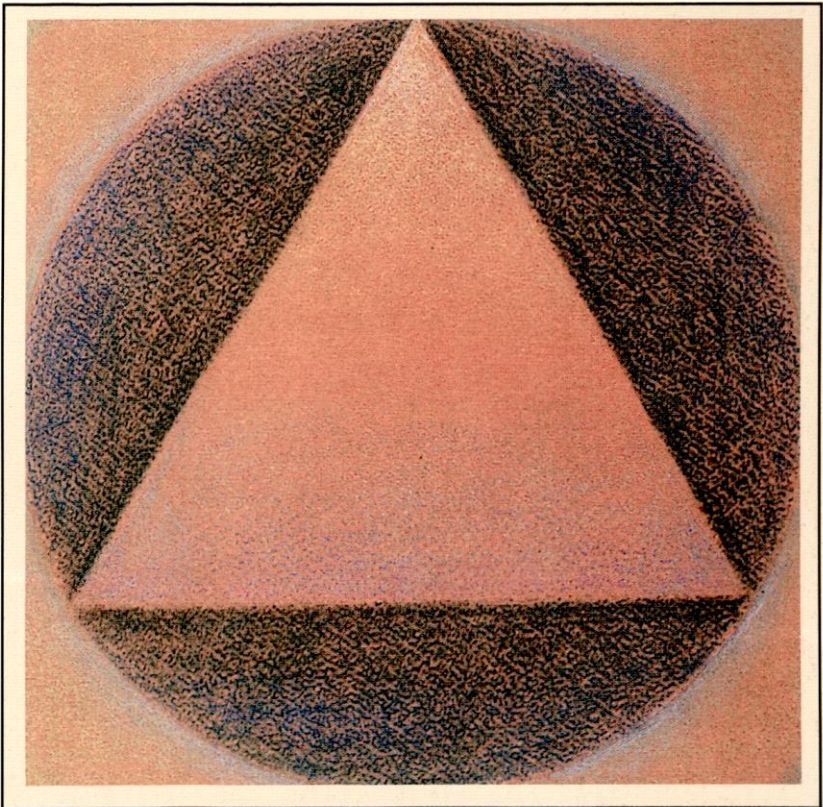


BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU

A PUBLIC LECTURE

SOME MARVELLOUS
ASPECTS OF
THERAVĀDA
BUDDHISM



**Some Marvellous
Aspects of
Theravāda Buddhism**

Some Marvellous Aspects of Theravāda Buddhism

A Public Lecture

by

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

(Phra Ariyanandamunī)

Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya, Surat Thani, Southern Thailand

Delivered at the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā
(Sixth Buddhist Council), Second Session
Mahāpāsaṅgūhā, Rangoon, Burma
December 6, 1954

Some Marvellous Aspects of Theravāda Buddhism

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Translated by Stephen R. Schmidt

First published in 1991 by Vuddhidhamma Fund
Lated published in 2005 by Dhammadāna Foundation

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Printed by: Witana Printing Tel. 0-2392-0146 Fax. 0-2381-0238

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, ageing, and dying.

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

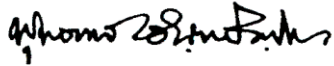
Heartiest appreciation from Buddhādāsa Indapañño,
Buddhist Science ever shines beams of Bodhi longlasting.

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 word upon earth.

from



Mokkhabalārāma

Chaiya, 2 November 2530

(translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu, 3 February 2531 (1988))

Foreword

This lecture "*Some Marvellous Aspects of Theravāda Buddhism*" was delivered by Than Achan Buddhādāsa in the second session conference of the Sixth *Sangāyanā* at Mahāpāsanaḡhā, Rangoon, Burma, on December 6, 1950. The conference was attended by learned people of Theravada Buddhism. The lecture is another very interesting one which shows learnedness of the lecturer, who was so much honored while being so young. Since it is hardly available for people to read, the Uddhidhamma Fund for Dhamma Study and Practice republishes it once more to preserve the original manuscript and to benefit dhamma-studying people in general.

The lecture published here was translated from the Thai by Prof. Sanya Dhammasak, who was at one time Thailand's Prime Minister and the President of the Buddhist Association of Thailand and, at present, is the Chairman of the Privy Council and the President of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB). We publish this English translation in a separate book from the Thai version so that interested people can study from either of them.

Regarding that it has been 45 years since this lecture was delivered, the readers should keep in mind that some of the lecturer's views have changed. Examples are the following:

(1) Attachment to the salient aspects of Theravada Buddhism should be abandoned. We should transcend the perception of being Theravada, Mahayana, Vajjarayana, or any other sects of Buddhism, and any other pertinent religions besides Buddhism, with the reasoning that the essences of the sects or religions are inducive to abandonment of selfishness, to elimination of grasping and clinging with attachment, and to true cessation of suffering.

(2) The lecturer still maintains his viewpoint regarding the Noble Eightfold Path but adds much more explanation on this teaching, especially recently (1988-1989). His discourses in the *Atammayatā* (Unconditionability) series can be regarded as a contribution to research and study on the essence of the ultimate teaching and practice in Buddhism that, very remarkably, can be applied to life on both the mundane and the supramundane levels, although it is not so well-know among Buddhists, including the Theravada. His assemblage of the nine related *-tās*, namely, *aniccatā* (impermanence), *dukkhatā* (stress), *anattā* (not-self), *dhammaṭṭhitattā* (natural orderliness), *dhammaniyamata* (natural law), *idappaccayatā* (the law of Specific Conditionality), *suññatā* (voidness of the meaning of self), *tathātā* (as-suchness), and *atammayatā* (unconditionability), shows his characteristic originality, which greatly helps enhance insight of dhamma and facilitate its study and practice.

(3) About “God”, the lecturer’s viewpoint has developed further from what he used to refer to as the Creator-Controller-Destroyer, which is translated into the stress-causing trio in Buddhism: *avijjā* (ignorance)-*kamma* (action)-*taṇhā* (craving). The trio conditions one’s self but can be overcome by attainment of *nibbāna*. At present, the lecturer sees an ingenious strategy of having God as a tool for elimination of

selfishness. This is achieved by giving up one's self to God in exchange for the "eternal self." In Buddhism, however, a practitioner with the right mind must train himself toward complete elimination of self in order to attain *nibbāna*, which is the "eternal voidness." The lecturer's interpretation of God as the ultimate dhamma for elimination of selfishness is conducive to good mutual understanding among religions, cooperation for world peace, and happiness for the followers of all religions.

