ethnic Chinese father. He followed Thai custom by entering a local monastery in 1926, studied for a couple years in Bangkok, and then founded his own refuge for study and practice in 1932. Since then, he has had a profound influence on not only Thai Buddhism but other religions in Siam and Buddhism in the West. Among his more important accomplishments, he:

- Challenged the hegemony of later commentarial texts with the primacy of the Buddha's original discourses.
- Integrated serious Dhamma study, intellectual creativity, and rigorous practice.
- Explained Buddha-Dhamma with an emphasis on this life, including the possibility of experiencing Nibbāna ourselves.
- Softened the dichotomy between householder and monastic practice, stressing that noble eightfold path is available to everyone.
- Offered doctrinal support for addressing social and environmental issues, helping to foster socially engaged Buddhism in Siam.

- Shaped his forest monastery as an innovative teaching environment and Garden of Liberation (Suan Mokkh).

After a series of illnesses, including strokes, he died in 1993. He was cremated without the usual pomp and expense.

Echoes from the Garden of Liberation **Series**

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* forthcoming

Recommended Reading (Books)

- *Buddha-Dhamma for Inquiring Minds*
- *Christianity and Buddhism*
- *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh*
- *Handbook for Mankind*
- *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*
- *Keys to Natural Truth*
- *Living in the Present without Past without Future*
- *Mindfulness with Breathing: A Manual for Serious Beginners*
- *Natural Cure for Spiritual Disease: A Guide into Buddhist Science*
- *Nibbāna for Everyone*
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- *Paticcasamuppada: Practical Dependent Origination*
- *The Prison of Life*
- *A Single Bowl of Sauce: Teachings beyond Good and Evil*
- *Under the Bodhi Tree: Buddha's Original Vision of Dependent Co-Arising*
- *Void Mind*

Online Resources

- www.bia.or.th/en
- www.suanmokkh.org
- www.soundcloud.com/buddhadasa
- www.facebook.com/suanmokkh.bkk

Buddhadāsa Foundation

Established in 1994, the Buddhadāsa Foundation aims to promote the study and practice of Buddha-Dhamma according to Ven. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s teachings. It encourages compilation and translation of his works from Thai into foreign languages, as well as supports publication of translated teachings for free distribution.



Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives

Established in 2010, the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives collect, maintain, and present the original works of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. Also known as Suan Mokkh Bangkok, it is an innovative place for fostering mutual understanding between traditions, studying and practicing Dhamma.

