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CONSUMERISM, PROSTITUTION, AND BUDDHIST ETHICS

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I

This article is intended to examine the inter-relationship between globalization, consumerism, and prostitution and the role Buddhist ethics may play in tackling these problems. Background research revealed that although consumerism is beneficial in general, excessive consumerism or uncontrollable desire to consume brings about many subsequent problems, one of which is prostitution. One of the important factors driving people into prostitution is the need for an extra income for fulfillment through material possessions. Prostitution, therefore, is not caused solely by the drive to be free from poverty, but also by excessive desires. When these desires cannot be met by the compensation from decent employment, prostitution seems to stand out as a prominent shortcut. Religiously speaking, prostitution undermines the moral values in a society. Buddhist teachings must be applied to give guidance concerning prostitution quoting principles such as the principle of *middle way* (knowing moderation) and *right livelihood* (knowing wise consumption) will lead to well-being.

According to the field work undertaken at *Dok Kham Tai* village, a place rather well known as one among Thai villages where people seem to adopt prostitution as not immoral, the consumption pattern has been influenced by consumerism and perceived more as a "means" of having higher prestige, rather than an "end" in itself. The addiction to status symbols means people give more importance to a material than its essence *per se*. It may be concluded then that economic concern is the root cause driving girls/children at *Dok Kham Tai* village to enter prostitution, either as a means of supporting their parents and/or family, or out of the desire for a better status of life.

Although it is very difficult to prevent girls/children from entering prostitution, it is still possible to discourage them from doing so. For example, if villagers could practice the *middle way* of living and right livelihood it would help, to a certain extent, to solve this problem. Buddhism does not directly condemn prostitution, but the harm, deceit, and disease caused by this occupation are acknowledged as dangerous. It strengthens the lustful while weakening the power of love. With regard to

economic pressure, people at this village have to put more efforts into working to support their families and subsequently incorporate the Buddhist teachings into their everyday lives. Therefore, it is a new challenge for Buddhist monks to help the villagers to turn their minds and hearts from being engrossed in materialism to spirituality. Apart from this task, the monks have to translate their compassion into concrete action by training the villagers to have alternative sources of income to supplement their occupations.

II

Consumerism, the consumption of goods beyond basic needs, is a worldwide and increasing trend in the twenty-first century.[1] The consumption of goods is a major driving force of economies, with both good and bad results for individual people, their culture, and environment. It is a dominant force, associated with changes in culture and in consumption patterns that move away from communal values toward individualism and materialism.[2] The excess of modern consumerism is directly related to a spiritual crisis, and to gender exploitation in the form of prostitution, especially of children and young girls.[3]

Prostitution and consumerism are both social issues concerning with material consumption for both physical and mental desire about which religion must show concern. It is interesting to study whether consumerism, the demand for goods and services in excess of need, is one key factor in the large-scale existence of prostitution in Thailand or not, and is particularly interested in how Buddhist ethics can respond to the changes of Thai current society. Religious traditions are not static. They respond to social, economic, and political change; indeed, they help shape such change. In stable periods of history, religious traditions seem to change only imperceptibly, but in more volatile times the disruption and transformation of religious institutions and worldviews keeps pace with and sometimes outstrips changes in other areas of life. However, the effect of factors like new political and social dynamics and elements of Western modernization like technology, consumerism, and capitalism on the Thai's belief and practice are undoubtedly immersed.

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[1] Songpol Kaopatumtip, "On the Thai Press Eye," *Bangkok Post* (Thursday, 15 February 2001).

[2] Norman K. Denzin, *Journal of Consumer Research* (Vol. 28, September, 2001), p. 325.

[3] *The Magazine of ILO*, World of Work (No. 42, March 2002), p. 14.

Consumerism is the fuel that helps spread the effects of globalization all over the world.[4] Consumerism creates huge markets by persuading people they have a real and pressing need for goods and services beyond those they already possess.[5] This desire is in many ways the antithesis of Buddhist teaching, where the focus is on contentment as the path to a happy and fulfilled life and to eventual spiritual liberation.[6]

The increasing inter-dependence of the countries of the world is based upon trade and the flow of capital for investment, and is accompanied by increases in communication and the exchange of ideas across national borders. Some see globalization as a triumph of both the democratic ideal such as free trade, and capitalism such as the need for constantly expanding market for the products all over the world,[7] although it affects most countries in both positive and negative ways. For example, it is apparent that Thailand has been participating in the spread of globalization and consumerism for many years, more so since the end of World War II. However, only if better economic conditions permit people to live generally better lives, and make more choices about their lives.[8] Accordingly, consumption becomes a means to flaunt wealth or powerful, and the material consumption and spiritual desire takes over.

Prostitution, providing sexual services for money, is usually regarded as an outlaw activity and most countries in the world have legislation controlling it. One traditional view of prostitution is that it is a form of sexual slavery and directly linked to sexual exploitation. Commercial sex and a negative attitude toward sexual relations outside marriage and at an increasingly younger age, are hardly just a Thai problem; they are a global phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is doubtfully why Thailand seems to have an unusually large number of prostitutes, for example, there are about

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[4] Lance Bennett, *Consumerism and Global Citizenship*, A paper prepared for the International Seminar on Political Consumerism, Stockholm University, May 30-June 3, 2001, p. 2.

[5] Norman K. Denzin, *Ibid.*

[6] Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 219-222.

[7] Riuhei Hatsuse (Kobe University), "Historical Globalization and Asian Implications," CSGR 3 rd Annual Conference, Scarman House, University of Warwick, 16-18 September 1999, p. 3.

[8] Pasuk Phongpaichit and Isra Sarntisart, *Thailand: Globalization and Inequality: The Case of Thailand*, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 10 November 2000, p. 2.

700,000 to one million[9] of prostitution in Thailand, and make Thailand as an unfortunate international reputation for child prostitution.[10] However, what is known is that women and children enter prostitution both voluntarily and involuntarily, and that prostitution is one means by which person can earn a substantial amount of money.

Prostitution, although not unique to Thailand, has been highlighted both internationally and domestically as being especially prevalent in Thai society. It is usually understood that the number of women and children involved in the sex industry in Thailand is high because of poverty.[11] This understanding was based on the fact that many prostitutes came from agricultural families, where their daily life depended on natural and primitive farming as is the case in Northern Thailand.[12] It is notable that since the studies were conducted, government measures have been made to help the poor by promoting employment in industrial areas across the country, and by launching projects for social insurance and security to support good health have much improved a lot of the poor.[13] However, prostitution is still a dominant problem in Thai society. Is poverty the main driving factor for those who enter the sex trade?

The problems relating to child prostitution are deep-rooted, stubborn, and prevalent. Furthermore, this form of child abuse brings with it a host of other serious social problems. As child prostitution and related problems are complex, no single remedy can provide an ideal solution, the related social problems worsen, the aggravating effects become more widespread. A great deal of planning and cooperation from all parties in society must be involved. It must be realized that many children and adults get involved in prostitution not only out of poverty, but also for reasons

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[9] The estimation of Dr. Pasuk Pongpaichit, cited from "Thai Women in Buddhism" by Chatsumal kabilsingh, (<http://keg112.eng.ohio-state.edu/~jirapinyo/profck.html>).

[10] A research paper by Dr. Julia O' Connell Davidson and Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor of the department of Sociology, University of Leicester, UK. This paper is published by ECPAT as part of a series for the World Congress Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. First published in the United Kingdom, 1994, pp. 3-5.

[11] According to ECPAT(a global network of organizations and individuals working together for the elimination of child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes), commercial sexual exploitation of children is mostly associated with poverty in Thailand. (http://www.ecpat.net/eng/~ = thailnd.html)

[12] Most of the poor are in the rural, especially in an agricultural sector. Thai Farmers Research Center (TFRC) Co., Ltd. March 2, 2001.

[13] The Ninth Plan Development Vision Framework (2002-2006) of Thailand, Strategy 1 : Human development and social protection; and Strategy 5 : International competitiveness.

relating to the relationship of people in their families such as to pay gratitude and support parents by entering prostitution for more money.

It is interestingly about the comment from NGOs points out that none of any measures have been entirely successful, and no country has succeeded in eliminating prostitution no matter what measures have been taken. Government action at the material and legal levels is imperfect because it lacks an understanding of the mind-set of both the people who pay for prostitutes, and those who provide the sexual services.[14] It also fails to promote a change in the attitudes of the population itself on material consumption.[15] Therefore, the intent of this study is to explore the relationships between consumerism and prostitution and how to minimize the social problems caused by consumerism and prostitution through Buddhist ethics. Can Buddhism still play an important role in Thai society? Specifically, can its teachings cope with the prostitution issue?

III

Historically, Buddhist ethics have been in existence for more than 2,500 years. Until recently, the teachings of Buddha were believed to be the core of the daily life decisions and moral choices of millions of people, especially those in Thailand. Fundamentally, Buddhism provides moral guidance to lead people toward an understanding of the causes of the actions and human behaviors, the meaning of life, and the nature of human beings. Furthermore, Buddhist teaching describes the causes of desire, including the desire to consume, and the search for happiness which seem to be universal characteristics of human society. Buddhist teaching points out that the appropriate way to live is to know how to control the internal and external factors, the causes of desire in an appropriate manner, and to conduct life according to a "middle way," where human needs are usually fulfilled.

If the desire to consume in excess decreases, what result might this have on prostitution in Thailand? In fact, Buddhist ethics provides the means for

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[14] ECPAT (<http://www.ecpat.net/eng/~ = thailnd.html>)

[15] According to Leslie Ann Jeffrey, St. Thomas University, *"Because They Want Nice Things": Prostitution, Consumerism, and Culture in Thailand* (<http://www.aasianst.org/absts/1998abst/seasia/se164.htm>), she examines the way in which the discussion of the problem of prostitution in Thailand today has much to do with Thailand's ambivalent relationship with westernization/modernization rather than with a concern over women's exploitation. The most popular understanding of prostitution today in Thailand is its link to the problem of consumerism.

people to cope with the day-to-day problems of life and to assess worldly pursuits, but does Buddhism still have the power to be an effective moral force in modern Thai culture? How Buddhism tackle the problems derived from globalization and its attendant consumerism? Therefore, the focus of concern for us must also be on: What is it that impels a person to consume even to the point of danger or ruining themselves (as in the case of paying for or becoming a prostitute)? To what extent do Buddhist ethics support and stimulate, control or reduce that impulse? In addition, what is the appropriate way to apply Buddhist teachings to deal with the problems derived from consumerism and prostitution?

According to the problem stated above, we realize that prostitution is a complex issue, and that the proper response of the government should be to reduce or eliminate both prostitution and its linkages. It is usually accepted that a driving factor to enter prostitution is poverty, but it is also considered that consumerism, lack opportunity of education, unemployment, and sex tourism play an increasing role. Therefore, this article aims to provide the understanding about the relationship among consumerism, prostitution, and Buddhist ethics which will enable the country to be better prepared to face and to minimize the problems derived by consumerism.

Significantly, the reason to choose *Dok Kham Tai* as the community to study was partly a by-product of an address by the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Khun Laddawan Wongsriwong, to a workshop on Family Development.[16] She stated that when she was acting as an advisor to the Minister of the Interior in the Community Development Department, she became intimately involved with the family concerns of the women in the eight Northern Provinces of Thailand. She became the head of a working group trying to develop new strategies to attack the problems of AIDS, drug abuse, illegal abortion, marriage breakdown and prostitution. As a result of her involvement with this work in these communities, she was able to identify 16 areas in the North and North-eastern part of Thailand that faced particular difficulties with social and family problems, many of them related to prostitution. In her address she stated:

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[16] The special lecture on "The Presentation on Pattern of Structure of Family Development Centre in the Community" by Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare (Laddawan Wongsriwong) in the workshop on Project of Family Development Centre Establishment in the Community on Wednesday 26th of September 2001 at 11.00-12.15 h. at SD Avenue Hotel, Bangkok.

"According to the record of the Ministry of Labour, it is people from the Province of Udon Thani who have migrated to work in foreign countries in the greatest number. These people have faced various kinds of problems... Udon Thani is the champion of tragedy. The Consul Generals in Sydney, Australia, and in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, have both reported Thai women who have been arrested because of working as prostitutes. These women were under 18 years old and were sent back to Thailand. In the North, Chiang Rai is the Champion. However, while it is true the problem exists in Nong Khai, Khon Kaen, and Korat; the first rank still belongs to Udon Thani. I always keep updating this record. It is the truth and no fake at all."

Deputy Minister Laddawan was born in *Phayao* Province and so feels a special duty to help solve the problems associated with prostitution in her home province. She stated that this area is very poor:

"The fact that many parents feel they are so poor they have to sell their daughter is a problem... There are examples of girls who came back from Japan and bought a big house, a truck and a pickup for their father; but we have tried to go against this trend... These children feel their family is so poor they have to show their gratefulness by being a prostitute. They have had no chance or money to study, and as a result have very little education. The feel they must become a prostitute to feed themselves and their parents... This is the truth."

Her address highlighted some of the problems associated with prostitution in *Phayao*. She noted that as a result of her campaign against prostitution, many people: agents, brothel owners, and some parents of prostitutes whose houses were not yet finished; said they would not vote for her again in an attempt to stop her work against prostitution. In her speech she pointed to poverty as the reason these children enter prostitution, but the elaborate size and nature of the houses being constructed in the area suggests another interpretation. These prostitutes are not only working for the survival of their families, they are also building big houses that reflect the superior financial status of their owners. This suggests that poverty is not always the key factor that forced the girls to enter prostitution.

IV

Whether it is called consumerism, materialism, or just plain greed; the desire for things appears to be a very strong human characteristic. Children fight over toys and adults compete for status in society by displays of their power and wealth. Consumerism, and the definition of self by means of possessions, has become a religion in its

own right. However, such a quest for more and more things and wealth in search of true happiness is doomed to failure. In *Dok Kham Tai*, as well as in the greater Thai society, the Buddhist understanding of the control of desire to achieve happiness is weaker than the lure of material objects as status markers. The crucial point of any alternative to this pattern of mass consumption is that people must voluntarily choose a life of simplicity. People must think before they buy, and consider the consequences of their purchases for themselves, their family, and society as a whole. They must take back the personal responsibility for what they consume, and the method by which they seek their income.

One of the major factors which lead to more desire in *Dok Kham Tai* is advertising. It is mass marketing and advertising that makes people believe that they can't be modern without having electronic appliances for their home. Therefore, people need to be provided with the necessary information for them to begin challenging the notion that consumerism is the only way to live. In a sense 'consuming' fulfils needs that will require other ways of being satisfied in a post-consumer society: the need to belong, the need for variety in life, the need to show their status in society. However, everyone has their own way of life and lives it in the way they think is right and appropriate way for them. This study made us realize that those who enter the sex trade should not be looked down upon. It should be understood as a phenomenon of human beings who are seeking survival and have made their decision based on many factors, including the surrounding social environment. *Dok Kham Tai* is a good example of the effect of consumerism on prostitution.

Presently, economic development for rural Thai people in order to reduce poverty is a major focus of many socio-economic development agencies in Northern Thailand. As projects sponsored by NGOs, governments, and multi-lateral groupings have set out to improve economic life in Northern rural areas, people in communities such as *Dok Kham Tai* become more and more dependent on a monetary economy. To minimize any problems arising from this shift, there are several key principles that should be kept in mind as follow.

a) *The duration and continuity of government postings*

During the term of this study in *Dok Kham Tai*, there were rotations of some of the government officers who have important roles in social development. Even if the rotation was done at the end of their term, it created discontinuous work. When old people go, the new people who come have to learn the job. If the overlap is not smooth or the new person

cannot adapt and apply him or herself deeply into the problem, projects will be delayed. This reduces work efficiency. Fortunately, the pattern of job rotation is not typical of the NGO's, some of which have sent personnel to study the problem for a long duration, such as Khun Samai Sae Pae from CARE who has worked here for over ten years and knows the situation better than the government officers.

b) *The role of government and the administration of local organizations*

The Ministry of Education has a project called "Sema for Life" which offers scholarships for rural students who are at risk of entry into the sex trade. However, the expenditure of funds from these scholarships needs close monitoring. The focus should be on supporting their family and allowing them to continue their studies without dropping out from school. If the scholarship is spent on amenities such as fans, refrigerators, or television sets, it cannot solve the problems associated with the sex trade. The investment in education, which enables children to have knowledge and secure jobs in the future, is a long term one. People tend to be interested in short-term investment. Before launching any projects for rural areas, the government should be prepared to take a long term approach, and must remain aware of any side effects that might increase the consumerism mentalities of people.

c) *Support for local products*

Apart from agricultural produces, *Dok Kham Tai* produces handicrafts such as cloth, which could be promoted and marketed to a wider area and might become popular. People will then become confident in their products. To improve income from the agricultural sector, alternative crops must be investigated. Garlic and red onions grow very well in the area but the planting of these crops has been decreasing. Also, farmers in the area found that irrigation via man-made canals from *Kwan Phayao* still do not enable farmers to plant outside the regular season because of insufficient water. Therefore, more efficient use of these canals should be encouraged by shifting to crops which do not need as much water as rice. Developing an agricultural and light industrial base, which is sufficiently strong to support people without seeking work outside the district is essential to the solution of problems in *Dok Kham Tai*. The pattern of seasonal migrant labour at low wage rates in provinces such as Chiangmai, Chonburi, and Rayong disrupts family life, and also hides or provides a convenient 'cover' for daughters working in the sex trade. They are just 'away' in the city working like other people in the district.

d) *Education and vocational training*

There is a vocational college in *Dok Kham Tai*, but it has some limitations. The type of training is mainly handicraft, which leads skills suitable to working in light industry only. *Dok Kham Tai* and *Phayao* province are not popular for tourists, so the local demand for handicrafts is not large and does not create enough revenue when compared with the revenue from sex services. People in the field survey noted that *Dok Kham Tai* Vocational School is in the field and far from the city. Students have to travel by car or, more popularly, by motorcycle to get to school. People are skeptical that the expenses from the purchase of motorcycles and fuel will be offset from the revenue derived from selling handicrafts.