(4) About the Triple Gem, which is the symbolization of Buddhism and the objective of Buddhists, the lecturer pointed out that this Buddhist Trinity is none other than the state of *cleanness-clarity-calmness* (the three C's), which, when attained, is perceived as the true Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. Otherwise, the Gem will not be a true refuge but can be a critical obstacle against attainment of the Buddha-dhamma. He specifically emphasized this point in his recent (1989-1990) lectures. For example, he talked about the real Buddha, the false Buddha, the personal Buddha, the dhamma Buddha, and the spiritual Buddha. He also talked about the representative Buddhas, namely, the Buddha's relics, the Buddha images, and various Buddha shrines, all of which are just symbols, not idols. But many Buddhists still practice their beliefs with an attitude inclining more to *superstitions* than to *Buddhism*: They emphasize *rituals* more than *methods*; they pursue *merits* rather than *righteousness*; they are satisfied more with *heavens* than with *nibbāna*; they have more *faith* than *wisdom*, etc. With this attitude, how can they get cleanness, clarity, and calmness as a result of their practice?

Those who keep track of the Than Achan's teachings would have seen origination, change, and continuity of his viewpoints all along. It is important to understand the develop-

ment from the beginning up to the present. One cannot grasp at only a segment or a portion of his teachings as the definite representative of the whole, for this will prevent right and complete understanding of his true teachings. This point is also applicable even to such matters as vegetarianism and meditation (*vipassana*).

This present publication uses the manuscript from the first edition, which was published on the Visākhapūjā Day of 1955 by the Dhammadana Group. For the Thai version, the original spelling and punctuation are preserved, but some words are bold-faced for emphasis. For the English version, Sāmaṇera Naṭṭhākaro, who is an American Buddhist novice at Suan Mokkh, and Prof. Mongkol Dejnakarindra helped edit the manuscript and added footnotes for foreigners to better understand some of the religious terms. We would like to thank both of them here for their help.

On the auspicious occasion of the Than Achan's 84th birthday anniversary, all of us who take part in the publication of this work of dhamma gift humbly dedicate the merits as a tribute to the Than Achan's graciousness. May this wish benefit all beings.

Phra Dusadee Medhaṅkuro
Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, Surat Thani
September 1, 1990

SUGGESTED READING

Other books by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu:

Buddha-Dhamma For Students
Christianity and Buddhism
Dhamma – The World Saviour
Gesänge und Sprüche zur Verehrung und Andacht in Dhamma
Handbook For Mankind
Heartwood From The Bo Tree
Handbuch für die Menschheit
India's Benevolence to Thailand
Keys to Natural Truth
Life Should Be Harnessed By Two Buffaloes
Mindfulness with Breathing: Unveiling the Secrets of Life
No Religion
Paticca-Samupāda: Practical Dependent Origination
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The Prison of Life
Towards Buddha-Dhamma
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Brethren in birth, old age and death !

May I be permitted to deliver my public lecture as a token of the veneration of all Thai Buddhists to the glorious occasion of the holding of the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgayanā*¹ under the auspices of the Buddha-sāsana Council of the Union of Burma under the patronage of H.E. Agga Maha Thiri Thudhamma Dr. Ba U and his government.

The first thing for me to express to you now is the great delight of all Thai Buddhists, both ordained and lay, on hearing that all of you Burmese Buddhists are offering a great sacrifice in holding the Holy *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā* for the veneration to the greatness of Buddhism in the sacred 2,500th year. Such a glorious performance for the purity and security of the existence of the Theravāda teaching will undoubtedly be greatly appreciated and rejoiced at, not only by the whole of humanity, but also by all celestial beings, so that they will temporarily put aside their celestial pleasure and join in *anumodanā*² with us.

¹ *Saṅgāyanā* here means a general convocation of the Saṅgha in order to settle questions of doctrine and to fix the text of the Scriptures. Five *saṅgāyanās* have previously been held since the Buddha's *parinibbāna* (decease); therefore, this particular one is *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā* or the Sixth *Saṅgāyanā*.

² Approval or congratulation.

The second thing beneficial to mention is our pride in realizing that both our nations still remain the firm stronghold of the Theravāda world from the beginning until today. In fact, Theravāda in Thai soil, as fixed by modern geographical measure, has passed through two crises, clashing with Acāriyavāda³ in two periods, namely, that in Sirivijaya Period (8th - 9th Century A.D.) of Southernmost Thailand, and that in Lopburi Period (10th- 11th Century A.D.) of the Central part occupied by some foreign Mahāyānist Kings, in a relatively recent time, during the interval from 11th to 17th century of the Buddhist Era. But in due course of time, however, Theravāda Buddhism prevailed in Thailand and still stands purely and firmly. This is because of the invulnerability of our Theravāda itself! As to Theravāda in Burma, I think it has not encountered similar struggles. I do hope all of you Burmese Buddhists greatly sympathize with us Thai Buddhists in this respect.

The third thing I am going to mention is the friendship between both of our nations which ought to be upheld and respected for all time. Someone had said that it was rather doubtful that affectionate friendship between these two old disputants could exist because their predecessors had been in mutual disputes for a long time. May I be permitted to stop for a while to repress my smile at this statment. Think. The quarrel makers instrinsically are *kilesa*⁴, not we! We, when being captured by *kilesa*, are not ourselves. Men of the same womb may be still in fatal quarrel. A loving couple, husband and wife, captured by *kilesa*, can be in bloodthirsty quarrel;

³ Another name for the Mahāyāna Sect.

⁴ Defilements of the mind.

but after that a number of heirs can still be born of them. This depends upon the great motive of love based upon the feeling of righteousness. Hence indestructible!

