

~ Virtuous Path Series ~



BUDDHADASA

SERVANT OF THE BUDDHA

By Santidhammo Bhikkhu

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Buddhapanyanuntarama Buddhist Monastery (BBM)

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BUDDHADASA
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By Santidhammo Bhikkhu

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Preface

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

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

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

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

Yours in Dhamma,

Venerable Phra Maha Tawatchai Khunakaro

Abbot, Wat Buddhapanyanuntarama

Foreword

Namo Buddhaya Sidthani.

Homage to the Buddha, Success!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you are mindful, you are a Buddha.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Venerable Santidhammo

Seattle, U.S.A.

Note on Romanization and Translation

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

BUDDHADASA

SERVANT OF THE BUDDHA

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

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

Buddhadasa

Introduction

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

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

Buddhadasa was interested in -

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



Ajahn Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

- 2) Focused on life in this world, action in the present material world, therefore saying Buddhism contributed to personal and social happiness in the present lifetime. This pointed out that Buddhism had economic and political value as part of the struggle for liberation from suffering.
- 3) He pointed out the centrality of nibbana in Buddha's teaching - nibbana is available to all people, - in the present, everyday life.
- 4) He applied Buddhist teaching, not only for personal happiness and liberation, but also for social harmony and peace. Buddha's teaching applied to structural violence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Map of Thailand with provincial/state boundaries

Part 1

Buddhadasa's Youth

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

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

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

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



Map of Surat Thani.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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