However, vocational training is certainly one method to reduce entry into the sex trade. If sufficient revenue is generated as a result of the right vocational training, the basic needs of people should be met and participation in prostitution should be effectively reduced. At present, Naresuan University (Campus), located in *Phayao*, can grant Bachelor's degrees locally. If enough jobs are created for these graduates, changes for the better and social development will follow. Simultaneously, local people will earn more and sufficient income from employment within industries supported by these graduates, and can supplement and aid their own careers based on knowledge learned from vocational training and their experience in daily life.

e) *The role of teachers and monks*

In rural society, teachers are highly respected. However, if they confine their roles to teaching only, and do not recognize problems in the community and lead efforts to solve them, their social contribution will be much less. It was clear from the survey that some teachers, who have a long experience in the area, should have recognized the problems regarding prostitution, and should have taught the children to avoid bad behavior, i.e. providing sex services. Perhaps teachers are reluctant to cite prostitution as bad behaviour because some of the students' mothers are involved in it.

Furthermore, we must challenge Buddhist monks to play more active role in helping the people of *Dok Kham Tai* realize the priorities of life, and shift the perspective and attitude of consumerism/materialism toward concentrating on mental development, following the teaching of the *middle way* of living, and practicing meditation. The application of Buddhist ethics to current social problems will prompt others to begin a multi-disciplinary approach to the incorporation of Buddhist thinking within the

ninth economic plan and to re-affirm Thailand as a nation of active and practicing Buddhists with compassion, care and concern for all.

f) *Minimizing the influence of the mass media*

Almost every house in *Dok Kham Tai* has a television, and the survey has shown that most people watch TV every day, especially dramas. People are also exposed to advertising which has a significant influence on spending and consumption. Their behavior can become dominated by this influence without much thought or people even noticing the process. A simple example is found at the local shop where children buy a lot of advertised snacks in preference to the cheaper and often healthier local ones. In fact, nowadays local snacks are not widely sold because their market has disappeared, and children are completely used to these pre-packaged and manufactured snacks. Both the media and advertising business are primarily dependent upon sponsors and companies wishing to promote their products. Companies also like to promote themselves as good corporate citizens, and this presents an avenue of approach to a more responsible and ethical standard of advertising, which attempts to limit the negative impact of consumerism on the population. Advertising which is less associated with lifestyle promotion and more with facts and advertising which is tied to the promotion of ethical and cultural values of worth are both possible and desirable.

From this perspective on the possibilities of change, we return to *Dok Kham Tai*, for what is happening in *Dok Kham Tai* is a very specific challenge for improvement. We believe that the *Dok Kham Tai* community can be developed through utilizing the full potential of its local resources. From observation in the late afternoon after school, there seems to be more schoolgirls than schoolboys who are in their prime of life and who will grow into a new generation. We hope that they will have a good life with perfect body and perfect mind. We hope that *Dok Kham Tai*, which is known as "The Land of Pretty Women," will also become the "Land of Dignity," a great land of peace and coherence and Buddhist culture as its ancestors once intended.

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DHAMMIC SOCIALISM
Political Thought of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Preecha Changkhwanyuen

I

Socialism is an idea that arose in reaction to the idea of democracy according to Locke and the liberal capitalist economic thought of Adam Smith. There were three schools of thought that arose as a reaction to political liberalism or democracy and economic liberalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They are: romanticism, socialism, and fascism. Romanticism was a reaction to the rationalism and science that led to the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, which, instead of making the people happier and more comfortable, pushed the majority of people, who were already poor, into desolation and misery. The rich treated the poor like slaves or animals and destroyed their human dignity. The romantics did not propose a comprehensive solution for improving society, and sometimes merely dreamed of the good societies of the past. However, both doctrines aimed to release humanity from enslavement to material things and escape the troubles caused by material things.

While fascism was also a reaction to democracy, it did not arise in all countries, only in those that had suffered defeat in war and were afflicted with poverty, distress and the dishonor forced upon them by treaties drafted by the victorious parties. In these countries, namely Germany and Italy, previous governments had been incapable of solving the nation's problems. In the people's eyes the parliament was merely a place where people came together to talk but could do nothing, so they turned to charismatic individuals who promised to lead their nations to glory. Mussolini, for example, promised to lead Italy to a glory like that of the Roman Empire, while Hitler wanted to create a third Rhine Empire. Neither the romantics nor the fascists had as much influence as socialism, which has remained the main rival of democracy till the present.

The doctrine of socialism arose in the western world. Thus the word has a specific history and meaning. Its meaning may be deduced from its history and its fundamental thought. The difference between socialism and romanticism is that while socialism, like romanticism, opposed the capitalists, socialism did not oppose but rather valued industrialization,

science and reason. Socialism saw freedom as a good thing, but freedom cannot really arise without equality. The democratic system and capitalism gave so much freedom that they almost ignored equality, leading to disparities and oppression. Disparity arose from an unfair distribution of the fruits of production in which the surplus went to the capitalists.

Socialism also differed from romanticism in that, unlike the romantics, it attempted to propose solutions, methods by which societies could become socialist societies. While socialist thinkers proposed different methods, they were all alike in that they proposed methods of some kind or other. Historically speaking, socialism may be divided into two main groups: socialism before Marx, which Marx himself referred to as "the socialism of dreams," (Utopian socialism) which I will refer to as Utopian socialism to reduce its disparaging tone, and the socialism of Marx, which he called scientific socialism.

G. D. H. Cole summarized the features of Utopian socialism as follows:

The first feature of Utopian socialism is that it is moral. It is the socialism that proposes the necessary conditions for a good society which enable people to escape from the present kind of society, which is evil. All followers of this kind of socialism hold the present state of society to be bad, and that is why people are bad. The way to give people a good way of life is to create a new system or structure of human relationship.

The second feature is that this kind of socialism holds that the good way of life is a natural way of life. The bad way of life arises from straying from the natural state. In this they were similar to the romantics.

The third feature is that Utopian socialism, while for the most part critical of present society, is nevertheless optimistic in that it believes that human beings will get better; that is, progress will occur, naturally of itself. This is a general characteristic of socialism.

The fourth feature is that almost all followers of this kind of socialism believe that a good life will arise from the advance of human knowledge. Some socialist thinkers explain this progress as intellectual, some say it is technological.

The fifth feature is that almost all followers of this kind of socialism believe that scientific and technological advancement will help to solve the problem of human poverty by increasing production to a level that can provide for the needs of the whole human race.

The sixth feature is that Utopian thinkers believed that people would act more rationally as knowledge grew, that the use of reason in politics would help to quicken the revolution of human relations.

Utopian socialism is considered to be socialism because it believes that the organization of the social structure is a cause for people's good or bad lives and for people being good or evil. It believes that people commit evil more because of an unnatural environment than because of poverty or their being inherently bad. If the environment is properly organized people will behave morally and rationally.

Utopian socialists have different ideas regarding methods. For instance, Robert Owens and St. Simone believed that an education that nurtured reason would help forge a new society. Fourier believed that human desires would lead to behavior that conflicts with society and force society to adjust itself naturally. However, all of these groups believed that people could not be improved through sermons and teachings but through an environment in which good actions were easy to do and bad ones difficult to do. As to the present state of society, which is a bad one, different thinkers have different ideas. Some, for example, feel that special privileges are an important cause for social evils, while others may feel it is competition.[1]

Utopian socialism strives to find a rationale for justice and brotherhood rather than emphasizing the power of the people. Marx tried to show that victory lay more in the power of the working classes than in moral dictums. Marx believed that class privileges, exploitation and fixed social classes were evils to be destroyed. But he believed that this would arise naturally as a result of transformation of the economic system, independent of human intention. This state is a historical fact, or a natural law of social evolution. It is rooted in materialism and has nothing to do with morality. The transformation of society into one without classes, or from evil to good, does not arise from good intentions or from reason, but from the development of the oppressed classes as they rise up against the ruling classes in each age of social development. This consideration of social changes in terms of facts rather than values caused Marx to refer to his thinking as "scientific socialism."

That Marx believed in society undergoing a fixed and inescapable evolution in the course of history caused him to believe that the specific small scale solutions to social problems proposed by the Utopian socialists, such as educating people to be more reasonable and less exploitative, or organizing cooperatives to improve the living of the

[1]G. D. H. Cole, "What is Socialism," in *Ideologies of Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 81–82.

working classes, were mistaken because they lacked an understanding of the procedure of the entire social stream, and in any case could never be realized because society must evolve according to its own inevitable current. Marx called this misunderstanding of reality an "incorrect conscience," and so he labeled this kind of socialism "Utopian socialism," pipe-dream socialism.

These are the history and features of socialism. Be it Utopian or Marxist, the common objective of socialism is to build a society of equality, since the doctrine arose as a reaction to the inequality and exploitation of liberal capitalism. Since they have this common objective, while socialist thinkers may propose different methods for solutions—some, for example, propose reducing the gap between the classes and creating a good standard of living via a welfare state; some propose a system of communes; some propose the state taking on the important tasks of national security and social welfare; some propose the state taking over all economic activities—but regardless of the method used, they all have the same main features: socialism is an economic system which stresses cooperation, planned labor and production and just distribution of wealth, all of which reduce or destroy the economic power of the private sector which is so great in the liberal capitalist system.

While these important characteristics correspond most closely with Marxist capitalism, other kinds of socialism have a tendency to proceed in such a way that the state becomes involved, intervenes, or exerts pressure; the state at least plays a greater role in organizing economic activity than in a liberal capitalist system. Since socialism arose in western civilization, and is an important event, process or stage in western civilization, the word is one with a specific meaning and particular objectives and ideas. It is a politico-economic idea or doctrine, not a general term that can be used as one pleases, and to do so could be misleading. The characteristics of socialism may be so broad that many different kinds of thought can be included within it, but it must be clearly pointed out which feature of society it conforms with and which important features it lacks.

Buddhadāsa's analysis of socialism, which he referred to as "*Dhammic socialism,*" must also be looked at in this light in order to determine whether it is in fact socialism or not; if so, what kind of socialism it is, and what special features it has. We will decide these issues partly on the basis of his own writings and partly on the basis of support and rejection from others. Within Buddhadāsa's work, we will be first analyzing the two

words—socialism and *Dhamma*—which go up to make Dhammic socialism, before going on to a practical evaluation.

Buddhadāsa uses the term socialism in a slightly different way from how it is used in the West. His analysis of socialist thought is clearly based on the teachings of the *Aggañña Sutta*, although he does not actually cite it. This he proceeds to analyze with a modern socialist outlook, an outlook on surplus and class exploitation, and then combines socialist thought with absolute monarchy and the righteous king (*dhammarāja*). We will attempt to determine just how viable his system of thought is, and in order to clearly understand it I will cite his own words:

Socialism is a natural state

Here he uses the word nature in a sense that includes its Pāli meaning and conforms with the concept held in Buddhism and other religions such as Taoism. Taoism uses the word "*tao*" in many senses. It can mean "nature," "the source of all things," "a path or way," "living according to that way," and "the destination of the way." These meanings have a similarity to the idea of God in Christian and Hindu teachings. Buddhadāsa says of the word *Dhamma*:

> "*Dhamma*, God, Tao, or whatever, can refer to 'a way,' to 'traveling along the way,' or to 'arriving at the destination of the way.' They are all the same and cannot be separated, and doing so would serve no purpose." (*Dhammik*. p. 8)[2]

The reason he explains socialism as a natural state is that he sees all things as socialist by nature; i.e., they all exist together within the one system. He uses the phrase "one system" in a very broad sense, including the physical world, such as the stars.

> "We study in science about the world and its mechanics, about all of the galaxies within the universe, and they are all a socialist system. The countless stars up in the sky exist in a socialist system, they are all right and well according to the socialist system, and that is how the universe can survive. This tiny solar system of ours, with the sun surrounded by the various planets, including our own earth, exist together in a socialist system. But they are not so crazy as to crash into each other. These days human beings are so crazy they bite each other and clash with each other because

[2] The word "*Dhammik*" refers to Buddhadāsa's book, *Dhammic Socialism*, a Thai version, edited with Introduction by Donald K. Swearer (Bangkok: Komol Keemthong Foundation, 2529)—*Editor*.

they adhere to an unrighteous (non-Dhammic) socialism, one that is not right according to the standards of nature, and do not know the truths of nature." (*Dhammik*. pp. 117–118)

The feature of this natural socialism is, according to Buddhadāsa, the same as animal societies: living together without conflict, not infringing on each other's rights. He gives as example:

"Look at the birds: we will see that they eat only as much food as their stomachs can hold. They cannot take more than that; they don't have granaries. Look down at the ants and insects: that is all they can do. Look at the trees: trees imbibe only as much nourishment and water as the trunk can hold, and cannot take in any more than that. Therefore a system in which people cannot encroach on each other's rights or plunder their possessions is in accordance with nature and occurs naturally, and that is how it has become a society continued to be one, until trees became abundant, animals became abundant, and eventually human beings became abundant in the world. The freedom to hoard was tightly controlled by nature in the form of natural socialism." (*Dhammik*. pp. 65–66)

This natural state is composed of two important factors

Firstly, things existing together; secondly, their existing together is interdependent, there is no conflict or aberration within the system. That means there is balance and there is unity. Buddhadāsa explains it thus:

"Natural truth is the essence of *Dhamma*, or of nature. It is the one thing, the actuality of nature, and that is socialism. There is nothing that can live alone, by itself; all things must depend on each other. Without the land how can a tree stand? Without trees, how can the land exist? How can water exist without trees, without the land?...

"Or one person: he embodies the socialist ideal: there must be many parts and factors working together, inseparably. Those who have studied anatomy or medicine know this well. The eye is connected to the ear, the ear is connected to the nose, and the nose is connected to the mouth. Nothing can exist separately on its own... The large and small organs must all work together and function properly according to the natural truth of the compounded things that go to make up and support the body. Thus the spirit of socialism exists within all people...

"Even among socialists there is killing, because there are many different kinds of socialists. But if it is right according to the natural truth there will only be one kind, so there would be no reason to kill anybody because there would be no point of conflict." (*Dhammik*. pp. 99–101)

For society to maintain a natural balance
There must be no taking of surpluses

Surplus is not evil if it is justly distributed, but it is exploitation to store surplus as a personal possession. Everyone wants a surplus, and that is why there is competition and conflict. Buddhadāsa explains:

> "Primitive peoples in the earliest times, half-men half-animals or people enough to be called 'primitive peoples,' lived according to nature. They automatically lived according to nature's control, with no surpluses, so there were no social problems. Theirs was an automatic socialism of nature and it was right. They were able to survive for hundreds of thousands of years, or for however many years it was, to become the people of the present day because they lived in a way that was right according to the nature that supported them.
>
> "When did problems begin to arise? They began when human beings began to step out of line. Some began to learn how to amass and were clever enough to produce. They competed with each other to produce and to amass, and grab too many things, more than what was necessary, for themselves. This is where the problem began." (*Dhammik*. p. 66)
>
> "If people did not take surpluses there would be a lot left over, and the surpluses would fall to others. Then those others would not be deprived. If people grab all the surpluses for their own consumption there will have to be deprivation, and the poor will quickly multiply. If people did not take surplus there would be no poverty. The taking of surplus increases endlessly because of greed and through endless kinds of dirty tricks. In no long time great deprivation arises, and other people become impoverished." (*Dhammik*. pp. 105–106)

The analysis at this point is clearly the same line of thinking as ordinary socialism: economic problems are the fundamental problems or the source of social problems. That is to say, social classes arise and fall into conflict because some groups of people store away surplus fruits of production as their own in excess. The surplus production does not fall to the people in need. People in need become impoverished and they become adversaries of the group that takes the surplus.

Socialism must distribute the surplus to those in need

Buddhadāsa has no objection to surplus production and does not object to economic disparity, but rich people should share with the poor. He says:

> "The working classes should not lay a finger on those capitalists who are like the rich Buddhists of the Buddha's time, but should rather honor them. However, if by capitalists we mean those who appropriate power, influence

> and money and whatever else to make themselves richer and richer, this is a totally different thing: capitalists who feed the world and capitalists who grab ... As for rich people other than Buddhist rich people, I do not know, but the rich people spoken of in the Pāli Canon were all this way, especially the rich people who were members of the Buddhist company (*buddhaparisa*)." (*Dhammik*. pp. 79–80)

This kind of society may not be the highest kind of socialism, but it is one in which people can be happy. For the ideal socialist state, Buddhadāsa cites the example of the Saṅgha, a society which consumes and uses only what is necessary and does not store things, so no surpluses fall to anybody. As he says:

> "Thus we have an ideal socialist community without even knowing it. We could say it has existed in the administrative system of the Saṅgha from the time of the Buddha down to the present, or that it already exists in the system of Buddhist teaching. If we look at the way the Buddha conducted himself toward worldly beings, we will see that it was the ideal of socialism." (*Dhammik*. p. 96)

The socialism described here would, Buddhadāsa believed, arise when people had right view. People have to make themselves right in the eyes of the *Dhamma*, to have *Dhamma*, to have goodwill (*mettā*) and kindness to others. This goodwill will arise when people give up their selves. Giving up of the self can arise when people know how to control themselves and not fall into the power of defilements (*kilesa*) such as greed. Thus Buddhadāsa felt that society would change for the better through people having right view, as he states:

> "Social welfare should provide that which is most excellent, which is right view, because problems arise from wrong view, wrong understanding of nature or things, not understanding how they really are. Thus problems must be solved with right view, proper understanding. When one knows that one is doing something wrong or bad one corrects it and redirects one's mind to a course that is right. In this way society would quickly change for the better." (*Dhammik*. p. 26)

This passage tells us that right view will correct wrong view, but it does not tell us how right view is to be brought about. Buddhadāsa does talk about the righteous ruler, saying that he is looked after and trained, but he does not explain how he is to be looked after or trained in order to bring about the desired results.

While the ideas we have described on Buddhadāsa's socialism are well-

intentioned, and such a society would indeed be a good one, there are many points that need to be examined concerning his analysis and the feasibility of the system he proposes. These will be presented both according to his own reasoning and in contrast to the socialism that has actually occurred in history. For ease of understanding I will deal with them point by point.

Buddhadāsa claims that socialism already exists within nature, and the state of nature he refers to here is all things being in their place, not encroaching on or conflicting with each other. He cites the solar system, how all the planets exist in unity and do not clash with each other, as an example of a natural condition. But material things exist together as they do not through cooperation but through conflict: i.e., each of them having its own pull on the others. It is a system arising out of inevitable necessity, not out of partiality or cooperation. The existence of things as a unity does not necessarily arise from agreement to be in any system or from any knowledge of each of the unit's duties. but may rather from compulsion.