Between both of our nations there exists the holy link of friendship in the pure body of Theravāda of the Lord Buddha, cherishing our brotherly affection and totally eliminating our bad dreams of the old days from our minds. There is nothing more than this in this world for us to rejoice at. In this world, there is nothing more for us to attach ourselves to than the real Buddha-Dhamma. As long as our Theravāda is still controlling our minds, fierce storms of anger and hatred from any direction cannot overwhelm us. Let us hold firmly to the principles of our Theravāda as our sacred safeguard without any need of proof or experiment whatsoever.

From this, it should be evident to all of us that any sacrifice we perform to preserve the purity and security of our Theravāda Buddhism as the spiritual goal of the citizens of our nations is our very life! Without it, we no doubt would die, either spiritually or physically, or, at least, would be in mortal suffering.

Some sects which are adulterated with Brāhmanism or other heresies are not befitting us. I, therefore, put special emphasis on the purity and security of our Theravāda Buddhism. Our cooperation and collaboration in holding the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā, which, in its essence, is about the preservation of the basic principles of our Theravādin teaching, is, then, the main requisite to feed directly the spiritual life of our nations, and indirectly, of our neighbors in the whole world.

I have spoken in my introduction either directly or indirectly, of the existence and destruction of our nations, according to the brief time of one hour limited for my lecture. Now let me deal with the gist of my lecture on “Some Marvellous Aspects of Theravāda Buddhism,” as much as time allows.

Please take note that I am going to speak only on “Some Aspects” of it. This is not only because of the limitation of time, but also because of the marvellousness of the subject itself, which is of numerous aspects, of which some are more profound than the depth of any ocean, so that I cannot totally deal with it. But as best as I can, however, I will go straight on to some points most profitable to mankind. If there is anything annoying to anyone, may they be kind enough to forgive the speaker, whose real intention is constructive—to show the way that leads to our very right understanding.

I am going now to speak on some salient points of Theravāda as follows:

(A) Being the only teaching that succeeds in preserving the ancient pure Buddhism by admitting only the additional that enhances the strictness of the original, while being against the revoking, changing or altering of the original even in the least form.

In regard to the first marvel of Theravāda, we ought to acknowledge firstly the fact that however many “schools” of Buddhism there may be, each of them has had a set of Scriptures, or Tipiṭaka, of its own, which has been gradually added to by various authorities according to circumstances, through the beginning and subsequent periods. This fact is obvious and

no proof is needed.

As for Theravāda, there is a special point to be noticed: that we have no constitutional right to revoke or change anything in the Scriptures spoken by the Buddha, however minor it may be, even though the Lord Himself had laid the permission for that purpose in an occasion very close to His passing away.¹ Such a Theravādin institution was strictly established by the Saṅgha presided over by Mahā Kassapa Thera as the successful conclusion of the holding of the Pathama Saṅgāyanā², which forbade any abrogation of any disciplinary rule or doctrine even of very small issue.

As for additions to the Scriptures, if there were some, as is generally believed, the addition had to preserve or uphold our original principles to their utmost strictness, or to explain it in accordance with the old text. The addition and the original must be in the same line! This differs from some of the “schools” whose methods of addition change the direction of the Teaching to some degree.

We have no warrant of addition that would make Buddhism develop according to the influence of opportunity and locality, or any other circumstances, to the extent that its original principles are lost. Such is the addition that leads to the fall of the doctrine, directly or indirectly, into Theism or Egoism; or more than that, back to the old Mysticism. We are afraid of doing such a thing. We are glad to accept the accusation that we are cowards. By means of this very cowardice, Theravāda

1. *Mahāparinibbānasutta-pāli*, *Mahā. Dīgh.* (Thai Edition, 10/178/141).

2. The First Saṅgāyanā. See *Cullavagga-pāli Vi.* (Thai Edition, 7/386/621).

still remains in its pristine form according to the original doctrine. May we be in cowardice in this way forever. Our addition, however great or small, must supplement the original to make the old teaching firm to its utmost.

If any heterodox matter happens to be mixed with the original by any means of influence, it would expose itself. It could not possibly be blended with the original. The Lord Himself enunciated two chapters of the Four Mahāpadesa Regulations³, one for Vinaya⁴ and the other for Suttanta⁵, to point out the rightness of any issue in case problems arose. Finally, those adulterated factors, having been tested by the principles of Mahāpadesa, appear in their inherent falsehood and they automatically drop out, or, on the other hand, if they still remain in any sacred literature, they will remain interesting to none, by their contradictions.

By means of the above mentioned Theravādin institution and the Four Mahāpadesa Regulations, our Teaching of Theravāda Buddhism has continued in its pure form from the beginning until now!

Here is the first cardinal aspect of our Theravādin teaching, which has as its firm foundation the *Buddhavaṇṇa* (words of the Buddha) which runs in the Mahāparinibbāna Suttaṅga as follows:

“Yavakivaṇṇa bhikkhave bhikkhū appaññattam na

3. *The Principal References.*

4. The Discipline. See *Mahāvagga-pāli Vi. (Thai Edition, 5/131/92).*

5. The Discourses. See *Mahāparinibbānasutta-pāli, Mahā, Digh. (Thai Edition 10/144/112).*

paññāpessanti, paññattaṃ na samucchindissanti, Yathā-paññātesu sikkhāpadesu samādāya vattissanti, vuḍḍhiyeva bhikkhave bhikkhūnaṃ pātikañkhā no parihāni” — “O Bhikkhus, so long as bhikkhus do not abrogate that which is established, do not introduce that which is not introduced, and observe in good term those matters well established, so long the Sangha may be expected not to decline, but to prosper.”

(B) Having as its fundamental principle the Noble Eightfold Path which had direct contact with life itself and without which no one in any world can get along well, nor attain his deliverance. Hence the only way for both the mundane and supramundane goal.

May everyone take hold, without hesitation, of the Noble Eightfold Path as the very essence of Buddhism, especially of Theravāda. The Lord had said, “Ayamevariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo ... idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave brahmacariyaṃ”¹ — “The Noble Eightfold Path called by me *brahmacariyaṃ* (religious life),” that is, the body of Buddhism.

The Noble Eightfold Path is none other than the right practice or an attempt to do right in eight factors, namely, in understanding, aim, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, attentiveness and in concentration of the mind in every mode of life, as the art of living. It is the only art that may be called Buddhist art in the true sense.