Moreover, Buddhadāsa compares the ideal of not taking a surplus with animals and plants, citing how birds eat only as much as their stomachs can take, and how trees take water in accordance with the size of their trunks. If we examine these statements closely we will see that while non-surplus may be moderation, nature is not a state in which things do not take surpluses for the reasons he claims, but rather because:

a. Some things in nature cannot take surpluses: it is not that birds do not wish to take a surplus, but rather they do not know how to. Not taking a surplus and not knowing how to take one are different matters.

b. The not taking of surpluses in plants and animals may result from their inability to do so: trees do not have anywhere to store any more water than their trunks can hold; animals that eat fresh flesh but cannot eat rotten flesh cannot store meat because if they did it would be inedible for them.

c. Storing may be dangerous: if weaker animals stored surplus food it may reveal their whereabouts to stronger animals and so prove dangerous.

It cannot be said that there are no examples in nature of taking surpluses, because ants and termites store surplus food. Frogs eat great amounts before their hibernation, and tigers and crocodiles keep carcasses for eating on a later day if they cannot eat them all at once. Looking at these examples, we see that the non-taking of surpluses is not a natural condition, and taking surpluses does arise in nature.

Regarding plants and animals, Buddhadāsa claims that any given thing exists dependent on other things, but to say "dependent on" in nature does

not mean "cooperation," but rather "destruction." Plants destroy the earth in order to grow; animals destroy plants in order to grow; and some kinds of animals destroy other animals as food for their survival. And other animals have a population not too big. That people exploit or destroy each other is their nature. In the *Aggañña Sutta* people are portrayed as degenerating even though they were once good. Why is that, if not because defilements or badness exist within them? Thus Buddhadāsa's comparison with nature is one-sided, and holds less truth than the opposite perspective. Cooperation is a characteristic of rational beings more than a characteristic of lower forms of nature such as plants or animals.

Buddhadāsa believes in human goodness. He believes that if people could be taught to have right view and restrain themselves from falling into the power of defilements they would have goodwill, and even if surpluses arose they would divide them. Some Utopian socialists believed in this way. If people were easy to teach the majority would be good and those with wrong view would be the minority. For example, in the Saṅgha society, which is a society of good people, the kinds of socialism that propose revolution or are full of class hatred would not arise. If such a society really could be made to arise that would be well and good, but religions have long taught humanity, and still such a society has not arisen. On the contrary, what has arisen and been with us down to the present day are aggression, race and class division, and exploitation. Buddhadāsa cites the rich men of the Buddha's time as examples, but why has the number of such rich people not increased over the ages? This indicates that we cannot hope to attain socialism voluntarily, and this is why socialist thinkers have devised systems to enforce people to follow the socialist way rather than teaching them the ideals of socialism. We have no proof that the Buddhist rich of the Buddha's time were the norm for all rich people or whether the rich people mentioned in the *Tipiṭaka* were rather the exceptions.

Moreover, modern socialists do not want a socialism that waits on other people's kindness. They believe that the distribution of surplus is the duty of the state, and the receiving of a share of the surplus is people's right as citizens sharing in the state's production. No one has the duty to be kind and no one wants to be indebted to another's kindness. Gains acquired are one's proper right. They belong to one, and are not something for others to give. On this point we can see that present day socialism differs fundamentally from Buddhadāsa's socialism.

Socialism, romanticism and spiritualism in general hold rising above enslavement to material things as an objective, but socialism does not say that material things are evils that obstruct freedom or bring oppression upon humanity. Material things may indeed bring oppression on humanity, but that is because a wrong economic system opens the way for certain groups to take advantage of others and empowers them to oppress them. Deprived people value material things because they lack them. People who are free have no need to demand freedom; it is people who lack freedom who want freedom. In the same way people who have enough material things feel no need for them. For those who lack them, material things are objects of desire. Thus, poor people are forced to become tools for producing material goods for their own survival. That is, they become enslaved by the material things they produce: if they do not produce they cannot survive. Once they have produced these goods they cannot possess them. This may be referred to as "having material things as master." The solution to this problem cannot be obtained by merely teaching capitalists to share more of the fruits of production, but by redressing the entire economic system. Buddhadāsa may not agree with this line of thinking because it is one that runs a great risk of violence.

There are many kinds of socialists, but it is possible to ascertain certain general principles that all kinds of socialism can accept. Socialism is a word that arose within a Western historical context. If Buddhadāsa wants to use this word without any connection whatsoever to the socialism that actually exists, then his use of the word has no use intellectually. If his definition agrees in part with actual socialism, there still remains the problem of whether or not the part that is not in agreement is so important that it renders his socialism so defective as to be unworthy of the name socialism, and why he did not rather use another more suitable term, such as "righteous monarchy" (*dhammarāja)*, which would greatly reduce the confusion.

At the beginning I discussed socialism as it is generally known. Here I will present the principles of socialism to examine how far the ideas proposed by Buddhadāsa accord with them. The reason we must use socialist thinking to examine Buddhadāsa's thinking is because this word and these principles arose before Buddhadāsa proposed his ideas about socialism.

Buddhadāsa talks of "not taking a surplus," which implies being in a position to take a surplus but not taking it. Marxist socialism does not

believe that such a thing can be brought about in society. That is why they create a social system by which the non-taking of surpluses is enforced, in which the state determines production and distributes the fruits of production. But there are some groups of socialists, such as the Utopian socialists and the Fabian socialists, who believe in human rationality, that if human beings are educated and made more rational, human society will change into a more socialist society. They believe in a gradual transformation, a peaceful transformation. Buddhadāsa's way may fall into this group, but what he must clearly indicate, like other socialist thinkers, is by what method he proposes the solution. Some socialists, for example, propose a system of communes, and some propose a system of welfare. Buddhadāsa simply cites the example of alms given by the rich, meaning that the state does not perform any economic organization. The giving of alms has no sure guarantees, and those who receive the alms have virtually played no part in the production of what they receive. They are receiving a share of other people's production given as alms, not a share of what has been produced by their own sweat. This differs from the socialist view and socialists would find this kind of idea unacceptable because the production system still contains exploitation, and surpluses are still falling to the rich. Some kinds of socialists may accept disparities in economic status, but their system of distribution of the fruits of production is not voluntary, but organized by the state through high taxes, distributed to the people as state welfare: the people receive it from the state as its citizens, not as charity from any particular person.

Buddhadāsa's socialism places its hopes so much in a king who upholds the ten qualities of a righteous monarch (*dasabidharājadhamma*) that it fails to recognize the necessity of having a system, believing that such a king will be able to control society as he wishes. It is the system of a good ruler who builds a good system, and everyone can benefit from it. However, being a good person and having the ability to create an efficient system are two different things. We cannot believe that the qualities of goodness, ability, acumen, knowledge and possession of accurate and complete information can be found in any one person, and even if they could it is still doubtful how such a person could be created, who would create him if the creator did not have such qualities himself, who would check to see that he really did fulfill those requirements, what system or standards would be used to create him, and what system or standards would be used to screen him. Socialism does not usually put its trust in individuals. While it believes in human goodness, it also believes that

people must be gradually developed. What is more urgent is the building of a better system to redress and replace the old one. Placing the aim in an ideal, and placing one's hopes on the government of an ideal person, without any method for realizing the objective and for obtaining such an ideal person, is a long way from practicality, and ventures on the impracticable. Teaching on its own is not an efficient enough way to bring about these results.

One thing that socialism, especially Marxist socialism, believes in is that the values people accept and follow in society arise from social determination, and how society determines these values depends on the production process in use at the time. For example, in a society with a capitalist economy competition is a good thing and making a profit is right, professions involving technological production are extolled, and wealth is the highest aspiration. Freedom in which the state has minimal intervention is the right kind of freedom. In a society in which production is in the hands of a monarchy and religion, there is adherence to abstract values, priority given to mental happiness rather than physical happiness, extolling of individuals on account of abstract values or religious beliefs, as in exalting the *brahmin* and warrior castes, because education and administrative power in organizing society lies in these people's hands. Thus they believe and teach others to believe as they do. Society is the determiner of social values. People as members of society hold to the values society determines for them. Thus a change in values will not arise through teaching, but by making the social system one that supports those values. But we can see that Buddhadāsa does not speak of, or may not believe, this. It seems he believes that righteousness (*Dhamma*) and humane-ness exist naturally. Human beings do not create the *Dhamma* and neither does society. When people act in contravention of the *Dhamma* they naturally experience distress. When human beings realize the *Dhamma* they live at ease and at peace. If he believes this, his thinking contradicts the major principles of socialism. He may call his thinking socialist, but people will easily misunderstand his teaching because they will be accustomed to the original meaning of socialism.

One point on which it may be said that Buddhadāsa and socialism agree is the objective of society, which is the return of human dignity. That is, freeing people from being defined and forced by material things into seeking only their consumption with no chance of doing anything else, and from being forced to live simply to produce material things and have their ways of life determined by activities of production. Instead activities of

production become simply a way for enabling people to live well, with a reasonable standard of living, with time left over to pursue other activities that they are equipped for, such as thinking, doing good actions, and admiring things of beauty such as the arts.

I use the word "agree" because the objective to be attained once human beings are freed of their enslavement to material things, being abstract, is conceived differently by different schools of thought. Thus I have not used the phrase "the same as."

We have seen that Buddhadāsa talks of socialism with an emphasis on the word "*Dhammic*," meaning government by *Dhamma*. A human being who embodies *Dhamma* is thus one of the essential factors in Buddhadāsa's political thought, and this is what we will consider in the next section.

II

The concept of the *dhammarāja* is a product of Buddhist culture. Thai people have adopted that culture, so the *dhammarāja* is a concept that Thai people have long been familiar with. However not many people have stopped to consider whether the *dhammarāja* is compatible or conflicts with our present political system and whether the term can be used in the present time. It is simply accepted that a ruler who is a *dhammarāja* is a good ruler and is compatible with any system. Buddhadāsa was the first to point out that a *dhammarāja* must be compatible with both socialism and absolute monarchy, and this led to the special kind of socialism he calls "Dhammic" socialism. Whether or not this kind of socialism can actually exist, discussing it can at least connect an ancient political term with a modern one to create a new thought and ideal. While it cannot be put into practice now, if it is a good ideal we may be able to find a way to put it into practice in the future, like other forms of government that have arisen in the course of history. Thus, in order to understand the word *dhammarāja* clearly we should fist examine its meaning. Sangkhom Sriraj writes this on the *dhammarāja*:

> "*Dhammarāja* is glossed in four ways. The first is (he is called *dhammarāja*) because he conducts himself righteously (with *Dhamma*). The second is: because worldly beings, including *devas* and humans, acknowledge and exalt him righteously, not unrighteously. The third is: because he is glorious in righteousness. The fourth is: because he governs his subjects righteously... The word *dhammarāja* is a name of the Buddha, an honorific

name for kings, and a title of the Lord of Death. It is one of the descriptive titles (*nemittakanāma*) of the Buddha. Wherever this word is used in the Canon, it refers to the Buddha. For example, in the *Bojjhaṅga Paritta* it is said *ekadā dhammarājāpi gelaññenābhipiḷito*, meaning "One time the Buddha was seriously ill." In the introductory verses of the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* it is said *desitaṃ dhammarājena sammāsambodhikittanaṃ*: "The Buddha declared his full, perfect enlightenment (*sammāsambodhiñāṇa*) in this discourse." It is used in the same sense in other parts of the Canon. It is used as an honorific name for kings who rule the land righteously, and whose conduct is known to their subjects at large, so that the people unanimously confer on him the title *Dhammarāja*, meaning "the Lord embodying righteousness." ... It is used in reference to the Lord of Death in that he conducts himself as a righteous king, constant in his justice: whoever makes bad or good *kamma*, he considers in accordance with their *kamma*. In conclusion, *dhammarāja* means "Lord embodying righteousness."[3]

The word *dhammarāja* in reference to a king refers to *Dhamma* as an attribute of the king's conduct, both as a person and as the ruler of the land, but does not go into specific details. Nowadays it tends to be defined as a king who possesses the *dasabidharājadhamma* (ten kingly dhamma); the *dasabidharājadhamma* are taken as the foundation, since *rājadhamma* translates as "the *dhamma* of a king." Buddhadāsa defines the term in this way, but if we consider it in terms of the Buddha's teachings appearing in the *Tipiṭaka*, we find that there are other teachings, such as the *cakkavattivatta* (duties of a universal emperor). The *cakkavattivatta* is a major teaching which has broader scope because it also encompasses the economy and the society. The teachings on the *dasabidharājadhamma* appear briefly in the *Mahāhaṃsa Jātaka* as follows:

> "See here, Lord of the Swans. I see clearly my long remaining life and am established in the *dasabidharājadhamma*, thus I am not afraid of the next world. Seeing these skillful qualities within me, i.e., generosity, morality, charity, honesty, humility, effort, non-anger, non-harm, patience, and non-fury, great rapture and pleasure arise in me."[4]

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[3] Sangkhom Sriraj, "Dhammarāja." *Thai Encyclopedia of the Royal Institute*, Vol. 14 (Bangkok: Royal Institute, 2521), pp. 9134-9135.

[4] Suttanta Piṭaka, Khuddhaka Nikāya, 28/240. (The Tipiṭaka used in this article is the *Syāmraṭṭha* Version. The first number refers to the volume, the second number refers to the passage—*Editor.*)

This passage speaks of the blessings (*ānisaṃsa*) of the *dasabidharājadhamma* as merely the non-arising of illness in the present moment, the subjects not committing crimes or thinking badly of the king, the royal consort being well behaved, and the king's children being of pleasant appearance. Moreover those qualities cause the king to govern without exploiting the people, to be without anger, to be just, to deport himself evenly, in a way that befits his position, to be reverent to wise persons (*sappurisa*), to not associate with foolish persons (*asappurisa*) and to not be deluded by objects that are conducive to delusion. Thus the righteous monarch need not fear meeting with suffering in the next world. In discussing the blessings and conduct that result from the *dasabidharājadhamma*, the Buddha does not lay stress on politics or government and economics as much as he did in some other *suttas*, such as the *Cakkavatti Sutta* or the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, and he does not give them as much importance as we claim for them in the present day. That people nowadays stress the *dasabidharājadhamma* more than other teachings may cause us to misunderstand the Buddha's thoughts in regard to politics given in other places, because since he only discussed the subject rarely, interpreters of his teachings may read too much into his words to fit them into their own ideas.

The idea of the righteous king (*dhammarāja*) has existed in Thai history from the Sukhothai period, as is shown by the appearance of the kings entitled *Dhammarāja* and *Mahādhammarāja*. King Lithai, for example, was known as *Mahādhammarāja* I. Prince Damrong Rachanubhap, a Thai famous classical historian, explains that the use of the term *dhammarāja*, one of the Buddha's epithets, to refer to a king probably first arose in Sri Lanka, the term being conferred on kings who really did have thorough knowledge of the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. Later on the term was used less strictly to refer to kings who did not have much knowledge about the *Dhamma-Vinaya* but were strong in faith and support of the religion. In later times, when Lankan monks entered Thailand during the Sukhothai period, they may have used the term to refer to Thai kings, and so the term may have been in use since the time of King Ramkhamhaeng. Later kings, not wishing to feel inferior in virtue to the former kings, used the term *Mahādhammarāja* until it became the custom in the Sukhothai period. In terms of actual knowledge of the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, King Lithai was the king most deserving of the name *Mahādhammarāja*. *Dhammarāja* was not the only epithet of the Buddha used for kings. Others were *samphet* (*sabbaññū*,

omniscient one), *lokanātha* (refuge of the world), and *songtham* (embodiment of *Dhamma*). Even kings' sons were given such names as *no phraphuttachao*, and *no phutthaṅkura* ("Buddha-sprout"), implying that the king himself is a Buddha or a *bodhisatta*, one who will in a future birth become a Buddha.[5]

When we examine the words *dhammarāja* and *dasabidharājadhamma*, we find that the emphasis is on knowledge of the *Dhamma*, embodying the *Dhamma* and ruling with *Dhamma*. But there is another meaning for which the Emperor Aśoka is usually cited as an example, and that is spreading the *Dhamma* to other lands, giving up the expansion of might via military means and expanding the might of the *Dhamma* just as the Buddha himself "turned the wheel of Dhamma." This idea is not found in the *dasabidharājadhamma* but in the teachings on the qualities of a true universal emperor (*cakkavatti*).

It can be seen that regardless of whether we speak of the *dhammarāja* from the *dasabidharājadhamma* or from another teaching, there is no modern political thought to be found. Trying to explain modern political thought with such teachings may be inadequate in terms of modern political thought, or may cause people to think that they are matters of two different cultures or different frames of reference. This kind of thing has arisen with the work of Buddhadāsa. The way to understand the problem is to consider it in terms of the way things are. Rather than expecting the Buddha to have a teaching for every time and every place, we should rather expect merely to be able to adapt his teachings to our use or use them as guidelines in certain cases. Events nowadays are not the same as those of the Buddha's time and there was no necessity for the Buddha to give teachings for this time and age to people of his own time.

Dhammic socialism is socialism containing *Dhamma*. The *Dhamma* referred to here is held by Buddhadāsa to be a virtue of the ruler or king, which he says is a king who embodies the *dasabidharājadhamma*. This kind of king is generally called a *dhammarāja*. Buddhadāsa says of the *dhammarāja* endowed with the *dasabidharājadhamma*:

> "A king who has the *dasabidharājadhamma* is full-blown socialism in the form of a despot. He gets things done quickly. An example is Emperor Aśoka, or another king who existed in Thai history but in whom no one shows much interest, King Ramkhamhaeng. Look at them—were they

[5] Sangkhom Sriraj, p. 9136.

despots or not? Were they socialists or not? If we look carefully we will see that they were a kind of socialists we never dreamed of, and they governed as parents govern their children. This is something we should bring back. Do not go bragging about or being taken in by the freedom of the 'me and mine' democracy." (*Dhammik.* p. 88)

A king who has the *dasabidharājadhamma* is both a socialist and a despot. He is a socialist because he acts for others—taking on the responsibility of distributing surplus and eliminating exploitation. He is a despot because he acts absolutely and immediately to produce quick results.