Being within the scope of attainment by everyone of

1. *Mahāvāravagga-pāli, Saṃ (Thai Edn. 19/31/112).*

natural intellect², the Noble Eightfold Path was called by the Lord *ehipassiko*—open to all, or, to be come upon and seen by all. The Lord conferred on it the title of “the Way”³ (*Magga*), or “the Stream” (*Sotā*), which is naturally slanting to *nibbāna*,⁴ enabling anyone who steps into it to go sliding inevitably and miraculously towards *nibbāna*. Hence the exact Way of *nibbāna* for all!

As for the first factor of the Path, right practice in understanding, or, as shortly called, right understanding or right view, (*sammādiṭṭhi*), it comprises all kinds of wisdom or good understanding such as the supramundane understanding of the Four Noble Truths⁵ which deal directly with suffering and its extinction. It also deals with the Dependent Origination of all phenomena, *paṭiccasamuppāda*⁶; and with the three characteristics of all phenomena, *aniccāṃ-dukkhāṃ-anattā* (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-selfhood); and with the whole scope of the Law of Cause and Effect (i.e., Kammic Nature). The realization of each produces the same result, *nibbidā*, the shunning of worldly life; and on the other hand, indirectly comprises all good mundane understanding which is the means of getting worldly benefits and peace.

Right understanding was called by the Lord “the dawn

2. *Mahāgovindasutta-pāli*, *Mahā. Dīgh.* (Thai Edn. 10/285/234) *Mahāvāravagga-pāli*, *Sam.* (Thai Edn. 19/23/69), and *Catukka, Aṅg.* (21/329/245).

2. (Most special), *Mahāvaccagottasutta-pāli*, *M. M.* 13/251/255, and *Salāyatana. Sam* 18/223/322.

3. *Mahāvāravagga-pāli*, *Sam* (Thai Edn. 19/434/1430).

4. *Mahāvāravagga-pāli*, *Mahā. Dīgh.* (Thai Edn. 10/348/299).

5. *Mahāsatipatthānasutta-pāli*, *Mahā. Dīgh.* (Thai Edn. 10/348/299).

6. *Nidān. Sam* (Thai Edn. 16/21/44). and *Tikka. Aṅg.* 20/227/501).

of all goodness”⁷ and “the dawn of penetration through the Four Noble Truths.”⁷ It is the sign that *nibbāna*, the extinction of all suffering, will inevitably come, just as dawn is a token of the day.

Everyone may notice the fact that whenever right understanding is perfect in its function, right aim, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, attentiveness and right concentration take place simultaneously and automatically side by side with the former; and later on, in due time, comes the deliverance from all suffering. This fact is said in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya-pali*⁸: “*sammādiṭṭhisamādānā sabbam dukkham upaccagamī*” - “Men have overcome all suffering by means of good practice of *sammādiṭṭhi*!” The Lord, accordingly, conferred on it the title of “the dawn of salvation.” Hence great hope was given to us by the Buddha. We ought to make haste in the practice of *sammādiṭṭhi*, the first factor of the Noble Way, zealously and gratefully.

The great hope is in the fact that whenever we meditate inwardly for insight, which, in actual sense, is called *sammādiṭṭhi* or Right Understanding, we simultaneously acquire the state of concentration of “*anantariya-samādhi* (deep one-pointedness of the mind),” in more or less degree, automatically and in equal ratio to the power of insight.

As a natural fact, no one can meditate without drawing up concentration in itself. When meditation is just natural, the state of concentration acquired is also just natural. If meditation is technical or systematic, the state of concentration

7. & 7. *Dasaka. Aṅg. (Thai Edn. 24/235/121), and Mahāvāra Sam. 19/552/1720).*

8. *Catukk. Aṅg. (Thai Edn. 21/68/49).*

acquired will be of a like aspect. Whenever meditation to foster *sammādiṭṭhi* is put into operation, the state of advanced concentration is automatically acquired, forming a sufficient basis for the automatic birth of *sammādiṭṭhi* itself.

Without *sammādiṭṭhi*, we will not know how to meditate! The power of *sammādiṭṭhi* which one has previously obtained, inspires the power of the acting-concentration all the time of its functioning. And the power of the new born concentration, in its turn, inspires the further development of *sammādiṭṭhi* in equal ratio. Concerning this fact the Buddha said, “Natthi jhānam apaññassa, natthi paññā ajhāyino, yamhi jhānam ca paññā ca, sa ve nibbānasantike” -- “Absorption is absent to one who has no wisdom, and wisdom is similarly absent to one who has no absorption. When one has absorption as well as wisdom, he is near to *nibbāna*.”⁹ These two things are mutual requisites to each other. Therefore, no one can get absorption without wisdom, and *vice versa*. They are automatically of mutual inspiration.

The automatic arising as mentioned, can be seen in the example of shooting an arrow. When one, holding a bow with an arrow in his hands, aims at something, he has no need of volition to raise concentration. The concentration will take place automatically and naturally, and synchronically with the aiming. If his knowledge for getting the object is firm, the concentration of his aim is also firm. The knowledge enforces the concentration all the time. In similar manner, right understanding of the value of deliverance, which is the ultimate goal, inevitably gives rise to the power of concentration and

exactly fits in the saying “*natthi jhānaṃ apaññassa*” as mentioned above. Therefore, put stress on meditation to foster *sammādiṭṭhi*; it will automatically draw out a sufficient, suitable and most dependable state of concentration for the purpose of penetrating the truth. In general, a person of good health and intellect can perform such a practice with satisfaction.

As for concentration or *samādhi* in general, the Buddha described it in *Aṅguttara Nikāya-pāli*.¹⁰ He put it in four groups, namely, (1) concentration for foretasting the instant happiness in this life, that is the practice of the four *rūpajhānas* (material absorptions) (2) concentration for acquiring *nāṇadassana*, (a kind of extraordinary power for seeing); this is the practice of *ālokasaññā* (perception of light) and *divāsaññā* (perception of daylight). (3) concentration for acquiring *sati* and *sampajañña* (attentiveness and clearness of consciousness); this is an exercise on watching the activities of the mind for the purpose of self-control, the practice of having insight into the arising, persisting and disappearing of *vedanā* (feeling), *saññā* (perception) and *vitakka* (thought conception); and (4) concentration for acquiring the extinction of all four *āsavas* (cankers of sense-desire, becoming, views and ignorance); this is the practice of contemplating on the origination and extinction of the Five Aggregates (corporeality, sensation, perception, volition, consciousness) associated with clinging (*pancupādānakkhandhā*).