"Westerners may not know of this kind of monarchy. It is not found in their political text books. What is it that we refer to as a king endowed with the *dasabidharājadhamma*? Should we abolish it? And why do we have new systems that abolish the king or absolute monarch? What is the difference in meaning? If the king is a despot, a tyrant, or an absolute monarch, then it is fitting to abolish him, that is true, but why should we abolish a monarchical system that contains the *dasabidharājadhamma*, which is the active agent of socialism? (*Dhammik.* p. 72)

It seems as if Buddhadāsa accepts absolute monarchy. I say "seems" because elsewhere he talks of the "first monarch" arising from the people's plebiscite. Thus it is not clear whether he favors the hereditary absolute monarchy or an elected monarch. What is sure is that he agrees with absolute monarchy, under the provision that the king must be endowed with the *dasabidharājadhamma*. This fits in with his thoughts on despotism:

"The idea of the constitutional monarchy trying to uphold the *dasabidharājadhamma* explained above cannot be found in texts the Westerners give us to study. Go and figure it out for yourselves: maybe a system in which there is a good "seed," a sovereign class, who is constantly tended and strengthened and seen to be established in the *dasabidharājadhamma* could be a kind of socialism that helps the whole world. A king endowed with the *dasabidharājadhamma* will be every inch a socialist. He should be preserved in the world. If there is no such person then simply to have a revolution or change the one person is enough." (*Dhammik.* pp. 87–88)

According to this passage, Buddhadāsa suggests that the ruler is to be created. The beginning of the passage seems to recommend creating a group of people, the sovereign class, to be looked after and trained in the

dasabidharājadhamma, but it does not explain who is going to do the looking after and how they are going to do it. If the king has absolute power, who or what power can control or supervise him? And suppose that the candidate for kingship, who has been duly trained, is a group of people, what methods are there for choosing which of them is to be the king: who has the proper qualities to choose the king—the previous king or someone else?

The last part of the passage seems to indicate that these kings are created one at a time, because we are told that whenever the king is found to be lacking in the *dasabidharājadhamma*, all that needs to be done is change that one person. If these two passages are considered in light of the facts, we conclude that if it were possible to create a *dhammarāja*, then once a *dhammarāja*, such as Aśoka or King Lithai, passes away, then all the ascendants to the throne that followed would be trained to be *dhammarāja*. No such efficient system of training has yet actually existed. As for the point that whenever a king lacks the *dasabidharājadhamma* we need only change the one person, this is not true, because a tyrant has his retinue and is never easy to overthrow.

Buddhadāsa's ideas on the ruler or *dhammarāja* contain a number of other problematic points, as follows:

1. Buddhadāsa speaks only of the good moral qualities of the ruler, but modern rulership must also have acumen, broad knowledge, understanding of various social systems and also the human mind. These he does not mention. It may be that he had these qualities in mind as well, but the *dasabidharājadhamma* are the most important, but if that is the case, such a ruler would be extremely hard to find. Without a specific method for creating him there can be no hope of ever obtaining such a ruler.

2. Buddhadāsa does not tell us how such a ruler is to arise or what methods there are for choosing him. While he does say to the effect that his ruler is "one with good blood," a sovereign class raised to ever better levels and trained in the *dasabidharājadhamma*, it seems that he takes the existence of this group for granted. Where is this group or sovereign class to come from? If such a group does not already exist, and it must be created, who is going to create it, and how? It is not enough to say "raised" and "cared for" because even in the present day, among people who have good discipline and order, like the Saṅgha, we still cannot efficiently create such people: there are still many monks who transgress the

discipline. Thus an efficient method for controlling and supervising is essential.

This kind of thinking is not new. Plato and many Western philosophers thought of creating especially good people to be the leaders, and most of them proposed the method of providing a special education for those people and methods for choosing who was to receive such a special education, but none of them could guarantee obtaining people with the desired qualities because problems in the philosophy of education are still many.

If we were to use the method of selection outlined in the *Aggañña Sutta* for obtaining our ruler, we must specify our method. How are we going to obtain good people? Nowadays we have modern methods for selection, but still bad people are elected, sometimes in great numbers, as we have so often seen. And if we were to claim that this is because present day society is not good, it must be countered that if we had to wait for society to be good before we could find a good ruler, then what good would the ruler be, since society was already good? And if it is not possible to find a good ruler in a bad society, it is useless to propose finding a good ruler, because it cannot be done.

3. According to Buddhadāsa's examples, the *dhammarāja* is not good just because he is a king, because there are many other kings who are not *dhammarāja*. Moreover, the status of *dhammarāja* obtained by kings does not always result from the same methods, either from education or from continuation of the lineage. Emperor Aśoka, for example, turned to supporting Buddhism after becoming disheartened (*saṃveja*) over killing so many people in his campaigns. It is not known for what reason King Lithai took an interest in Buddhism, but it is known that he had faith in the teaching and studied it until he was expert in it, and built temples and invited learned monks from Sri Lanka to disseminate their knowledge in Thailand. If it were possible to create kings like King Lithai then we should have had one in every reign, or at least in the majority, but it does not seem that later kings were like King Lithai. Kings who had done much warring did all not have changes of heart like Emperor Aśoka. It may almost be said that the *dhammarāja* that arose in history were special cases, the exceptions, and did not arise from anybody's creation or any system. We may accept that the objective of society is goodness and justice, and we may be able to accept, as Buddhadāsa does, that the method for arriving at this objective is having a ruler who possesses the

dasabidharājadhamma, but without a method for obtaining this just ruler, that good objective cannot be made a reality. This problem demands an answer, not just a general or unclear statement.

4. Government cannot proceed smoothly with only one ruler. There must be administrators on different levels. While having a good ruler on the highest level may help to make the administrators on the lower levels function better, this is not a sure thing. At present we sometimes have a good and moral prime minister but the permanent government officials on lower levels do not follow his example. If we do not yet have any method for efficiently creating one good ruler, it is even more unlikely that we will be able to build many good rulers at once. However, Buddhadāsa does not address this question. We must accept that a good example may not necessarily be followed: the Buddha was a good example, but he had to lay down a great number of *Vinaya* rules because there were so many disciples (*sāvaka*) who did not follow his example.

5. Even with a good and moral ruler there must be some system of government. If socialism is not taking surplus, there must be some mechanism for seeing that this is done. Buddhadāsa gives as example the donations of the wealthy in the time of the Buddha, but those were voluntary actions. There were some who did not do so. In modern society, where there is very little distribution of surplus, or not as much as Buddhadāsa recommends, what mechanisms are there for bringing about the distribution of surpluses? This is a very important point which is dealt with by all kinds of socialism, but Buddhadāsa has nothing to propose on it. How can he bring about the socialism he wants, and how absolute must the despot's rule be to bring it about?

6. The discussion so far has taken it as given that a ruler endowed with the *dasabidharājadhamma* can be found. But how do we govern if such a ruler cannot be found? Or must we allow a bad ruler to set up a despotic rule without any system controlling him? The various systems of government have arisen entirely from other systems of government which contained irredeemable flaws. An absolute monarchy, for example, with a righteous ruler is very difficult to find. It holds the defect of rulers who lack ability or are even tyrannical, which is a danger to the people. In a free democracy, which gives great freedom to the people, people use their freedom to take advantage of others. Then there is the socialist system to address these problems, but socialism again has its problems, because it depends so much on the power of the state to solve economic problems

that it becomes authoritarian. We must accept that at the present time there is no perfect system. We have a democratic government not because this system gets things done best, but because it is the system with the least risk. It does not, for instance, run the risk of having only one ruler, of putting all power in one place, and allows opposition to authority. It does not take the risk of allowing a ruler to rule permanently but reviews his work at regular intervals, and if it is not good it changes the ruler. In this system people have maximum opportunity to participate in government: to participate in the making of laws and to have a chance to address political flaws. As long as we cannot find a righteous king (*dhammarāja*), we can still at least have a government in which the rulers, while not the best there is, cannot be tyrants. If the absolute monarchy was capable of finding a righteous and perfectly capable king, then we would not have to make do with an inferior system of government.

7. Present day governments, be they democratic or socialist, are not dependent only on the people who do the governing, but also on the forms or procedures they use, as in organization of property rights, the economic system, and the legal system. The modern political system gives broad principles for these things so that the various systems within the state will be compatible with each other and abide by its political ideas. The absolute monarchy gives no importance to these matters, because everything is dependent on the king. Even so, in actual practice there is a system. Buddhadāsa says generally that it is socialism, but the socialism he talks of has no clear form or mechanism. In actual fact, liberal democracies differ from place to place. Socialism, too, has many forms and is implemented in different ways. Democracy in itself provides almost no answer at all. Some of the qualities of a righteous monarchy, such as generosity (*dāna*), require the collection of taxes. If much is given, taxes have to be heavy. If there are rich and poor people, then the rich will have to be taxed heavily in order to distribute to the poor. If the system is one in which people are of equal or similar economic standing, then it is not necessary to give *dāna*. In real socialism it is the duty of the state to see that people are of equal economic status, and charity from others is seen as dishonoring the human dignity of the poor. A system of charity is one that presupposes economic disparity, which according to socialism is a sign of an exploitative society. If we wish to show the righteous monarchy as a form of socialism we must show a system or a method for getting rid of exploitation. Then, if the king has no surplus, what is he going to distribute as charity? If he takes taxes to distribute it cannot be called charity (*dāna*) because taxes are not the

king's money. Thus, Buddhadāsa has not yet clearly answered just how the righteous king is to be found, and how he is going to rule.

III

The idea that the best person should be the ruler seems to be generally accepted. Thus in political systems everywhere there will always be an attempt to establish a ruler's virtue or suitability and his right to rule. For example, Plato claimed a person's virtues obtained through training as the deciding factor for whether or not that person was entitled to be king. The *Aggañña Sutta* describes good characteristics, acumen and ability to adjudicate disputes to the people's satisfaction as the bases for the arising of the first king, indicating that the king was created by people's appointment. The Hindus held the divinity that was part of the king's being as justification for giving him a higher status than ordinary people. Ancient Egyptians believed that the Pharaohs were gods and so had a right to rule human beings. We can see that some of these political principles for sovereignty claimed a higher status, either the status of a divinity or the possession of divine authority. In these cases sovereign power does not belong to the people. In other systems the king is appointed by the people, in which case the source of sovereign power is the people as a whole. Then there are minor variations to be found in profusion in the political texts of the Western and Eastern worlds. They invariably show the justice of the ruler's moral right to rule or a right based on the relationship between the sovereign power and the status of the ruler.

While Buddhadāsa does not say explicitly where he gets the basis for his ideas, and makes his statements as if they were universally accepted truths, they more likely came from the *Aggañña Sutta* than anywhere else. He briefly says in this regard:

> "However, it should be known that socialism has already arisen in the past, as the first king to arise did so as a result of the efforts of all the people, who could no longer endure the natural liberalism of that time. This is not a story but something that occurred tens of thousands of years ago, at a time we know nothing of. However, rationally speaking we can see its plausibility. That human beings survive as human beings is the socialist intention. These words probably do not exist in modern political texts, or if they do exist, it is in covert form." (*Dhammik.* p. 71)

Such statements show us that Buddhadāsa believed in the theory of the natural arising of the state, but unlike Plato he did not develop that theory

into a system for creating a righteous ruler through a process of education. Instead he claimed the source of sovereign power to be the collective agreement of the people, following the *Aggañña Sutta*, which has some similarities to Hobbes' theory of the social contract. While there are differences, in general these theories hold that sovereign power belongs to the people. Even so, to cite this theory as justification one must show clearly how the transference of power is to be done and how the revoking of power is to be achieved—what mechanisms are there for ensuring that power is exercised properly?—because the system of election cited in the *Aggañña Sutta* still has many ambiguities, such as:

1. Judging from the *Aggañña Sutta* and the writings of Buddhadāsa, there seems to be a belief that election will produce a good person to be king, but if we pose the counter-question—"Does election always choose good people?"—the fact remains that many times those elected by the people are not good. Even in small societies, such as villages and districts, the representatives chosen by the people and those who are righteous are not necessarily one and the same, and being elected is no guarantee of a person's virtue. Buddhadāsa attacks liberal democracy but in his fundamental belief that whoever is chosen by the people is a good person or is worthy to rule he is thinking no differently from the liberal democrats, except that according to his idea the method of election will only be used once, and thereafter will be replaced by other methods. However he does not clearly explain this point.

2. Considering the conference of sovereign power by the people, in the *Aggañña Sutta* it is a total and absolute bestowal. Western philosophers such as Hobbes are in agreement with this kind of conference of power, although it need not necessarily be given all to one person. Other philosophers, such as Locke, feel that power should be divided so that a balance is struck. A lot of arguments have been presented in political philosophy on the division or non-division of power, but the important argument is not efficacy of operation, without any consideration of the dangers of despotism.

3. The ancient society cited in the *Aggaña Sutta* has no factual historical basis, but this presents no problem as we can consider it in terms of a logical theory. However, even in the *Tipiṭaka*, as for example the *Cakkavatti Sutta*,[6] the Buddha accepts the hereditary emperor. The emperors of ancient India were usually followers of Brahmanism. They

[6] Suttanta Piṭaka, 11/35.

were *devarāja* (divine kings) rather than *dhammarāja* (righteous kings). Regardless, however, of what kind of king they were, they were very different from elected kings. If, on the other hand, we were to accept the idea of the first elected king passing power on to his descendants, this would be an acceptance of the idea of the ruling caste of Brahmanism, which is in turn accepting the idea of class privilege regardless of personal ability, and closing off the opportunity to rule for capable people from other classes. We must understand that there are good fathers who beget bad sons, and clever fathers who beget foolish sons: a father who is a righteous king may have a son who is not. Buddhadāsa calls Emperor Aśoka a *dhammarāja*, but none of Aśoka's sons or relatives seem to have continued on as *dhammarāja* after him. Buddhadāsa does not explain how the *dhammarāja* following the first is to be obtained or how the following kings are to obtain their sovereign power.

4. Suppose a *dhammarāja* cannot be found, or the person found is bad or a mixture of bad and good, and not really a *dhammarāja*: do the people have the right to revoke the sovereign power? What methods are there for them to do so? How to decide when it is time to revoke that power; how bad does the king have to be? Buddhadāsa does not explain these points. Perhaps he did not think that such situations could arise.

5. What is the position of the people within the state? Do they participate in governing, do they contribute their ideas? Or, once they have conferred the sovereign power, are their honor and status reduced to that of domestic animals of the king? If that is the case such a system of government is not acceptable, because regardless of whether the owner is good or bad, animals are animals just the same.

One of the important components of a government is law. A good government must have clear and just laws, and must have a rational backing for the justice of its laws. For example, in democratic countries legal power comes from the people, who are the owners of the sovereign power, and the people participate in the making of laws for the control of their own conduct. That is, the people govern themselves. Thus the laws made by the legislative body are just laws. All political philosophies speak of laws. Even the absolute monarchies of ancient India or Europe of the Middle Ages had to clearly show the source of their laws and show that the laws they issued were compatible with their source, the religious texts which were the words of the gods. No developed system of government will be without a legal system. If Buddhadāsa claims the *Dhamma* as the

source of the government's laws, he must show what these just laws, issued by the *dhammarāja*, are, because if the *Dhamma* possessed by all *dhammarāja* is the same, then all *dhammarāja* must have the same central laws, even if they do differ in minor details. Buddhadāsa does not address the subject of laws, but goes on to talk of punishment. Even so, the punishment he speaks of is not in part of a government's legal process, which must have clear standards for efficient practice. Under the heading of despotism he cites the characteristics of a *dhammarāja*'s exercise of power. The method of punishment proposed by Buddhadāsa is that known as *brahmadaṇḍa,* or "overturning the bowl" (an agreement to have no commerce with), which is a method that, while viable in the Saṅgha, cannot be used with a government. This is for the following reasons:

1. *Brahmadaṇḍa* works through giving social merits and demerits (social sanctions). This method can only be effective in a small community, and once the community has grown it loses its efficacy. While it can serve as a kind of law, once the society has grown the use of laws is more effective. Thus from ancient times states that have developed beyond the tribal level have used laws. Social sanctions can only be used within lesser institutions that exist within the state.

2. Buddhadāsa cites the Buddha, who used this method with the Saṅgha, as an example, but the Saṅgha society and a national government are very different. The Buddha and the Christian Church during the Middle Ages may have been able to effectively use this method because they had the factor of faith. Buddhists have faith in the Buddha. Whoever does wrong and incurs a *brahmadaṇḍa* can no longer live in the Buddha's community, although he could go to live in a Hindu community or a one of another faith. In the Middle Ages people deemed by the Church to be of wrong view would be excommunicated (*pabbājanīyakamma*), which meant they had lost their chance of meeting God and were doomed to certain damnation in hell. People in those days believed in God and in heaven and hell, and so they had to conform to the power of the Church. Modern governments are not so endowed with faith. Even were there to be a *dhammarāja*, the faith of the people would not be as great as the faith the people of ancient India had in the Buddha.

3. The Saṅgha community during the Buddha's time was not so large, so *brahmadaṇḍa* was effective, but these days it is not so sure that a *brahmadaṇḍa* imposed on a monk would be acknowledged by the Saṅgha throughout the country. It might even lead to a schism. Even shortly after

the Buddha's death the Saṅgha found a difference of opinion and could not impose a *brahmadaṇḍa* and were forced to split into two sects, the Mahā-saṅghikas and the Sthavīras. For the same reason, *brahmadaṇḍa* would not be useful with today's society because bad people may have such large supporting groups that the non-association of others would not trouble them.

4. Different offenses deserve different punishments. *Brahmadaṇḍa* alone is not an appropriate and just punishment for different offenses. The *Vinaya* lays down different grades of severity for different offenses, which may be sufficient for the administration of the Saṅgha, but for a government the punishments need to be defined in more detail. Nowadays this has become such a detailed subject that it requires the separate science of criminology.

5. Theories on the giving of punishment are many. Buddhadāsa does not explain what method he has or what principles his system of punishment follows, or how they fit in with his system of government. He only talks about the subject briefly, which is not enough and adds nothing new to what is already being done. Without clarity on these points, the use of a despotic system is extremely dangerous.

Buddhadāsa proposes despotism to implement political power. He explains his interpretation of the word despot as "despotic in method," giving the word despot two senses:

> "I would like to give the word "despot" two meanings. As a principle or political ideal, despotism is useless, but as simply a method of practice or of implementation, it has its uses. That is, it can get things done faster than if the people were totally socialist or democratic. If a certain problem seems to be very drawn out, we hand it to the despot, and in this regard despotic democracy, or people's despotism, is the better system." (*Dhammik*. p. 60)

The word despot explained by Buddhadāsa here, while divided into two distinct meanings, is nevertheless vague. The condition he lays down is "the people being totally socialist or democratic," which would seem to be a "Dhammic socialism,:" in which the people have equality because surplus is distributed. Elsewhere he states "once a ruler is righteousness he can be despotic." This has been explained elsewhere under another heading. Here I will discuss whether despotism in the sense of "a method of practice," is in fact as good a thing as Buddhadāsa says it is. Good practice must have a good system, and whoever uses the system must also be good; i.e., he must not use the system for purposes other than for what

that it was intended. Despotism without a system may lead to problems for the leader: he may give orders that are carried out wrongly, not fully or in excess. The example given by Buddhadāsa clearly shows lack and excess:

> "However Emperor Aśoka's way of rule was absolute and despotic. It even led to the killing of monks. A number of monks were executed on account of Aśoka's stipulation that monks were to practice properly. Whether by mistake, over-zealousness, or in conformity with orders, the officials carrying out Aśoka's orders killed a number of monks who were of wrong view." (*Dhammik.* p. 77).

According to Buddhadāsa's example, if the officials were acting according to orders, the despot had the monks killed in spite of the fact that they may have reformed themselves through training or some milder form of punishment. If, on the other hand, the officials were exceeding their orders through a misunderstanding, it shows that a despot without a system for clarifying his orders can be very dangerous. But when we look at the explanation for the killing Buddhadāsa gives in the passage preceding the one above, we find that Buddhadāsa interprets "killing" in a different way.

> "The legal system formulated in ancient times was socialist, there was no way anybody could take advantage of someone else. Once this principle is correctly established, the method of practice is despotic—anyone not obeying is killed. If this killing is done according to the Buddha's method, it means having no further commerce with. The Buddha's method of "killing" people was to have nothing further to do with them. The human method of killing is to deprive others of life, but in the noble discipline, killing means not to have anything further to do with someone. That is the Buddha's kind of despotism." (*Dhammik.* p. 76)

If "killing" as the imposition of *brahmadaṇḍa* or social sanction is the killing intended by Buddhadāsa, then the case of Emperor Aśoka cannot be a valid kind of despotism, but more an example of the defects of despotism, or the narrow thinking of a depot who refuses to use any method less than killing. Thus despotism is not good even as a method, and even despotism under someone Buddhadāsa regards as a *dhammarāja*, Emperor Aśoka, is not just.

Buddhadāsa not only cites Aśoka as an example of a despotic *dhammarāja*, but also cites the Buddha as an example of a despot:

> "Now let us look at the system of socialism in Buddhism. The Buddha himself held to a principle or ideal of socialism, but his method of practice was despotic. All the activities of the Saṅgha are based on this kind of principle. Let us look at this kind of socialism. In the *Vinaya* of the Saṅgha it is stated that to seek out, to consume, to make use of, or to store away even one pinch more than is necessary, is wrong, an offense (*āpatti*)." (*Dhammik.* p. 73)

According to this example, the word "despotic" should rather mean "imposition of punishment without exception" —wrong is immediately wrong. But if that is so, then all laws are despotic: if it is established that something is against the law it is immediately wrong and punishment can be immediately imposed according to that law, just the same as in Buddhadāsa's example. But if we take it that judgment and enforcement of laws need not be despotic, i.e., there can be laws that have not come from a despot, then the Buddha's method is not despotic, but simply a normal, rational way of practice. Buddhadāsa also says of the Buddha's "despotism":

> "As for the statement that the Buddha had a socialist system but a despotic method, it is as already stated: democracy is slow and does not get things done in time. When something is seen to be right there should be immediate enforcement. The Buddha's method of operations was despotic: "This has to be done and done immediately." Thus there are many *Vinaya* rules that make no allowances for time or allow excuses or exceptions. Not only that, the Buddha stated that he was above the *Vinaya*, just as law in those times was said to apply to the people, but not to the king." (*Dhammik.* p. 75)

The meaning of the word "despot" given at the beginning of this passage is like the meaning already stated. The meaning it has at the end of the passage refers to government in which the ruler is above the law—he can obey the law or not as he pleases—and there is no law governing the ruler. If this is the case there is no criteria for deciding whether the ruler governs well or not because the laws have no power in themselves. Power lies in the ruler. That is why Buddhadāsa has to state righteousness (*Dhamma*) as a necessary virtue of the ruler. But he has no guarantees for finding such a ruler, and it is still unclear as to what level of *Dhamma* this ruler is to have. If we take *Dhamma* in this sense as it is usually understood, meaning the *dasabidharājadhamma*, it is still unclear because we can still ask what level of *dasabidharājadhamma* a ruler must have. For instance, in regard to *akodha* (non-anger), do we take it to mean

simply not acting on anger, or having a mind that is entirely devoid of anger? If the former, it is not entirely safe, because the king may still give in to his anger at any time; if the latter, such a ruler cannot be found among unenlightened beings (*puthujjana*), but only among the noble ones (*ariyapuggala*). How are ordinary people, who still have mental defilements, to decide who is a noble one free of anger? And even were we to find such a person, would it be appropriate to make him a ruler? We should rather further consider how far the example of the Buddha does support despotism, a question which we may consider point by point, as follows:

1. The Buddha was enlightened and had transcended defilements. The *Vinaya* he laid down is thus right in the sense that he knew that actions that were against the important *Vinaya* rules were obstacles to liberation. The Buddha was above the *Vinaya*, not because he had power and wanted to exercise that power over the monks, but because he was already liberated and committed no wrong actions that could possibly be an obstacle to any further liberation. That he had to lay down the *Vinaya* rules was to keep the monks from straying from the right path, and was nothing to do with any attempt to keep all the power to himself or solve problems through authority. He tended the Saṅgha more like a father tends his children, laying down forms and procedures for leading them to a good life, than through determining the relationship of freedom and power between the people and the state and between people themselves, as in politics.

2. Some parts of the *Vinaya* are not related to liberation but more matters of what is not pleasing in the eyes of householders, things that householders would criticize. The Buddha laid down these *Vinaya* rules. Monks behaved in ways that householders would find censurable because those monks were not yet liberated: they lacked composure and restraint and the control of mindfulness. But the Buddha had transcended such states, so the *Vinaya* did not apply to him. It is the same for the *arahants*: they would not transgress the *Vinaya* naturally, not because the *Vinaya* constrained them. That the Buddha listened to the views of householders in this way shows that he was not despotic.

3. The Saṅgha community is a special community, a community of people aiming for liberation. The Buddha had discovered the way to this liberation. Whoever entered this community had to follow the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha was the master of his community. The ruler of a country is not its master. The relationship is different, and the people do not unanimously accept the ideas of the ruler in every respect as did the

Buddha's disciples accept the Buddha's words. Also, life in worldly society is much more complex, so that a worldly ruler cannot be expected to have such perfect knowledge of all aspects of that life as the Buddha had in relation to liberation. Thus it is not appropriate for a ruler to have such absolute rule as did the Buddha.

4. The word despot as it is generally used means a system of government in which all power lies with one person and is not limited by any law or organization. The use of absolute power is generally not favored. The kings who have been extolled in the past are those kings who have tried to build and utilize laws rather than despots who simply followed their own views. For example, while King Hammurabi of Mesopotamia had absolute power he created written laws. The Roman Empire is famous for its legal system because in normal times the Empire was governed by law. The appointing of individuals as despotic rulers was only in times of crisis; in ordinary times there was no need to put all power into the hands of one person. Even if the ruler is righteous there is no necessity for him to have absolute power or to make instantaneous decisions as Buddhadāsa claims. When we look at the meaning of despotism as it is generally accepted we see that while the Buddha may have been somewhat like a despot in that he was above the *Vinaya* and had the power to define the *Vinaya*, we cannot compare the Saṅgha community to the state. The status of the Buddha and the status of a state ruler cannot be compared. In practice, especially, the Buddha did not exercise absolute power in the worldly sense. Even when the monks were in dispute he did not exercise absolute power, but chose instead to go into seclusion in the forest. When the Saṅgha had grown larger, he conferred certain powers, such as to conduct ordinations, to other monks. This is not the action of a despot, and so the Buddha was not a despot, either through the form of his own community, in which absolute power was not necessary, or in terms of his own practice. To use the word despot in respect of the Saṅgha may lead to misunderstandings.

Buddhadāsa is of the view that despotism is good when the despot is a person with Dhamma. He gives his reasons:

> "When a ruler has *Dhamma* he can be despotic. Thus small countries, in particular, should be democracies of the kind that are Dhammic socialism and despotic socialism. When everything is in order then quickly establish a despot, otherwise it will be hard to control and will eventually fall apart. The operation was performed too slowly. For such an operation there is only

a tiny amount of time: if we are too slow the patient will surely die." (*Dhammik.* p. 8)

According to this passage there are three reasons for being socialist: they are, being rooted in *Dhamma*, speed, and timeliness. These two latter points may be considered under the one heading of "speedy, that is, timely," or they may be considered separately in that even when something is timely, swiftness is better than tardiness and inefficiency. These reasons carry the following considerations:

a. The first reason, "If a ruler has *Dhamma* he can be despotic," is an idea that is generally accepted in the sense that if something is right it can be done, or may even be enforced. For example, when we see that something is right we make it a law and force people to abide by it. The problem lies in the phrase, "If there is *Dhamma*", i.e., "if it is right." This statement does not maintain that *Dhamma* has already arisen, but simply imposes the condition, "if...then:" i.e., it has not yet arisen. Suppose a king has *Dhamma*, and in a certain case he judges fairly so that justice does truly arise and is implemented immediately. This would be right. But the doubt still exists as to whether the king really does have the *Dhamma*, and if he does, is that case really considered and acted upon justly?

b. This statement takes it that having *Dhamma* as an attribute and considering things with *Dhamma* (justly) are inseparable, but in fact it is possible for a person with *Dhamma* to consider some things unjustly. He may consider on the basis of ignorance, since human knowledge nowadays is so vast and profound that it is impossible for one person to know it all. Even within one field it is impossible to know all the knowledge available. For example, when two people study biology, one studying plants and the other studying insects, each of them is ignorant of what the other has studied and they cannot examine matters in each other's field. In the past it may not have been so difficult to know everything as it is now. In those times, "having *Dhamma*" and "considering with *Dhamma*" may have come about easily, but nowadays knowledge and circumspection are essential factors for considering things. Thus, even "when there is *Dhamma*" is not sufficient reason for despotism, except if we take it that being a ruler who has *Dhamma* also entails broad knowledge, astuteness, circumspection, and always obtaining the true facts from the people around one. However, all these attributes do not automatically arise together with "having *Dhamma*." Buddhadāsa should have clearly

explained this matter, just as he clearly explained other matters of lesser importance.

c. The second reason is speed, being able to doing things speedily, and everyone wants to do things speedily. But why are we slow? We have not only the proverb "When the water rises, scoop it quickly," ("Make haste while the sun shines") but also, "Take it slowly and you have a good knife," ("Slow and easy wins the race.") or "Slow is work, a long time is a virtue." In some instances where speed is necessary and tardiness means danger, we must be speedy. But we must also acknowledge that in such cases circumspection may be lacking. If time permits we tend to avoid doing things hastily. The chance for mistakes is minimized or nullified when we do things cautiously. Also, it is difficult for "speed" and "circumspection" to arise together. When we are speedy we tend to lack circumspection, and if we want to be circumspect we tend to go slowly. We only go for speed and dismiss circumspection in times of crisis in which there is no time to think.

d. Circumspection does not usually arise together with haste because circumspect thinking requires knowledge and a good deal of data, and this must be examined and reviewed many times, all of which requires time. Thus it is not possible to be fast. The more weighty and complex the problem is, the more time is required. It is not just a matter of seeing something as important and doing it quickly. Moreover, circumspection does not usually occur with despotism. If a despot did use circumspection and think matters through thoroughly the result would be good, but circumspection does not usually arise from the thinking of one person, but more from listening to those around one. One who listens to those around him is not a despot. The proverb we Thais like to cite to counter lack of circumspection is "Two heads are better than one," which indicates that despotism is carelessness (*pamāda*), a kind of lack of circumspection. One who is not careless will listen to the views of others, and so his decisions do not arise solely from himself. It is not right to give someone power, or encourage someone to think and act entirely on his own initiative, without some person or power to balance him.

The third reason, that of timeliness, is not a justification for saying "despotism is a good thing," but more a matter of necessity in which there is no time to wait: an action must be done even though it might not be circumspect. Such cases are taken to be a "risk," not "safe," and having to act quickly for that reason is more an "expedient measure." Once the crisis has passed, it is fitting to go back to using circumspection once more.

e. Despotic government supports the use of power. When there is no way to assure a ruler who is righteous, clever, circumspect, altruistic, learned and free of defilements, a ruler, even when he is a good person, will usually has some failings. Thus it is necessary to have some way of examining or balancing his use of power in order to prevent those failings from influencing him to do bad things. If a ruler has absolute power he can do evil very quickly and in great amounts. That is why despotism is not popular, and that is why the balancing of power has arisen. Despotism in itself is not a good thing, and a good person can do things without having to be despotic.

f. Historically, the first forms of government were despotic. If despotism really was good we would probably have continued to use it from that time on, but we have made our governments less despotic. This is because it is hard to find a *dhammarāja*. Among all the kings of the world , how many can actually be called *dhammarāja*, real *dhammarāja*, without flaws? Were they *dhammarāja* in actual practice, in every case? And of those who were *dhammarāja* because of supportive environments, as in ruling over a land that is rich in resources, free of enemies, and of small population, how many would still be *dhammarāja* if they fell on situations in which the environment was not supportive? Such questions point out the futility of pinning our hopes on the *dhammarāja* who is almost impossible to find. We must build a system that is secure from the tyrannical despots, who outnumber the *dhammarāja*. Creating a system in which the people still have some control over the power would still be better and safer than letting the power fall into the hands of one person without any clear standards. Such a system, while not the best, is least dangerous. Human beings have abandoned despotism because their hopes for a *dhammarāja* are rarely fulfilled. What they fear is that tyrants can so easily return.

[Translated from the Thai version by *Bruce Evans*]

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HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND THE DHAMMA

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu
M.R. Kukrit Pramoj

I

Buddhadāsa: The assembly of those interested in the *dhamma* presided by the minister! I am invited here to deliver a lecture on *dhamma* in a dialogical style. That is, questions will be raised from as many angles as possible in order to promote understanding, which is different from debate as commonly understood. Therefore, please pay close attention. The appointed topic is 'How do you understand the *dhamma*?' However, it is unclear to whom 'you' refers. If it is the audiences, Ajarn Kukrit and I have nothing to say, because it concerns each of the audiences himself. If it refers to us, Ajarn Kukrit and I will express our views. I will relate my views and Ajarn Kukrit will raise questions to make interesting points clearer. However, I would like to modify the topic to be 'How should we understand the *dhamma*?'

Firstly, I would like to tell that wherever I am to deliver a sermon, I am accused of attempting to launch religious propaganda in the manner of over-advertising a product. Therefore, I would like to make known to you all that the *dhamma* is in itself so wonderful that neither propaganda nor advertisement is needed. Promotion becomes necessary because of people' s spiritual falling. An example is the activities of boy scouts or the Red Cross which are always accompanied with elaborated form of 'propaganda'. This shows that our mental state is not suitable for learning the *dhamma*. Meanwhile, the elements that divert people from the *dhamma*—even obscenity or *apāyamukha* (ways of squandering wealth)—are given intense 'propaganda.' Thus, it is the right time that we counter this with 'religious propaganda.' I am willing to face the accusation in the course of saving the worsening world. The 'worldly propaganda' shows the situation of selfishness. This world is full of lies told on the basis of self-interest. In a word, it is the atmosphere of infliction through words and intentions, which is mysterious and invisible. Infliction is not a human duty. The *dhamma* is the pure duty we ought to do. Infliction is certainly not the duty because it is against the duty, the *dhamma*. In other words, it

conforms to the opposite *dhamma*, that of villains and rogues. Infliction is not the desirable *dhamma*. Therefore, we describe those without the *dhamma* as having less of human virtue. I would like to sum up that we have lower mental quality to understand the *dhamma*. Even though there is material progress and more research works, the virtue that supports the conformity to the duty becomes lower so that it is more and more unsuitable to understand the *dhamma*. The problem is thus how to promote the understanding of the *dhamma* among the new generation. Will they have a better understanding? Is the education suitable for this task? This is the point I propose you to remind our children.

In this world, ten thousand tons of paper are used in publication. Therefore, books are influential. However, of all the publications, how many per cent is about the *dhamma*? Most of them promote sensuality, which diverts people from the *dhamma*. The distracting elements are so many that they now form the world atmosphere, and take hold of the human mind. It is then hard to understand the *dhamma*. Moreover, I would like to point out that the so-called study of the *dhamma*, or the Pāli study, in the temples can be done without any true understanding of the *dhamma*. I would like Ajarn Kukrit to elaborate on this point. The *saṅgha* is in a sad condition. That is, despite the advance of the monastic affair, it aims to do things other than the promotion of the understanding such as the provision of vocational knowledge, which can be gained without any interest or accurate understanding in the *dhamma*. To sum up, the question is whether people's understanding of the *dhamma* is now desirable, or deserves our concern. May Ajarn Kukrit lead the discussion to provide us with a good understanding?