From this fact we can see that *samādhi* or concentration of the fourth group is just the practice to acquire *paññā* or *sammādiṭṭhi* as generally stated in the scripture. The concen-

9. *Bhikkhuvagga-pāli, Dham. Khu. (Thai Edn. 25/65/35).*

10. *Rohitassavagga-pāli, Catukk. Aṅg. (Thai Edn. 21/57/41).*

tration practice of this kind is obviously development of wisdom or *paññā*. It witnesses the fact that the word “*samādhi-bhāvanā*”—concentration development—is of wider meaning than the scope of concentration generally understood, which is only for the development of the four *rūpajhānas*. Therefore, concentration in its practical form cannot be separated from *paññā* or *sammādiṭṭhi*. Theravādin concentration is by all means concurrent with wisdom or deliverance—the goal, whether directly or by implication. It is not merely sitting quietly and continuously as has been mostly understood.

As for right concentration or *samādhi* which is an ingredient of the Noble Eightfold Path, the Buddha described it in general sources of the Scriptures as the four *rūpajhānas*; and He has referred to it, in *Mahācattarīsakasutta-pāli*¹¹, as the one-pointedness of mind encircled and guided by *sammādiṭṭhi*, which knows what is right or what is wrong. Therefore, right concentration can be called “right” by means of *sammādiṭṭhi*; otherwise the four *rūpajhānas* will fall into the scope of other *tiṭṭhiyas* (faiths) such as those of *tāpasas* (ascetics, for example, *Āḷaratāpasa* and *Uddakatāpasa*, who were the Buddha’s former teachers) and others, which is not a factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, and does not lead to the goal of Buddhism—*nibbāna*. Consequently, it is evident that right understanding and right concentration must go hand in hand with each other all the time, and they will then be that of Theravāda.

More admirably than that, whenever *sammādiṭṭhi*, right understanding, is functioning well, there will be no problems with the development of the other six factors¹², right aim, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, and right attentiveness.

Sammādiṭṭhi, by its very nature, knows the right or wrong, the workable and unworkable, the worthy and unworthy, and the way to perform. More than that, its very power of realization invariably pushes one to do things in accordance with his right knowledge. Therefore, by means of *sammādiṭṭhi*, one can and must aim at the right object, speak the right speech, conduct oneself in right conduct, live the right livelihood, struggle in right effort, and think in right mindfulness or attentiveness. The six factors, therefore, become less difficult to obtain, because of the power of *sammādiṭṭhi*.

In another angle of consideration, the group of *sīla* (morality) factors: right speech, right conduct and right livelihood, have to have some supporting factors such as moral shame and moral dread (*hiri* and *ottappa*) and restraint of the senses (*indriyasainvara*) for their perfection. By means of *sammādiṭṭhi* as well, all those supporting factors can wonderfully be obtained. Even in the case of the group of *samādhi* factors: right effort, right attentiveness and right concentration itself, the supporting factors for it, such as tranquillity of the spiritual group (*kāya-passaddhi*), can be obtained easily by this power of *sammādiṭṭhi*. Therefore, *sammādiṭṭhi* is both the program maker and the guide to other factors, so that the Buddha titled it “Pubbaṅgamā”—“the Forerunner.”¹³ The same holds true for the group of *paññā* factors: right aim and right understanding itself have their proper methods of development under the guidance of right understanding.

11. *Mahācattarīsakasutta-pāli*, *Upari. M.* (Thai Edn. 14/180/253).

12. *Dasaka. Aṅg.* (Thai Edn. 24/254/121).

13. *Mahācattarīsakasutta-pāli*, *Upari. M.* (Ti vi Edn. 14/180/253).

Especially, with supramundane *sammādiṭṭhi* as the main force, its power can clear away all practical problems arising from the other six factors mentioned above, or even of all the seven, inclusive of right concentration itself. The insight acquired from the four aspects of supramundane *sammādiṭṭhi* can be summed up into a very short saying: “No thing to grasp, no being to become, for us.” When one’s mind is filled with the *sammādiṭṭhi* of this “No thing to grasp etc.” formula, wrong understanding, wrong aim, wrong speech, wrong conduct, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong attentiveness and wrong concentration, accordingly, have no room to remain in the mind. More certainly, the mind will automatically decline from all wrongfulness (*micchatta*) and fall in to righteousness (*sammatta*) in perfect condition; and will finally proceed to the “extinction,” that is *nibbāna*—the ultimate end of all suffering and its cause, because of its non-attachment to anything in any world. Such a possibility can take place only by the *sammādiṭṭhi* of—“No thing to grasp, no being to become, for us.”

The most wonderful aspect of this is that the Noble Eightfold Path enables the world not to be void of *arahantas* (fully awakened beings). The Buddha said on the same night of His passing away: “Ime ca Subhadda bikkhū sammā vihareyyum, asuñño loko arahantehi assa”¹⁴—“Subbhadda! if bhikkhus live the right life, this world will not be empty of *arahantas*.” The word “right” in the sentence is meant for the Eightfold Rightness, that is, the Noble Eightfold Path. The Lord, accordingly, said on the same occasion that in the religion which was void of the Noble Eightfold Path, there would be no noble ones (*ariyapuggalas*) of the first, the second, the third, and

the fourth standards, that is *sotāpanna*, *sakadāgāmi anāgāmi* and *arahanta* respectively, and that in His religion, there exists the Noble Eightfold Path¹⁵.

Why is it that the Noble Eightfold Path enables the world not to be void of *arahantas*? The fact is not difficult to be seen by all. Whenever a man lives his life in the Eightfold Rightness with right understanding as its first factor and right concentration as its last, his life has in itself starved out automatically all kinds of requisites for his *kilesas* (defilements). When *kilesa* is food-boycotted, through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, it becomes thinner and thinner, and finally dies out. If everyone simply were to live the right living according to the principle of the Noble Path, all *kilesas* would inevitably starve to death. When *kilesa* is dried up to the extent of the first standardized degree, after which one is called *sotāpanna* (state of stream-enterer), the final degree of *arahantaship* is inevitably within reach by means of the Noble Path slanting to *nibbāna*.¹⁶ Therefore, it is a great hope to all, because the perseverance to attain the first stage of *sammaṇa* (Noble One) is not out of reach for anybody.