M.R. Kukrit: I agree with your viewpoint. I feel that people these days do not understand the *dhamma*, or take something to be the *dhamma* when it is not. Regarding the advertisements, it is normal for worldly people who still have to earn their living. It is not my concern at all. Venerable mentioned about temples' advertisements. The study of Pāli and *dhamma* in the temples can be done with no connection to the *dhamma*. This point, I strongly agree. I would not like Venerable yourself to discuss about it, because they are still your fellows. Otherwise, it would not be good for you. You said you were accused of launching the 'religious propaganda' or over-advertising the *dhamma*. I believe it was from a few for it is not true. Were it true, people would know it and believe the 'propaganda.' The truth is that most still do not understand the *dhamma*. Therefore, if the 'propaganda' is really made, it is not good enough because it cannot match

others. Most still lack the understanding. The way the advertisements for the *dhamma* are conducted, I think, is not different from those with commercial purpose. That is, the advertisers of the *dhamma* survey the market, and then propose to sell things that match the desires. When those in the temples know that people's desires are full of greed and delusion, they propose greed and delusion in the name of the *dhamma*. For example, they give sermons on supernatural power. From the radio and other media, the topics of paradise and flirtations among angles are related to enjoy the audiences around the country. Even the incredible matters that children can falsify are included in the sermons. I feel that the advertisements of the *dhamma* as done today are not well thought. It may eventually drive people away, and undermine the faith in the *dhamma*. If people find the *dhamma* to be false—, that is, when what they perceive from the radio or the newspapers is uninteresting, incredible, dubious, or wrong—, those who never know about the true *dhamma* will lose interest, and think that the *dhamma* is useless, and nonsensical, and that it is better off leading the worldly life earning their living. If a temple advertises amulets or important monk images by describing that anyone who owns them will become wealthy, this is likely to make people believe. But it is the belief not based on rationality. There are many who see that, if one wants to be rich or have successful business, there are many other ways to these ends like honesty and hard working. On the other hand, some think that dishonest acts, not the worship of amulets or monk images, are the effective means of money making. However, the temples these days give much emphasis on this kind of advertisements, which results in undesirable drawbacks. I think that the temples heavily rely on the worldly methods. They speak what people want to listen. Therefore, if people are greedy, they preach in the way that the greed is promoted; if people are deluded, they promote the delusion rather than give them light. Sometimes, they even provide mediums. All of these have to do with cravings and false views, but succeed in creating the attraction. I do not understand the purpose of these activities. My inquiry tells that money is the goal. They claim that these give the temples a financial support. The arising question is what the temples are for. If they are the place where the right *dhamma* is to be propagated, the reliance on the means that are against the *dhamma* is a contradiction. Instead of the place of spiritual liberation, the temples are the sites of delusion, not enlightenment. I may be considered aggressive, but my observation shows me thus. The advertisements of the Buddha images, amulets, and monk images are

widespread. The competitive atmosphere is not different from that found in the commercial market. The campaigns for the *vipassanā* practice are also easily found. People go to *vipassanā* schools, and gossiped about the superiority of this over that school. The gossip topics even include the *vipassanā* masters' private matters. Because I belong to no school, I heard the gossip about every school. People dropped in and told me the gossip. I would not like to go into details. If the main activity that people do when they go sitting meditation is gossip, I never see that *vipassanā* can provide the way of promoting the understanding in the *dhamma*. I would like to leave this to Venerable. Otherwise, I would do all the talking.

Buddhadāsa: Next I would like to focus on the obstacles to the *dhamma* understanding. When people say they are interested in or want to study the *dhamma*, they refer to theoretical understanding, which they pursue to the point of uselessness. The theoretical study is enjoyable because there are many points for discussion. And those who are successful in the study, not in the serious contemplation, easily gain the prestige. People are thus drawn to the theoretical matter with no involvement with the way of practice. An example is the study of *abhidhamma*, which mainly concern theoretical explanations, rather than practical matter. To appreciate the point, compare the study of formula to create a human being to the study of practice for the existing human beings to be free from suffering, and think which is more interesting. The former is usually found to be challenging while the latter seems to be common. Yet, consider which should be done; which tends to our benefits. As a matter of fact, we focus on the conformity to the *vinaya*, the memorization of the *sutta*, and the discussion of the *abhidhamma* while the essence of the *dhamma* is overlooked. People forget the need to transform themselves to be one with the *dhamma*. These are the obstacles to the right understanding. As a result, what we are doing is plainly the senseless imitation of what our ancestors did. By analogy, we are not different from crab infants that zigzag like their mother. We lack the true interest in the right understanding of the *dhamma*. Like Ajarn Kukrit said, religion is commercialized, which obstructs the learning of *dhamma*. However, the traditional way of religious practice opens the way for that—zigzagging crab infants and commercialization. To sum up, we pay attention only to the theoretical study of *dhamma*, and go deeper to the point of unnecessity. Ironically, the *vinaya*, the *sutta* and, the *abhidhamma* turn out to delay the learning. How do you think of these facts? I again beg you to discuss.

M.R. Kukrit: I agree with Venerable. Whenever you say like that, I always find it agreeable. I think that the cause of all these problems stems from the ignorance of the objective of *dhamma* learning. People in general do not pay attention to this. They opt for something simpler like the idea that all religions teach people to be moral. Therefore, they think that any religions will do, or even that all can be integrated as one. This is the trend. And they held the meetings (about the idea) as if there were nothing significant (about the objective). Religions are taken to be the means to teach people to do good. There is no point considering how different they are. They can attend the assembly of any religions. They do not understand the *dhamma*. They do not know what the learning of *dhamma* is for, and take the means as the end. Or they misunderstand that the *sutta* is the *dhamma*, and devote themselves memorizing its content. When they vow to observe the precepts, they assume a competitive attitude. They want to prove who can do it better. Otherwise, they go to the other extreme. That is, they think that, if they can not strictly observe them, the precepts should not be observed at all. Moreover, they claim that it is better studying the *abhidhamma* because it is more profound, can exempt one from observing the precepts, and enables a vigorous *vipassanā* practice. These can be found. They go to the opposite extremes. Some study the *abhidhamma* to learn technical terms, and to count the sets of mental states, about which they enjoy a chat. I think that the study of *abhidhamma*, the study of *sutta*, and the observance of precepts for their own sake are not for the *dhamma*'s sake, not for the liberation from sufferings—the true objective. These all stem from the ignorance of the objective. Not only the studies are affected, but also the daily practice. If the objective is not rightly understood, we tie the *dhamma* to a certain place. We do not absorb the *dhamma*. No practice begins. They consider the *dhamma* to depend on the conditions of place and time. For example, if one goes to a temple, the *dhamma* should be the topic of conversation, or one should listen to the sermons and observe the precepts therein. They believe that, when one leaves the temple, the precepts are no longer necessary to observe. The instruction of *dhamma* is completely given in daily life. If we observe life from the *dhamma* viewpoint, we see that the *dhamma* is the vehicle of liberation. No matter what we see in life or work, more sense of liberation can be felt if we see them with the *dhamma*, or consider them with the *dhamma*; if we let the *dhamma* to be within us, or look for the *dhamma* from ourselves. That is, we can make ourselves free little by little from sufferings. We do not know the true objective of the *dhamma*. We

misunderstand that we go to the temples to make merits, and study the religion to be a good person. What good is it if we do good in order to gain? For example, some civil servants do good because they want promotion. They think that it is the fruit of merits. If they are disappointed, they are unhappy so deeply that nothing can soothe. Sometimes, they even quit doing good. These stem firstly from the ignorance of the meaning of the *dhamma*, secondly from the ignorance of its objective, and thirdly from the lacking understanding of 'good' according to the *dhamma*. If we still want to teach people the *dhamma*, I think we should do it correctly. That is, we should begin with what is 'good' according to Buddhism. What is the ultimate good? Otherwise, we do not have a norm. These days, we keep teaching people to do good without telling them what is good, how it is good, why it is good. When it is not taught, people do not understand and misunderstand that good are things gained in return like going to heaven, becoming prestigious, owning a big car, having a lot of money, winning royal decorations. Even though events in life show these to not be good, but vehicle to sufferings, none believes it. All stem from the ignorance about the *dhamma* that Venerable talked about. These are my opinions.

Buddhadāsa: I still have the doubt whether we have any hope to draw them back so that they have the right understanding—a good beginning.

M.R. Kukrit: Oops! You ask me? Actually, it is your concern because you are the monk. I am the layperson. It is enough that I understand it. I do not have the duty to guide anyone. Let each do his own. I do not have the duty of propagation. I was in the monkhood for a short while. It is my duty to make myself enlightened as far as I see possible. If I succeed, I am satisfied. If people are going to hell, it is not my business at all. I would like to ask Venerable what you will do given that it is your duty to guide people to the enlightenment.

Buddhadāsa: Let me repeat my question. As a man with knowledge of the world, people, and society so wide that their being lost is detected, do you think it is still possible that we instruct them?

M.R. Kukrit: It is always possible, or at least hopeful, because today's education is inculcating rationality in people. The faith in things beyond rational proof is perhaps getting to subside. I think that there should be an organization, or people in the religious circle, setting the irrefutable principles that explain for what we have faith in Buddhism. In what do we really have faith? We can not be sure what kind of faith people are having. The so-called Buddhists do not only worship the Buddha, the *Dhamma*,

and the *Saṅgha*, but also Kuan-ou (the virtuous Chinese warrior) and the like. Or even M. R. Kukrit. They can worship everything. Worship for what? The Thai sect does not tell. Monks are all apathetic. Each gives a different answer when asked. Our religion recognizes such remarkable freedom of speech. No conclusive answer can be reached. It all depends on each temple, each school, or each monk. Each teaches his own way. It is not conclusive. Formerly, I thought I could depend on monks when I had any doubts. Yet, the more I talked to them, the more clearly the disparity was seen. I then did not know what to do. I did not want to choose among them. Nowadays, I still treat monks with respect, but I do not ask them any question. I pay them respect at sight and make offering. I never ask a question because that will bring me headache. They all give different answers. Therefore, we should begin with what the faith in Buddhism aims at, and what exactly goodness is. What is the ultimate good? What is it when Buddhism calls 'know'? When is it that we know? No one ever tells about them. People devote themselves practicing *vipassanā* simply to find out that they still do not know whether it is rightly practiced. They are totally ignorant. These should be the starting point. I think they are possible to teach. But they must be taught by the authority. And they should be uniformly held. I do not mind misinterpretations of the precepts, or misunderstandings. It is a matter of individuals' freedom. However, Buddhism should provide the principles that no one in the religious circle can deny, the principle on which laypeople can depend. That is, when they ask a question, it can be expected that they will be given a uniform answer no matter from which temples. These days, temples give different answers. I do not know what to do. If I went to *Suan Mok* and asked Venerable for what we made merit, you might tell me that it was for elimination of defilements, for liberation. If I went to Chiangmai and ask the other monk, he might tell it was for going to heaven many miles up high. One spoon of rice offered to the monk enabled me to become an angel after death surrounded by other eighty four thousand servant angles. It is a form of profiteering, I think. Eventually, I myself can also propose my own religious principles, which amounts to my having a new religion. It is my own Buddhism originated from my own understanding, and held by me alone without any propagation.

Buddhadāsa: Therefore, it means that, first of all, we should have a uniform understanding of the *dhamma*. Otherwise, we will run into the trouble Ajarn Kukrit described. That is, each school focuses certain point as they see fit, which creates the difficulty for the society. Today's topic is

'How should we, or you, understand the *dhamma*?'. It is a good topic indeed. I would like to draw your attention to this word, '*dhamma.*' We should understand its meanings thoroughly. However, first of all, I would like to say that the *dhamma* that can be explained or discussed is not the true and ultimate *dhamma*. The true and ultimate *dhamma* is beyond discussion because it confines to each individual's experience. It is like sweet or salty tastes, which can not be explained to people. They themselves have to taste it. Therefore, the *dhamma* that is explained is not ultimate. I would like to ask Ajarn Kukrit to discuss about it. Is it so?

M.R. Kukrit: I am completely certain. The true *dhamma* can not be taught. Those with direct experience of it can not give the explanation, because it transcends human language. It is incomparable. It is too profound for verbal expression. The enlightened can not show it. However, before the enlightenment is reached, there need be some guidance like that given by the Buddha. If we still have loving kindness toward others to lead them to the attainment, we need to provide them with guidelines of practice, or instruct them the *dhamma*. Despite its not being the true *dhamma*, it can lead people to the true *dhamma*. Do not teach the *dhamma* that drive them away. Do not teach the *dhamma* that poses the obstacle. As I said earlier, if the *dhamma* is to be taught, it should be considered whether the instructions are the obstacle, the promoter of defilements, cravings, and delusions. This kind of instructions is the obstacle. We should avoid it.

II

Buddhadāsa: It can be said that Ajarn Kukrit and I agree that the *dhamma* to discuss is that about which verbal expression is possible to a certain extent. Let's conclusively define the *dhamma* that deserves attention so that interest is aroused and practice is begun. Firstly, the *dhamma* is everything with nothing excluded no matter whether they are abstract or concrete; deeds or their fruits; conditioned or unconditioned; permanent or impermanent. All are the *dhamma*. Secondly, all of these follow certain laws. The laws of all these are the *dhamma*. The first definition of *dhamma* may refer to 'nature'. Everything, even the *nibbāna*, is natural. The second definition, the laws of all that we call '*dhammatā*,' is also the nature. Thirdly, the *dhamma* is the reciprocal duty among all, the duty to act in accordance with the laws in order to attain peace. I insist that my thorough study leads me to only three definitions of the *dhamma*. We can conclude that the *dhamma* must be known, practiced,

or had to prevent all from sufferings. This is to say in accordance with the aim of the religion as far as it concerns human beings, and in accordance with the Buddha's purpose, the Master's. Ultimately, we will find that the practice ends with the *dhamma* in the sense of the void of attachment even to the *dhamma*. The true and ultimate *dhamma* equals the complete detachment, even to the *dhamma*—even the notion that this *dhamma* is me or mine. The notion of '*me*' or '*mine*' is extinguished no matter whether it is in the laws, the duty toward all, or the fruit of the practice. Our mind is void of the feeling that what is me and what is mine exist, the feeling sustained by the attachment. This is the ultimate attainment of the *dhamma*. We should reach this point of understanding if we want to save ourselves. Otherwise, we can not save ourselves and are below the point where we can rightly claim we know the Buddha's religion. We have to understand it to the point where there is no attachment to 'me' or 'mine', even the *dhamma* itself, or the *nibbāna*. Whether the explanation is difficult or easy; short or long; deep or shallow, please consider with close attention. If you ask me what the *dhamma* is, this is the answer. I believe that you all should understand thus. And this will save your time. You can have the timely understanding for your life. You will be on the right path. Otherwise, you may have to go around for a long while. Sometimes, death arrives before any understanding is gained. How do you think of the proposed principles, Ajarn Kukrit?

M.R. Kukrit: I have nothing to add. I understand so. What I was trying to say was meant so. Like what you just said, the *dhamma* is nature—everything that we experience both inside and outside the temples. Even the *nibbāna* is part of nature. And everything goes by the laws. That is, they are impermanent and have to perish one day. And everything is interrelated. Therefore, everything has reciprocal duties. If we are to live among men, we need to know the duties toward them so that we can live together with peace. But this is only the minimum. If we want something better, we have to do the duty toward ourselves, which lead to the true peace, the void of attachment even in the *dhamma*. However, the problem is how to make people believe this.

Buddhadāsa: Let me conclude that Ajarn Kukrit and I agree on the definitions of the *dhamma* as I have already shown. 'Empty mind' is therefore the important issue to discuss today. I understand that Ajarn Kukrit admits that 'empty mind' is not nonsensical. It is the highest goal of Buddhism, the very end of Buddhism that everyone should practice to attain. Next, let me make an important remark. Because we are interested

in the cautious or immediate understanding of Buddhism, I would like to suggest you to adhere to the easy principle that, the more you study about Buddhism, the more you are ignorant about it. This is applicable especially to the occidental scholars who take 'religion' to mean doctrines or theories, and rites. We have to study the world or sufferings if we want to understand Buddhism. The Buddha used them interchangeably. The world is sufferings; sufferings are the world; or life is the world. All the *Tipiṭaka* can not help us understand Buddhism. The occidental scholars think that we should thoroughly study both Mahāyāna's and Theravāda's *Tipiṭakas*, and all the knowledge about India like arts, culture, and other religions. This way does not lead to the understanding, but misleads us around until we quit. Unless we learn from the world or life or sufferings, that is, from ourselves in the limit of this approximately one-metre long body, we do not understand Buddhism or the *dhamma*. Today, we misunderstand that the study of all the *Tipiṭaka*, and information about India will help us rightly understand the *dhamma* or Buddhism. I insist that this is misleading. We should attend to those things that are going on inside ourselves. Look inside ourselves and see that the attachment is the cause of the sufferings we are experiencing. The second that we have no attachment is when we no longer suffer. The more you do it this way, the more directly and the earlier you gain the understanding of the *dhamma* or Buddhism. Regarding this remark, what do you think, Ajarn Kukrit?

M.R. Kukrit: If you teach it this way, you should teach it to me on our own. That is, the detached should teach the detached. If you teach people with strong attachment, they misunderstand. That is because, while by 'empty mind' you mean the mind empty of attachment, 'empty' can be differently understood. Empty of what? It is easier to understand if 'detached mind' is used instead. 'Empty' can lead people to think of not-thinking. The phrase, 'work with empty mind,' raises a doubt in laypeople whether it is possible to do any work when the mind is empty. The background should be provided. If you talk to me about it, I can understand. There is no problem at all because I know it when you talk about it. However, as for those with some attachment, it is very difficult. Besides, the saying, 'the more you study about Buddhism, the more you are ignorant about it,' can frighten those with no background. They might accuse Buddhadāsa of talking nonsense. That would be unwholesome for them. Thais are not familiar with it. Instead, it should be taught to Japanese people because it sounds closer to Zen Buddhism. Another difficulty can still be found. I beg your forgiveness. Please allow me to frankly inform

you of my disagreement about your saying that, the more we learn from the world or sufferings, the more we understand Buddhism. I am suspicious. I many times saw that people who tried to learn from the world and the sufferings without Buddhism on their mind were usually let astray. I should like to propose instead that, if anyone is going to learn from the world and the sufferings with the aim to rightly understand the world and the sufferings, and Buddhism, he should have some Buddhist principle on his mind. That is, he must know that he learns from them in order to get rid of all the attachment. If a man is attached to, for example, the belief in the existence of God, no matter how hard he tries to learn from the world and sufferings, he will never be liberated. No *dhamma* can be so understood. On the other hand, if he studies the world and sufferings through the Buddhist lens, he will know more about the world. When he knows more about the world and sufferings, he knows more about Buddhism. However, I agree with your first point that, if they study Buddhism in the way people are doing today, they will never know Buddhism. The gained knowledge simply enables them to be promoted to higher ecclesiastical ranks or wins them degree, but they can not be said to truly know Buddhism. Regarding the second point about learning from the world and sufferings, it is reminded that the Buddhist attitude must be assumed. If the other religions' attitude is assumed, you certainly run into trouble. That is, if you study the world with the hope that it is the place of happiness, you will not be able to identify sufferings when you see them. Then, more unhappiness, more rage, more dissatisfaction developed. And it becomes impossible to be free from sufferings. You suffer more. If we know the Buddhist principle, and accordingly learn from the world, it is better, I think. I would like to skip the issue that, the more one studies the *Tipiṭaka*, the more one is ignorant about Buddhism, because I once was severely reprimanded when I discussed about it.

Buddhadāsa: I am happy to discover the truths Ajarn Kukrit pointed out. Audience! Please consider the facts about the Thai Buddhists' study and knowledge of Buddhism. When I said that, the more you study about Buddhism, the more you are ignorant about it, I meant to point out that this way of study made people obsessed with, and addicted to, the theoretical knowledge, and the taste of theoretical thinking, philosophical speculation and logical inference. By Buddhism here, we do not mean the theoretical knowledge, but the true *dhamma* that destroys the attachment. The more we study the *Tipiṭaka*, the more we enjoy it. That is why people in the past called the *Tipiṭaka* 'angel' (*vāṇī*). She is so beautiful and charming that the

students are under her spell. Enslaving them, she takes a firm hold of their minds. I had the experience. Regarding the knowledge about India that those occidental scholars insist that we have before the proper understanding of Buddhism can be obtained, I think that they get lost away from the core of Buddhism. They think that Buddhism is one of Indian religions. I insist on the contrary that it is the hopeless method, especially for those totally ignorant about Buddhism. If one wants to gain an immediate understanding of Buddhism, one needs to practice the method taught by the Buddha, *vipassanā*. But it must be the right *vipassanā*, not the false one which, as you know well, brings the consequence mushrooming to cloud Buddhism. One should practice as the Buddha taught by sticking his mind to the moment of seeing an image, hearing a sound, smelling a smell, tasting a taste, for example, and keep it on the track of wisdom, not cravings and delusions. After a few hours, a few days, or a few months, the *dhamma* will be attained, the *dhamma* that the Buddha showed us, not the one that, pardon me, was added later by the commentators as appeared in the *Tipiṭaka* or other scriptures.

Therefore, we should not misunderstand that, because they thoroughly study the Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, and other various subjects on India, the occidental scholars very well understand Buddhism and suit to teach us. It is for sure that, as long as you are still at lost in this large flower garden, you will never discover the heart of the *dhamma* or Buddhism. Thus is how the saying should be understood that, the more you study about Buddhism, the more you are ignorant about it. Moreover, when the sufferings or the world are mentioned, they have the specific meanings. The Buddha used them interchangeably. Although sufferings arise, the world in itself is neither pleasant nor unpleasant. On the condition that we are attached to the world in such a way that it is us or ours, the world becomes the suffering. The world can mean anything ranging from honor, fame, wealth, or family, for example. Even such simple things are the world. When we are attached to them, we suffer. When we detach from them, the sufferings cease. However, the lesson can not be learnt other time than the moment of suffering. That moment is the golden, the diamond moment. It is the most wonderful moment to study Buddhism. Ponder how the suffering is, why it arises, what is its opposite, and how to realize its opposite. This is the principle (the Four Noble Truths) in Buddhism. When suffering, you must look inside yourself and observe the mind filled with cravings and delusion. This deserves a close observation and a serious attempt to understand. It is called 'the more you

observe the sufferings, the more you know them, and the *dhamma* of Buddhism.' Thus is the meaning of sufferings. The meaning is specifically defined so that suffering is correlated with attachment. Detachment gets rid of the sufferings. Birth, old age, sickness, and death are alike. If we are not attached to them, they can not make us suffer. Therefore, when we hear the chanting that birth is a suffering, old age is a suffering, etc., do not take it to mean that they themselves are the sufferings. The Buddha's instruction comes at the end of the chanting that the attached five aggregates are the very sufferings. Either sufferings or the world, without being attached to, do not give rise to sufferings. Attachment to them always give rise to sufferings. Focus on this principle. The time when the attachment can arise is every time of the eyes' contacting the images, the ears' contacting the sounds and so on. This is the method to study Buddhism. This method brings an immediate understanding of the *dhamma*. Thus should we study from the sufferings. In this sense and with this method. It enables the soonest understanding. I beg you to suggest people to study Buddhism in this way, and to tell your friends or foreigners who are ignorant about Buddhism that, if they want to learn about Buddhism directly and immediately, they should do it in this way. The *Tipiṭaka* or Indian studies are not the way. To sum up, the more you study about Buddhism, the more you are ignorant about it; the more you study the sufferings in this way, the more you understand Buddhism, and are likely to conquer the sufferings. Therefore, we are closer to the topic of how we should understand the *dhamma*. 'Religion' is used with confused meaning. In the time of the Buddha, the term '*dhamma*' was used. But now we use the term 'religion.' They are meant to share the same reference. However, the meaning of 'religion' now deviates much from this, which causes difficulties.

Now we come to the so-called heart of the *dhamma* or, if you prefer, the heart of Buddhism. It is a newly coined phrase in the Thai society, because, in the time of the Buddha, Buddhism was nothing but its heart. However, later it is wrapped with decorations so that its heart is hard to identify. We are required to re-consider what the heart is. Generally in the Buddhist circle, when asked what the heart of Buddhism is, most of them reply that it is the Principal Teaching (*Ovādapāṭimokkha*), which consists of not to do any evil, to do good, and to purify the mind. Some prefer the Assaji's words popularly recorded on bricks, which can be found both in India and Thailand, especially in Nakorn Pathom province. The words are derived from the story that, short period after the Buddha's first propaga-

tion, the monk, Assaji, was asked what the Buddha's *dhamma* was like. He replied that everything came to be for a cause, and the Buddha pointed out what the cause was, and showed the complete ceasing to be by the eradication of the cause. Some prefer the *Four Noble Truths*—sufferings, the cause of sufferings, the ceasing of suffering, and the path to the ceasing.

As for me, I prefer one of the Buddha's words. Once a man asked whether the Buddha could summarize into one statement all the *dhamma* he taught. The Buddha affirmatively replied that the statement was that nothing at all deserved any attachment. This is all of Buddhism. If one practices this, one practices all; if one succeeds in this, one succeeds in all. Let consider which of the proposals should be so nominated. It is right that we should not do any evil, do good, and purify the mind, but it is not clear how to purify the mind. Assaji's words are that everything came to be for a cause, and the Buddha pointed out what the cause was, and how it can be eradicated. By this, sufferings are meant. Sufferings come to be for the causes, and the Buddha showed their complete ceasing to be. Yet, it is not clear how it was showed. Therefore, from a viewpoint, the words imply that we should be rational. That is, we need to know that, for an effect to cease to be, its cause must be ended. Regarding to the principle of Four Noble Truths, it covers the four topics whose content is very general. I thus would rather not adopt it as the heart of Buddhism. The principle needs a lot of details to explain. Therefore, I prefer the statement that nothing at all deserves any attachment. I see that it is the heart of Buddhism because it is sufficient that we see that nothing at all deserves any attachment. Not to attach is not to mistakenly consider that it is me or mine. When we no longer think that anything is us or ours, we will have all the qualifications. Like the Buddha said, *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom) arose out of detachment. People become immoral, unable to concentrate, and unwise or most stupid because of the attachment. Therefore, there is only one thing to do, only one thing to learn, and only one thing to practice. Success comes from this one thing. That is, we have to be careful not to let the mind form the attachment that it is me or mine when we hear, smell, taste in daily life. The detached mind is full of wisdom and mindfulness. With this empty mind, we are wise and mindful; with troubling mind, we are craving and attached. They are always opposite. 'Empty mind' means the mind without attachment and selfishness, the mind with brightness and peace from wisdom and mindfulness. This is the empty mind according to Buddhism.

Therefore, the short statement of the heart of Buddhism is that we should free ourselves from the attachment that this and that are us or ours. This is the statement, in which the Buddha summarized all of the teachings. It exhausts all the *Tipiṭaka*. All I am trying to do all along is to point out the heart of the *dhamma* and express it in a short statement yielding to immediate understanding of people in general who do not want a deep study. They can attain to the *nibbāna* because of the detachment. Is such a short statement that provides the principle for practice sufficient and suitable for the present society? I beg Ajarn Kukrit to comment.

III

 **.R. Kukrit**: Having listened to your discussion, I understand. But it is not as easy as Venerable said. That is, it is hard to explain to children or laypeople. Simply to explain the Assaji's words, it takes several days. I once made the attempt. It was not easy at all. If they were the detached, it would be a lot easier for them. However, it is very difficult for the detached to explain it to the attached. I can not see the way. In fact, I understand that, if people can only realize that only principle, they are free of all the attachment. However, the truth is that every teaching of the Buddha, if we have enough wisdom to contemplate on them, can free us from the attachment. But, if we want a convenience, we can make do with that one principle in the contemplation on the world and sufferings. Nevertheless, if we do not know the other teachings of the Buddha, we can not go very far. I came across with many who had been born in the places of different faiths and never known about the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha*. When they began to study Buddhism, the traces from the former faiths still exerted influence on them. For example, they still thought that the Buddha was God; the *Saṅgha* was the mediator between God and men, not the group of those determined to free themselves from the world. It is very difficult. I admit that, if I had no background, I would not see it. These days, I see the world, understand it and know the sufferings because of the original faith in the Buddha as the Perfectly Enlightened One, the attempt to study about what the Buddha was enlightened, and the avoidance of the suspicion in his being truly enlightened. We should start with the belief or faith. It is like the instruction that we begin with faith, and then try to understand Buddhism. Do not lead your thinking out of the religion. This can be said to be a form of attachment. That is, we are attached to the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha*, which, I think, is not unwholesome. The *Tipiṭaka* can be so

understood too. There are many approaches to it. It depends on the approaches we use to study the *Tipiṭaka*. If we use literary approach, we can get addicted because its prose is very beautiful, and its meanings are deep. If we approach it from a logical standpoint, there are many points for analysis. If we approach it with etymology, the old language therein is very interesting. The *Tipiṭaka* is indispensable. It can not be totally ignored. The Buddha's teachings we now know come from the *Tipiṭaka*. It is right that it may contain some errors, but what we consider to be the truths can be found in it too. Who is eligible to judge which pages contain errors and which pages truths? If we are to accept it, we have to accept it all. If we are to throw it away, we will lose all the valuable things. That is what I think. What Venerable told us is totally correct. I had no dispute. But, first of all, we have to begin with faith. We have to take refuge in the *Ratanattaya*, believe in the Buddha as the Perfectly Enlightened One, and believe that the Four Noble Truths, what the Buddha was enlightened about, are completely true and credible. Otherwise, I think it is impossible to understand the *dhamma*. All we attain to will be infinite sufferings, attachment, and cravings. There is only one who can be enlightened without Buddhism on his mind, only one who can know the world and sufferings by himself without any experience with Buddhism, and he is the Buddha himself. No one else can do that. All the rest must follow his path. Thus do I believe. May I beg Venerable to tell whether it is right?

Buddhadāsa: It is now clear to me what the confusion is. When I said that the statement was the heart of Buddhism, I meant to choose the most practical or comprehensive principle that could provide us with the guidance. It can guide our faith too. It is true that we need faith as the basis. However, I told that the aim was to help learners and practitioners save time. If the faith is thoroughly directed to the heart of Buddhism, it will be the right and complete faith, because the statement encompasses all the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha*; and *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*; or anything else. That is, the essence of the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha* is the state, or being an individual with the state, void of attachment. Because the Buddha was enlightened, and had all his attachment destroyed, what made him the Buddha is his state void of attachment while his body was not different from normal people. The heart of the *Dhamma* is the state void of attachment. The *Dhamma* as practice aims to destroy the attachment. The *Dhamma* as fruit of the practice, the *nibbāna*, consists of the complete destruction of all the attachment. Therefore, we should focus on the destruction of all the attachment. Only

then do we properly absorb into our heart the essence of all the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha*. This is the way we have the true Buddha, the true *Dhamma*, and the true *Saṅgha* in our faith, or in our practice. We no longer have to worship the objects, voices, and things symbolizing the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha*. We are not delayed as before. We do not waste our time. If we have to use the symbols, we should transcend them as soon as possible to discover the essence of the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha*, the state void of attachment. Then, we have in ourselves the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha*, which is totally credible, self-evident and in need of no authority. If one sees that the attachment is the cause of sufferings and its destruction is the end of sufferings, one is completed with *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom). People become immoral because of the attachment to the things they love and hate. They act under the influence of love and hatred. They lack concentration and suffer from the five hindrances (*nivaraṇa*) because of the attachment. If we see that there is nothing to which we should be attached, our mind becomes calm. The contemplation on there being nothing that deserves our attachment comprises the ultimate wisdom that the Buddha wished we had. Therefore, through the detachment, we have all the *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* in the spirit of Buddhism.

Considering about the *Tipiṭaka*, we can see clearly that every words therein points to the destruction of the attachment. Even in the Four Noble Truths, we can clearly see that the first two truths, sufferings and their causes, have to do with attachment. We can see further that, when there is no attachment, that is, no craving, then there arises the extinction of sufferings. And all the acts on the basis of detachment are the path leading to the extinction. Even though the path consists of eight elements, all contribute to the destruction of attachment, the misunderstanding that this or that is me or mine. Take the first of the eight elements, the right view, as the main principle. We must begin with the view that there is nothing to which we should be attached. This is the perfectly right view, which enables all the other elements to be performed on the right track. The Buddha told that the right view should come first, the view that corresponds to the reality in which there is nothing that can be attached to as '*me*' or '*mine*.' Then, we have the other two of the four noble truths, the truths that are concentrated in the only statement that nothing at all deserves any attachment. Therefore, the faith in the Buddha, the *Dhamma*,

and the *Saṅgha*; and the practice of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā;* or all the other kinds of practice are simply an elaboration on the basis of this statement. The doctrinal study, or the study of the *Tipiṭaka*, is within its bound. Only elaborated and beautiful explanations are added. Therefore, for those wishing to gain an immediate understanding of the *dhamma*, this should be focused as the heart of the *dhamma*. I am agreeable with Ajarn Kukrit that it is very difficult and profound for laypeople. Yet, if we have the determination, and try our best to find out the proper methods, there should be a way that is appropriate and suitable for them to rightly practice themselves so that they unknowingly have all the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, and simultaneously accomplish according to the Four Noble Truths. Therefore, I beg your special attention to the statement that nothing at all deserves any attachment. If you find it still too long, a short phrase, 'empty mind' (*suññatā*), will do. This is the very heart of the *dhamma* or Buddhism, because being void of all the attachment is the ultimate goal of Buddhism.

I have a system of practice especially provided to ease laypeople's understanding and practice. I have been confronted with the difficulty in explaining the phrase, 'empty mind,' for years. And I always learn more about the explaining method. I am thus encouraged to strive for the clearer explanation so as to save the fellow human beings' time and lead them to the concise, right, and complete understanding of Buddhism. I have often been accused of speaking with unintelligible terms. Therefore, I beg your close attention. This system consists of working with empty mind, eating with empty mind, living with empty mind, which puts death out of the question in the first place.

Working with empty mind amounts to our working according to our duties with the mind free of 'selfishness,' free of the idea that there exists the self or things belonging to that self, free of the attachment that this or that is me or mine. This is to work with empty mind. Empty of what? Empty of the feeling that our self or its belongings exist. Empty of 'selfishness'. That is because our self is not true. It is an illusion. Nevertheless, we can not underestimate the illusion. The illusion is the feeling that the self exists as something dense, something real, while the self actually is only the illusion, the attachment. It results from misunderstanding or ignorance. It is a form of false view due to the clinging. We have to work with mind empty of the view that the self exists. Then, we work with empty mind. At the same time, this empty mind is full with mindfulness and wisdom. Make a clear distinction

between mindfulness and wisdom. They are allies. Mindfulness makes one cautious in his acting; wisdom makes him act wisely. They are the important elements for practicing. The Buddha said that only mindfulness could save us. Mindfulness and wisdom can not co-exist with attachment. They can be found together at the same moment. Although our mind changes from one moment to another, there is no moment when they co-exist. If there is attachment, there is then no mindfulness and wisdom, and vice versa. When the mind is free from attachment, it is full of mindfulness and wisdom. If we do whatever duties with empty mind free from 'selfishness', it is the state of 'empty mind.' However, most people do not understand so. They think that empty mind is the blank mind which amounts to our being like a log, or a sleepwalker. It is not so. The word 'empty' can mean many things. There is 'empty' in the sense held by the wrong views, and in the sense held by the right view. According to Buddhism, it must mean the emptiness of the feeling that there is 'me' or 'mine,' the feeling that is caused by the misunderstanding due to attachment. If there is no 'selfishness', what else can it be called except the emptiness of self. Such emptiness implies wisdom. It is the *dhamma* in the Zen Buddhism's concise descriptions that the Buddha is emptiness, and the *Dhamma* is emptiness. By 'emptiness' it is meant as what I said. Whenever we are empty of our self, we become a Buddha, the *dhamma* as it should. This is the effective Buddhist principle. It is not different either in Zen or Theravāda. This emptiness refers to the void of all kinds of 'selfish' feeling. When we work, we will work effectively. Let me raise an example of a rice grower's working with empty mind. Exposed to the strong sunlight and soaked with sweat, he with empty mind that clings to nothing as its belonging tills the soil while singing. This is to grow rice with empty mind, which makes the work enjoyable in itself. If he also sees that it amounts to the practice of the *dhamma*, his enjoyment grows and the mind becomes emptier. Thus, he ploughs with peace of mind. No thought ever arises that it is easier earning a living by stealing. Another example is a ferryman who oars against the wind and the current in the condition of strong sunlight, or heavy rain. His work brings him no pain if his mind is empty of the thoughts concerning his self or its belongings. For example, he simply thinks that it is his work. He does not feel inferior by it. He does not think that he is poor, or he is reaping the result of his bad *kamma*. His work does not make him suffer—it does not put his mind into hell. He enjoys it singing and oaring. This is also the case for other kinds of laborers. If they do so, they work with empty mind. To shoot or throw

sharply, a man needs to get himself prepared with empty mind. If his mind is filled with 'selfishness' like the expectation for reward or the fear of laughter, he will never be able to make it. He needs to concentrate and remove these 'selfish' thoughts from his mind. The mind is left with mindfulness and wisdom. He then will be able to shoot or throw sharply. It is spontaneous as if by magic. That is because it is done on the basis of the mind empty of the feeling that it is his self, or its belongings. If he is 'selfish', his mind swings, his body shakes, and so does his hand. When a student goes to a test, he should prepare his mind so that it becomes empty, forgets all about the self, and is left with mindfulness and wisdom. He then can do the test extraordinarily well. It is to go to test with empty mind. It is true that kids always expect good result when they have a test. They are 'selfish.' However, while they are sitting in the examination, they should be mindful and wise in the manner of empty mind. They then can do it better. They can have better study, memory, and decision. Even when a man goes to court, he should maintain the empty mind. Otherwise, his mind is vague, which puts him in a disadvantageous position. If his mind is empty, he can see the way, and become more cautious, which brings him advantages.