The practice of bidding our mind continually to be in contemplation in order to reach the realization of “no pleasure to attach to, no thing to grasp, no being to become, for us,” will keep our mind aloof from attachment to all things or beings in any world, and make it go slanting towards the “extinction, without remains of the cause of suffering.” This is because one

14. *Mahāparinibbānasutta-pāli, Mahā. Digh. (Thai Edn. 10/176/138).*

15. *Mahāparinibbānasutta-pāli, Mahā. Digh. (Thai Edn. 10/175/128).*

16. *Mahāvāra. Saṃ (Thai Edn. 19/465/151 162).*

is without bondage of any kind.

When the mind is continually concentrated on this truth, the utmost right understanding takes place by itself; the aim automatically slants towards *nibbāna*; speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, attentiveness and concentration, consequently, have no chance to be in the wrong (*micchatta*). Rightness (*sammatta*) reigns automatically and continuously, being the Noble Eightfold Path in its perfect condition. During such a time, the starving out of the foods of *kilesas* continues, and eventually *kilesas* gradually dry up until a certain stage of *samaṇa* is reached or, as it might be, *arahantaship*, the final stage, is truly attained.

Such is the wondrousness of the Noble Eightfold Path which enables the world not to be void of *arahantas*. The way is practical to all. Here is the second wonder of our Theravāda teaching of which we can be most proud.

(C) Being beyond the power of all things, including that of the so-called Gods of any faith, it is beyond the power of creation, of control and of destruction. *Nibbāna*, which is of *ajāta-abhūta-amata* (unborn, unexisting and undying) nature, is the state beyond those three powers. This is supreme Theravāda Dhamma.

The word “God” as found in Scriptural descriptions of any faith, may be understood in the scope of Buddhist thought and summed up into three senses--God the Creator, God the Controller, and God the Destroyer. God the Creator is God in function of creating the world and other things; God the controller is in function of controlling; and God the Destroyer

is in function of causing the disappearance of this world periodically.

As long as the possibility or the acknowledgement of the power can take place in man's mind, so long will he be created, controlled and destroyed. In some religions, these three powers were bestowed upon one God, while in the others upon three or more Gods. This does not matter. Be it one or many in number, human duty is still worshiping or praying to Him or Them, in the same manner.

To fall into the triple power of so-called Gods in such a way, or even being in Heaven, is neither regarded by Buddhists as something to be proud of, nor is it liberty, intrinsic salvation, or the extinction of all suffering—*nibbāna*. It still subjects man to transience, to alteration in the whirlpool of *saṃsāra*, or to the control of outside factors—the hope for the Land of Promise, or the hope to exist in the heaven of a God forever. This is to be without the freedom of “non-existence” of the pure mind.

It was considered by Buddhists too primitive, too plain and too impalatable to be only seeking for heaven. They have worked for the freedom of going beyond the influence of creating, controlling and destroying which happen so very often endlessly. Buddhists seek for ultimate freedom, ultimate salvation and ultimate extinction of all kinds of bondages, even the bondage of existing in heaven eternally. Extinction of all kinds of bondages brings ultimate blissfulness, in this very life. The power of creating, controlling and destroying has no influence whatsoever on the mind freed from all bondages,

human and heavenly. Under the guidance of the Buddha, we Buddhists have found out all the facts of the three Powers as follows:

(1) The Natural Power of Creation that is called God the Creator, is in reality *avijjā* (ignorance or the absence of knowledge of suffering and its cause). It functions in the formation (*abhisankhāra*), and creation of phenomena respectively and accordingly. The Scriptures say: “Avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā, saṅkhārapaccayā viññānaṃ, etc.”—“Ignorance causes volition to occur; volition causes consciousness to occur; etc.”—until the coming out of human being who, filled with defilements, causes crisis to this world.

(2) The Natural Power of Controlling that is called God the Controller, is in reality the Kammic Nature (*kammasabhāva*), or the Law of Cause and Effect, to which men who are under the influence of merit and demerit attach themselves, by means of *avijjā*.

(3) The Natural Power in Destroying that is called God the Destroyer, is in reality *avijjā*, which is in the three forms of *taṇhā* (craving). It makes man fall into all kinds of cravings and desires up to the boiling point, and into intoxication with worldly sensual pleasures such as wealth and power, without moral shame and moral dread, until he faces his own destruction.

We Theravādins have a system of working for the realization of the fact that it is mere *avijjā*, in various forms, that causes the Power of creation, controlling and destruction. It binds all forms of life under its influence, whether human or

not, causing forever their continuation of sufferings like whirlpool of water.

And we realize further that all of us creatures have to fight and destroy the very cause of the Power of Creation, Controlling and Destruction, that is to say, *avijjā*! We have to enlist its enemy, *vijjā* (knowing) or *nāṇa* (insight knowledge), or *paññā* (wisdom), by means of our human ability. We cannot put ourselves under the mercy of the so-called Gods which are the Perpetual Creators, the Perpetual Controllers and Perpetual Destroyers themselves. The so-called God is *avijjā* and the Triple Gods are *abhisankhāra*, *kammasabhāva* and *tanhā*!

By means of the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path pointed out by the Buddha, we Buddhists can get *vijjā*, the nullifier of *avijjā*. It helps us to realize all things in their true reality so that our minds can get the supramundane wisdom and know the ultimate truth: No thing in any world to attach to, even the Heaven of Gods! No being of any kind in any process of existence to become, even being of the "I" itself which is the mere illusion of egoism produced by *avijjā*. No need to become a being of any kind, even a celestial being in the Heaven of those Gods.

Existence of the "I" or our "self" is nothing but the product of misunderstanding of the mind. When the mind is cleared of misunderstanding, the "I" is absent, leaving only the pure mind which is beyond the power of all Gods. The pure mind wants nothing! It has no kind of being to become, no kind of existence to exist, no bondage to strip off, and no "I" to bear or to carry. Therefore, it has no need to be helped by, or to serve, anyone else.