Even music can be played with empty, not troubling, mind. The pure music, the one without lyrics, like whistling can be played with empty mind. Even when we sing, if we do not cling to our self or its belongings, we sing with empty mind. Moreover, the pure music can also help clear the mind of all the obsession, anxiety, and restlessness until it becomes empty. Therefore, whistling or singing can not be always deemed to be driven by sensual cravings. Sometimes, they are means to empty mind. They can give a starting point. If we sing with sensual cravings, the mind is certainly troubling. Especially when the singing is sexually driven, the trouble grows. But do not consider all singings or music to trouble the mind. Impure arts certainly promote sensual cravings. Therefore, the arts are neither to be all blamed nor all praised. We have to distinguish between those that tend to empty mind and those that promotes sensuality. Therefore, we should not judge everyone we see singing to be sensually driven. The state of mind should be taken into account. An angry man who whistles to ease the rage is doing it right according to this principle.

'To work for emptiness' must confuse the audiences. It is to work neither for the worker himself, his family, the nation, nor the religion. It is to work for emptiness. However, this saying skips over to the final goal. It is possible to offer a simpler interpretation like 'to work with empty mind.'

I have said that the *dhamma* is emptiness. Emptiness is ultimate. It is now generally recognized that there is nothing at all that deserves attachment, because everything is selfless. Everything is empty. The whole world, ourselves, our family, our nation are simply mental formations. They are natural, either corporeal or mental. Actually, they are not-self. In this sense, no matter whom you work for, you work for emptiness. Therefore, to work for emptiness is to turn the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha into what human beings ultimately deserve. If we work for this or that, it is base. Especially, when money is the goal, it is worse. If we work for its own sake, this is better, but the duty itself should not be clung on. To work for its own sake is considered to be for emptiness. The term 'emptiness' has the special meaning. When we work with empty mind, it amounts to working for emptiness. Its benefit falls on no one else but the worker himself. Therefore, we do not have to be afraid of shortage of food, for example. Although the benefit is great, we do not attach to it. It thus is to work for emptiness. If it is asked on what one will be fed, the answer is that he is fed on 'the food of emptiness.' It is to be fed on the food of the *dhamma*, the food of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. But we call what we are fed on 'the food of emptiness,' which has the special meaning. Therefore, we have food while we are working with empty mind, for emptiness. It is the pure food with no mixture of disadvantage. It truly is wholesome.

Next is 'living with emptiness,' which is to live with no idea of self and its belongings on every breath. Regarding the point that 'death is put out of the question in the first place,' it means that when we work with and for emptiness, and are fed on the food of emptiness, there is no self, which makes death impossible. There is thus no problem about death. The only death that exists is the eternal emptiness, which is better than the death that is accompanied by rotteness, dirty, ordorous, disgusting, and pitiful. I can not judge for myself if what I have been sayings is intelligible, and acceptable to people in general. However, I still persist in the attempt to find out the way to help them understand.

The monastic life enables easier understanding and practice. I taught my fellow monks that we should be fed on the Buddha's food, not our or laypeople's food; that the true Buddha was the Dhamma and the true Dhamma is the emptiness. The fellow monks can make sense of it. But I am not sure if it is also the case for laypeople. Therefore, I would like to beg Ajarn Kukrit to discuss on it.

IV

M.R. Kukrit: If we live in a monk's cell in the back of the temple, we can certainly do as you guided. There is no problem. From the beginning until now, I see that Venerable has shown us the truth as deep as an ocean. You explain that the aim of liberation is the complete detachment, the destruction of all the attachment. This is the truth no one can deny. But, when it comes to 'to work with empty mind; to work for emptiness; to be fed on the food of emptiness; or to live with emptiness,' I feel that you are trying to pour the whole ocean into a small bowl. It is impossible. It overflows. The truth that you have shown us is too deep. It concerns the *arhat*s' mental state. Ordinary people who have to earn their living can not contain that truth in such a small bowl—no matter how they do, they can not work with empty mind. That is my belief. Your concluding remark implies that you too see that it is easier for monks to put it to practice. Therefore, I believe the ancestors' saying that, if a layperson become an *arhat*, he will die within seven days. A monk who becomes an *arhat*, I truly believe, can live on without any problem because the monastic life allows the living in accordance with the *dhamma*. If a layperson makes an attempt, I think that he will get into trouble. It does not mean that the *dhamma* is wrong. On the contrary, I think that it is absolutely true. The problem is how much laypeople afford to practice it. What Venerable says mainly concerns the *arhat*s', and the Buddha's way of living. I think that it is impossible if laypeople are required to do the same. The first reason is that it is beyond my imagination how working with empty mind can be done. If we work without considering it as a work, without thinking that it is we who work, without seeing that others, society, nation are the recipients of the benefits, why should we work in the first place? Instead, we should put an end to working. Why should we work? If their mind is empty of selfishness, people no longer works. If I freed myself from all the clinging, I would go to your temple to ask for an ordination. I would not waste time working. But I can not free myself. That is why I am still layman. I can not let go all the attachment. Working is a form of attachment. Anyone who can not let go has to go on working. It is a part of suffering. I can not see a way to work with empty mind. Perhaps, I am of small mind, or do not really see the truth so that I completely have no idea. Regarding mindfulness and wisdom, I think that mindfulness is the state in which we are aware of everything's selflessness—being impermanent, subject to change, and not-self. Nothing is ours. If we are mindful in this sense, we no longer work. We lack any

enthusiasm to go vending, or anything. We would rather rest at home. With respect, I frankly inform you of my inability to understand. I want to make sense of it, but my pondering leads me this way. If Venerable told that the aim of your teaching was freedom from all sufferings—the mind is to be emptied in order to get ordained, I would believe you. But you teach it this way. You teach us to go back to work and keep our mind empty all the while. I can not do so. This clearly points out the disparity between laypeople's and monks' viewpoints. I would like Venerable to teach me what I should do then.

Buddhadāsa: I still have a doubt. Let me ask whether, after all the rest flows over its edge, the water left in the small bowl is the same as the overflow.

M.R. Kukrit: The water is just the same. Yet the amount is different. Anyone with careful consideration about your teaching realizes that your 'empty mind' is not truly empty. It is a form of attachment. The mind is slightly free from some defilements. The teaching does not survive a logical scrutiny. However, I admit it has a practical value. But the teaching then need not be on this. It may be on something simpler like the fruits of merit making to be reaped in heaven. That also leads to good deeds. It does not make sense why things should be made so complicated. I do not mean to accuse you of leading us out of the track. I simply would like to point out that people can be taught to do good with something simpler.

Buddhadāsa: Now I can catch your point. To work with empty mind, with freedom from the sense of our self or its belongings, means that, while we work, our mind should be free from 'selfishness'. Of course, there exists, even before the working is started, the cognizance that we have the duty toward our nation and religion. This can be considered a wholesome attachment. The possession of wholesome attachment does not attract a reproach. Everyone is allowed to store it. Yet they are further asked to make a superior attempt to strive until and beyond the top of wholesomeness. We then transcend to 'emptiness.' The immediate practical method is to avoid the troubling mind while working. We are mindful of what, how, how long, and how much it should be done. We can still think but do not think with the mind obsessed with the strong sense of 'selfishness,' or self. It is because it will be too much or too little deviating from the reality. Do it with pure wisdom, and with emptiness of the feeling that our self exists. We can think of how we should work with a certain status, under a certain condition, with a certain daily duty, with a certain job, or what benefits the society will have. These are alright. The mind still

can be said to be empty. The point is that, when we do it, all that should be left are mindfulness and wisdom. In Buddhism, 'mindfulness' refers to the principle of *Satipaṭṭhāna* (The Foundations of Mindfulness). Be mindful all the time. Do not be absent. Be mindful of there being neither self nor its belongings, and work with that mindfulness. In that state, the mind is absolutely bright, and quick. I propose you to ponder on and practice it. The attempt will show you whether it is possible. That is because sometimes we obtain the most precious from the smallest amount, as small as the water left in the bowl after the overflow. This is my intention. I would like you to carry on the consideration. You may not be able to understand it today, but you may one day ahead. In the teaching of this deep *dhamma*, we have to aspire that the learners of today will in the next five or ten years understand it. They will attain it for sure. However, if we keep waiting, they have to wait another ten years before the practice can be started. And another ten years before they can understand it. Be brave to contemplate on this unintelligible *dhamma* for the sake of benefit to be gained in the next five or ten years. 'Empty mind' or 'to work with empty mind' are part of the deep *dhamma*. I have been trying to communicate that you all should understand the *dhamma* in this manner to save your time, to attain an immediate result. We are discussing under the topic, 'How should we understand the *dhamma*?,' and I propose that this is the way we should understand it. Ajarn Kukrit's comments are reasonable. I will take into account to improve it so that it is beneficial even as much as the small amount of water from the whole ocean. Persist in the attempt to study to understand 'emptiness' or 'empty mind,' the most important principle in Buddhism. The Buddha held that *nibbāna* is the absolute emptiness. Absolute emptiness is *nibbāna*. The end of the feeling that it is self is *nibbāna*, the ultimate goal every human beings deserve. We should aspire to its coming one day in the future. I beg you to understand the *dhamma* in this manner. Do not think that the goal is to become an *arhat*, or to gain a status through the study or practice of the *dhamma*. It is because that tends to the increment of attachment. If we understand that the goal is the gradual reduction of 'selfishness,' the clinging to there being self or its belongings, that is right. Let the cultivation go that way. 'Emptiness' has the special meaning. Let me repeat again and again that the statement that '*Nibbāna* is the absolute emptiness' has the special meaning. Consider another important Buddha's words that 'Always see all the world that it is empty,' which means that the world is actually empty, but we do not see so. Therefore, we should try hard until we see so. This

will bring us to the most desirable state. The conventional words have their special meanings. When they are in a different context, it becomes difficult to understand. I thus try to use the contemporary Thai or easy language. Therefore, we should not cling to the words themselves. Ajarn Kukrit, do you think that there should be any exception, or what? What should be discussed? I beg you again so that the dialogue is completed.

M.R. Kukrit: I understand as you explained. Only those individuals can be called 'empty' who are as 'empty' as *arhat*s, do not lead the same kind of life as I or the audiences here do, lead their lives as Venerable, use only three pieces of cloth, depart from society to live on their own, and observe the 227 precepts without any trouble, with voluntariness, and with spontaneity. But in case of the laypeople like me, I can not see how it is possible to work with 'empty mind' because the work itself prevents us from having the empty mind. The laypeople like me are in the condition that does not allow the emptiness. If we attain to the emptiness, we are no longer the laypeople. If you suggested that I should become a monk to attain to the emptiness, I would find it acceptable. I myself do not get attached to anything but, by 'working with empty mind,' I would like to ask you what you exactly mean. If you mean that it enables people to be successful with their worldly jobs, I do not believe it. If it is said that, for a man to become a very good soldier, he must be fighting with empty mind, shooting with empty mind, I do not believe it no matter what explanations are given. But, if Venerable said that we should be in the world to which our work belongs and work with empty mind so that no suffering arises either in the time of success or failure, I would believe. I do not believe your saying that, with empty mind, one is successful with his work, because the worldly work obstructs us from having the empty mind, or freeing ourselves from sufferings. Mundane happiness is unhappiness in terms of the *dhamma*. The success in work have worldly meaning. It is true if 'empty mind' leads to the attainment of the *dhamma*, but not both. If one wants to succeed in the *dhamma*, he should forsake the worldly achievements. Otherwise, there is no point in becoming a monk.

Buddhadāsa: Do you mean that laypeople will never try to realize the empty mind?

M.R. Kukrit: They can. That is, empty of defilements. I believe so.

Buddhadāsa: Should laypeople try?

M.R. Kukrit: I believe they should not have attachment. That is, laypeople should study the Buddha's *dhamma* so that they know what it is, but at the same time they should also know that, while they do so, they

need to have some attachment because we are simply laypeople. If we can let everything go, we should not stay as laypeople.

Buddhadāsa: I want laypeople to work with less sufferings and full achievement. Is this possible with empty or troubling mind?

M.R. Kukrit: I think that worldly achievements must be bought with sufferings. We can not have the cake and eat it too. No one spreads butter on both sides of a piece of sliced bread. No one makes merit in that attitude. Allow me to teach monk that it is not possible. If complete freedom from all the sufferings is the aim, we should forsake the worldly achievements. We have to quit. If so, I believe. If we still are laypeople, we have to experience both happiness and unhappiness. There is no emptiness.

Buddhadāsa: How can we reduce the sufferings?

M.R. Kukrit: As I have said, everything is not self or its belongings, but we have to focus on our work when we work—it is not empty. It is unavoidable that we think we do it for ourselves. When there is any failure, then your teaching has a role. By thinking that it is not our self, we can at least comfort ourselves.

Buddhadāsa: Our dispute is over this point. I insist that even though you are a layperson, do a layperson's work, you have to more and more overcome the sufferings arising from your working. The main Buddhist method should be appropriately applied—empty your mind of all the attachment. Forget your status as a layperson or a monk, and focus on the immediate problem by observing your mind. If suffering is found, identify the cause and solve it there according to the principle that everything arises by a cause. Gradually, you become a monk living in the laypeople's home. Finally, you can no longer stand it and get yourself truly ordained.

M.R. Kukrit: If you say so, I believe it. At first, I felt that you suggested that we became a monk living in the laypeople's home without having to later get ordained. If you suggest the gradual cultivation of 'emptiness,' I find it acceptable.

Buddhadāsa: I say that we should use every means to get closer to emptiness. Even while we are working, eating, breathing, we should devise skilful means to get closer to emptiness despite a layperson. Our views are slightly different.

M.R. Kukrit: They are vastly different. The closer to emptiness we get, the less worldly success we have.

Buddhadāsa: That is not 'emptiness' in the sense the Buddha taught laypeople.

M.R. Kukrit: If one is a millionaire and a gentleman, it is not possible. To be a millionaire, one does have to suffer and can not be 'empty' at all.

Buddhadāsa: Can there be an *arhat* millionaire?

M.R. Kukrit: If he becomes the millionaire by heritage, it is possible. But it is not the case if he has to achieve it with his own hands, because an *arhat* never thinks of becoming a millionaire.

Buddhadāsa: Is it not possible that individuals with different levels of enlightenment are at the same time millionaires?

M.R. Kukrit: I myself do not believe so. Not to mention those enlightened individuals, even people with slight experience of emptiness like I myself do see that wealth is impermanent. So is money, or anything else. They are not self. I am not yet a millionaire. I simply have no difficulty earning my living. Actually, I have my principle that I will never earn money for future use. I earn money only when I want to buy something. When it is bought, I stop. That is why I have an 'empty' (free) time to discuss with Venerable. If I pay all the attention gaining money to be a millionaire, I would not be here today—I am not 'empty' (free).

Buddhadāsa: Is there any millionaire who feels that he has enough wealth so that he becomes interested in the *dhamma*.

M.R. Kukrit: Possible if it is said only that he gets interested. But anyone who touches money will find that it is no longer 'empty.' I do not think there is such a millionaire.

Buddhadāsa: I would like to leave the dispute over this issue to the audiences to independently consider for yourselves. I however insist that people of all ages and sexes apply the principle of always maintaining the sense of 'emptiness' as best as possible in all cases, especially when sufferings arises while you are working. The disputes over the views or appropriate time are besides the point. Even Ajarn Kukrit admits that the attachment is to be destroyed in the end because it is the principle of Buddhism. I repeat and insist that we should understand the *dhamma* in this way. That is, we should gradually get rid of the 'selfishness' until it is weak or completely destroyed. If you do it correctly, you will feel peaceful and find your work enjoyable, not tormenting, which is a spiritual progress at the same time. I insist and beg that you understand the *dhamma* in this way. I ask Ajarn Kukrit to express your opinion again.

M.R. Kukrit: I would like to make a short conclusion that I am totally agreeable with all that Venerable has said about the *dhamma*. You are absolutely right. That cravings and attachment are the cause of all sufferings is undeniable. It is verifiable. And the more we can reduce cravings and attachment, the more sufferings we can eliminate from ourselves. This is the pure *dhamma*, the unshakable. It should be promoted, understood, and propagated. My discussion simply aims at informing Venerable of the audiences' viewpoint that the practice of the *dhamma* is difficult because it requires the forsaking of 'the world' by which I mean all the troubles. 'The *dhamma*' is all the purity that is opposite to 'the world.' We are in the world. We can depend on the pure *dhamma*. The knowledge that cravings and attachment are the cause of all sufferings should always be on our mind. Meanwhile, if we keep practicing what the Buddha taught, the world will finally lose its significance for us. It is not a matter of desire. If we persist in the practice of the true *dhamma* the Buddha taught, we attain to *nibbāna* when the time is right. It is not because we desire or do not desire it. However, while we are still laypeople, it is difficult. I would like to make this clear. The choice has to be made between the worldly success and *nibbāna*. Status, fortune, conveniences are still understood to be the fruits of the practice of the *dhamma*. I insist that they are not. The effect of the practice, of making the mind empty, is liberation from sufferings. All the worldly gains bring us sufferings. They are not the true happiness. This is what we should know. If we think that empty mind helps us become a millionaire, I am not sure. But if, by 'millionaire', it means an individual rich with dhamma—the troubles he has never shake his mind, I find it acceptable. I believe it. That's it. I would like to tell you that you should be very careful when you teach people the dhamma because they easily misinterpret. For example, when you say that empty mind brings success, they misinterpret that empty mind brings financial success, because people these days think of money every breath they take. This is another obstacle to the propagation of the *dhamma* that I want to tell. Therefore, I generally do not have any disagreement, and very much appreciate with understanding the *dhamma* Venerable so deeply explained. The remarks I made have in the first place the objective of having you make elaboration, or showing the facts about laypeople, their cravings and defilements, their morality as it is today for Venerable and the audiences to learn, and to see if there is any solution in terms of the *dhamma* which tends to further benefits. This is my objective. I do not disagree with or mean to oppose monk, which will bring me

unwholesomeness. I never argue against Venerable. And, finally, I would like to honestly report that I never cling to *arhathood*. I never think of becoming an *arhat*, and never think that *arhathood* is the most precious and desirable. I never have such an attachment. These are my concluding remarks.

Buddhadāsa: I will ponder on the peculiar points you raised. If there is a chance, we will discuss again.

[Translated from the Thai version by *Pagorn Singsuriya*]

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Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was the most famous Buddhist thinker of Thailand. Kukrit Pramoj was formerly the Prime Minister of Thailand. Even though not being trained directly in Buddhist teachings, Kukrit was widely accepted as knowing Buddhism deeply. The dialogue between Buddhadāsa and Kukrit was held about forty years ago. It is recorded as one of the major events of Thai Buddhism, in which the great thinkers, one of religious backgrounds and one of the worldly experiences, interestingly exchanged their profound views about Buddhist ethics and Thai society.

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