The pure mind is, accordingly, beyond the sphere of the power of all Gods, either to control or to destroy. Here is the ultimate freedom, ultimate salvation, ultimate extinction of all kinds of bondages, ultimate extinction of all sufferings, in this very life, without waiting for a land of promise, or God's heaven. This is *nibbāna*, the intrinsic Summum Bonum, or ultimate good for mankind, in accordance with the sacred saying: "Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ vadanti buddhā"—"All Buddhas say that *nibbāna* is the Supreme Thing."¹ It is beyond the scope of understanding of the masses of opiate faiths.

Theravāda Buddhism has no land of promise, or the heaven of God, as bait for the people, and has no personal God or anything else for them to become attached to. The Triple Gem of clarity, cleanness and calmness of the intrinsically pure mind takes the proper place of the so-called Gods, helping man to work for his realization. Theravāda is, accordingly, beyond the possibility of being classified with the group of opiate faiths.

Theravāda missionary works can go throughout the whole world without any army, or bait, or recompenses or even the colorful rites and rituals of materialism; but they can go along because of the foretastable bliss from any practice of the doctrine, even on a trial basis coupled with their comprehensible reasons even from the very beginning of coming into contact with the teaching. History of Buddhism gives ample proof of this.

Here is the third wondrous aspect of Theravāda which

1. *Mahāpadānasutta-pāli, Mahā. Dīgh. (Thai Edn. 10/57/54).*

keeps itself beyond being an opiate faith of the masses.

(D) Having the Triple Gem within oneself as the object to be reached with wisdom, in place of the external God in theistic religions held by faith. Hence the “God for Wisdom,” not God for faith.

The Triple Gem in Theravāda, which can be said to take place of the Gods of theistic religions, has to be distinguished in two senses, as follows:

In the exoteric sense, for preliminary consideration of the beginners, there are three Gems: (a) the Buddha, the One who had been enlightened by Himself and taught the thing He had realized to others; (b) the Dhamma, the body of Truth that the Buddha realized and taught; it is the Truth to teach, to perform, and to realize for the salvation of everyone who practices of his own accord; and (c) the Saṅgha, the Ones who listened and understood, performed and realized the truth the Buddha taught.

In short, the Buddha is the one who realized and taught the dhamma; the Dhamma, in the forms of wording, of performance, and of realization, is the thing to realize and to teach; the Sangha are the Ones who acted and are acting in accordance with the Buddha’s teaching. These three Gems are called, or at least may be named in this sense, “The Buddhist Trinity”—one God in three appearances, which, when spoken of according to Buddhist thought, means: “God” (which in this sense is Buddha-Nature), the thing that makes something to be called “God” and the people who become “one” with “God” (the Buddha-Nature also), and the group of people

who have reached or are able to reach the oneness with “God” (people who have the Buddha-Nature as their essence).

But in the esoteric sense, for the advanced ones, there is only one Gem in essence—*ekībhūtampanatthato*. The one thing is the very great blissful nature of cleanness, clarity and calmness; it manifests in one’s mind when the mind is purified to some degree. Here is the real Gem, or the essence of the Gems, that makes person called the Buddha, the people the Saṅgha, and its very self the Buddha-Dhamma which is eternal.

Why did I say so in the latter discourse? This is because of the fact that even when we consider about the One who knows and teaches, we perceive that He knew and taught us to know the very blissful nature of cleanness, clarity and calmness. In His own part, He had these in His own mind as the whole essence of Himself all the time. And it is because He has this inherent in His mind, instead of defilements, that He is consequently called the Buddha. If the thing is absent from the mind, the Buddhahood is not there. This thing—the very nature of the blissfulness, not the human being—is, then, the Buddha Himself. The mind as well as the body, while serving as a base, are merely the shell of that perfect blissfulness.

As regards the very thing He knew and taught, as you may see, the thing is the same as the very blissful nature of cleanness, clarity and calmness which He has in His mind all the time. Or in other words, there are three levels of sense to be discovered: (1) the theoretical sense—the thing which is taught is the theory or method of getting the very nature of blissfulness; (2) the practical sense—the thing is the very process of

practicing to get to the very nature itself; and (3) finally, the realizational sense, as I have no other better word to call it—the thing is the very nature of blissfulness itself. Therefore, the thing He sought, found out, practiced, realized and taught, is none other than this very blissful nature. The thing is the Dhamma in the true sense, having the theory as its map and the practice as the travel along the routes of map and the realization as its arrival at the destination.

In regard to the Ones who have understood, performed and realized the same thing as the Buddha has done, they have understood how to get to the nature of blissfulness, have performed to get the very state of blissfulness, and finally, have realized the state of blissfulness itself. They who have attained the state of blissfulness have acquired this very thing as basic factor of their minds forever after. That very thing in their minds, and not merely the minds and their physical bodies, is the Saṅgha in the true sense. The minds and the bodies which are bases are just shells of the perfect blissfulness.

By the above-said reasons, the very blissful nature alone is the true essence of all the three Gems—the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha. Anyone who has inherently attained such a nature of blissfulness has intrinsically and simultaneously attained the whole of the Triple Gem, because it is three-in-one in itself and permanently belongs to the one who discovers it.

The Triple Gem, either being three in number in the exoteric sense, or being one in essence in the esoteric sense, as described above, is for Buddhists in the place where God is in theistic religions. One who has got the Triple Gem has

got the oneness with “God”—the very God of the Buddhists—without any functioning of creation, controlling or destruction whatsoever. Here is the Theravādin’s God, if we wish to have one of our own! We have “God” for wisdom, to realize by that way and means, and not God for faith to rely on.

Here is the Fourth Wonder of Theravāda.

Brethren,

Now the time for my lecture is drawing to a close. May I take this opportunity to conclude that our two nations must have pure Theravāda Buddhism to cherish in our life and safeguard our mutual friendship. Theravāda is still in its original purity—and this fact is accepted by the world’s scholars—so it deserves the greatest homage and upholding. The Noble Eightfold Path is the heart of the doctrine. It enables the world not to be void of *arahantas*. It is not beyond the reach of anybody, and any one will be able, when the right line is followed, to practice as easily as a light object floats out to sea. The Noble Eightfold Path is the principle capable of being practiced for both mundane and supramundane benefits. We are determined to be above the mystic powers of creation, controlling and destruction caused by *kilesa*. Our aim is to attain *nibbāna*, the perfect blissfulness, by way of Theravāda, which contains the nature of *ajāta* (unborn), *abhūta* (unexisting) and *amata* (undying). Our aim is also to refrain from the inclination towards the existence of self or the the existence in the world of any God. We have the pure Triple Gem consisting of cleanness, clarity and calmness of the mind without any *kilesa*. This ideal is for us to hold on to and to worship instead of any God of another faith. Our own acts and deeds are, for all time, our

self-help. It is rational, of precise reason and beneficial to life. It is beyond being named an opiate faith, which signifies public addicts, as I have already mentioned. Our religion has the real capacity to battle and destroy the influence of materialism. We are all in a position to know, to understand, to practice and to realize the effects of the practice, and we can successfully instruct others. This is because we are of sufficiently high mentality to understand the secret of mind or consciousness which is at a higher level than materialism; and moreover, about the benefits of supramundane as apart from worldly knowledge.

Speaking in a Thai idiomatic expression, because I do not know otherwise, I should say that we must not be a rhinoceros. A rhinoceros is unable to appreciate a beautiful tune from a flute. The supramundane truth continually renders sweet music for all time. If we are rhinoceroses, we shall not hear it. About the year 500 B.C. in Greece, the home of philosophers, Heraclitus¹ had played his flute in vain to his rhinoceroses. He was born in the same period as the Buddha, just a few years later. He has put out his theory of *Panta Rhei*: everything flows, which in its gist means that every matter which is called the world is just a continuous flow, without any real existence. Only changes exist, in a way comparable to a burning flame, which consists of a continuous burning out. The "*Panta Rhei*" of his is the Buddha's "*Sabbe Saṅkhārā Aniccā*." But the people there simply could not understand it and named him "The Obscure." This is none other than the fact that Greece at that time was the home of rhinoceroses—the home of the philosophy of materialism. Those rhinoceroses

1. Heraclitus, 536-470 B.C., born 8 years after the Buddha's parinibbāna.

could not understand the statement about the supramandane, even though their country is deemed by the world up to the present time as the country of philosophers.

We must be proud of ourselves that we understand and appreciate the music of the Buddha's supramundane truth. We refuse to be rhinoceroses of an opiate faith for the masses, for we definitely do not long for the benefits of materialism, be it human or celestial.

The philosophy of Theravāda must definitely be on the spiritual side. So our aim is directed to *nibbāna*, which is beyond the power of all things that could cause illusions; and it is these illusions that cause us to be created, controlled and destroyed, repeatedly and unceasingly.

Our countries abound with the shining colors of the yellow robes. This signifies the presence of the ones who are above the powers of the creator, the controller and the destroyer; and concurrently signifies the presence of the light, or *paññā*, which in turn signifies purity, the extinction of all sufferings without any possibility of their return.

So, these are conclusively the wonders of the noble principles of Theravāda, to which we all belong. We all have to preserve these noble qualities eternally, just as the salty taste is preserved by the salt itself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (Slave of the Buddha) went forth as a *bhikkhu* (Buddhist monk) in 1926, at the age of twenty. After a few years of study in Bangkok, he was inspired to live close with nature in order to investigate the Buddha-Dhamma. Thus, he established Suan Mokkhabalārāma (The Grove of the Power of Liberation) in 1932, near his hometown. At that time, it was the only Forest Dhamma Center and one of the few places dedicated to *vipassanā* (mental cultivation leading to 'seeing clearly' into reality) in Southern Thailand. Word of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, his work, and Suan Mokkh spread over the years so that they are easily described as 'one of the most influential events of Buddhist history in Siam'. Here, we can only mention some of the more interesting services he has rendered Buddhism.

Ajahn Buddhadāsa has worked painstakingly to establish and explain the correct and essential of original Buddhism. That work is based in extensive research of the Pali texts (Canon and commentary), especially of the Buddha's Discourses (*sutta pitaka*), followed by personal experiment and practice with these teachings. Then he has taught whatever he can say truly quenches *dukkha*. His goal has been to produce a complete set of references for present and future research and practice. His approach has been always scientific, straight-forward, and practical.

Although his formal education only went as far as ninth grade and beginning Pail studies, he has been given seven Honorary Doctorates by Thai universities. His books, both

written and transcribed from talks, fill a room at the National Library and influence all serious Thai Buddhists.

Progressive elements in Thai society, especially the young, have been inspired by his teaching and selfless example. Since the 1960's, activists and thinkers in areas such as education, social welfare, and rural development have drawn upon his teaching and advice.

Since the founding of Suan Mokkh, he has studied all schools of Buddhism, as well as the major religious traditions. This interest is practical rather than scholarly. He seeks to unite all genuinely religious people in order to work together to help free humanity by destroying selfishness. This broadmindedness has won him friends and students from around the world, including Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs.

Now he focuses his energies on his last project, establishing an International Dharma Hermitage. This addition to Suan Mokkh is intended to provide facilities for:

- courses which introduce friends, foreign and Thai, to the natural truth explained in the Buddha's teachings and start them in the Buddha's system of mental cultivation

- gatherings of representatives from the different religious communities of Thailand (and later the world) in order to meet, develop mutual good understanding, and cooperate for the sake world peace

- meetings among Buddhists from around the world to discuss and agree upon the 'Heart of Buddhism'

Actual results must depend on Natural Law, as Ajahn Buddhādāsa and his helpers continue to explore the potential of mindfully wise actions within Nature according to the Law of Nature. He welcomes visitors.

Our Theravada Buddhism still preserves the original purity of the Teaching -- the fact commonly accepted by learned students of religious studies. Therefore, it should be regarded with esteem and taken hold of...

We have the true Triple Gem, namely, *cleanness*, *clarity*, and *calmness* of the undefiled mind as our refuge in place of Gods in other religions. Our own actions are helping us all the time. They are clearly logical, really beneficial and essential to life, and truly capable of fighting or eliminating the influence of materialism.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu