

Let's All Be Buddhadāsas



Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

A 'Message from Suan Mokkh'

Let's All Be Buddhadāsas



by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Messages from Suan Mokkh Series – No. 5

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by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Translated from the Thai by Santikaro Upasaka

มาเป็นพุทธทาสกันเถิด

This article was prepared in 1988 by Ajahn Buddhadāsa as part of a series of six pamphlets to be distributed at a major exhibition on his life and work organized by Ajahn Runjuan Indarakamhaeng and other students at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Subsequently, all six pamphlets were first published in 1990 by Vuddhidhamma Fund as *Messages of Truth from Suan Mokkh*.

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Anumodanā

To all Dhamma comrades, those helping to spread Dhamma:

Break out the funds to spread Dhamma to let faithful trust flow,
Broadcast majestic Dhamma to radiate long living joy.
Release unexcelled Dhamma to tap the spring of virtue,
Let safely peaceful delight flow like a cool mountain stream.
Dhamma leaves of many years sprouting anew, reaching out,
To unfold and bloom in the Dhamma centers of all towns.
To spread lustrous Dhamma and in hearts glorified plant it,
Before long, weeds of sorrow, pain, and affliction will flee.
As virtue revives and resounds throughout Thai society,
All hearts feel certain love toward those born, aging, and dying.
Congratulations and blessings to all Dhamma comrades,
You who share Dhamma to widen the people's prosperous joy.
Heartiest appreciation from Buddhādāsa Indapaṇṇo,
Buddhist Science ever shines beams of Bodhi long lasting.
In grateful service, fruits of merit and wholesome successes,
Are all devoted in honor to Lord Father Buddha.
Thus may the Thai people be renowned for their virtue,
May perfect success through Buddhist science awaken their hearts.
May the King and his family live long in triumphant strength,
May joy long endure throughout this our world upon earth.

Buddha dāsa

*Mokkhabālārāma
Chaiya, 2 November 2530 (1987)
Translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu
3 February 2531 (1988)*

Foreword

Ajahn Buddhādāsa took on the penname Buddhādāsa as an aspiration and calling, to dedicate his life in service of Lord Buddha. Similarly, his brother took the name Dhammadāsa and a close friend took the name Sanghadāsa. All three are chanted in Thai monasteries and homes withing the morning devotional service. They are not intended as personal names. They don't belong to anyone. We can all share in their noble aspirations.

This article aims to inspire similar dedication in everyone who takes refuge in Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, in order that the four noble truths become manifest and suffering quenches.

Santikaro

Let's All Be Buddhādāsas

*An article written on 30 April 2531 (1988)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma, Chaiya*

There is a kind of servitude or slavery that doesn't need abolishing. The more there is of it the better. If we all were such servants, the world would be free of crisis and at peace. What kind of servant is this? A servant of the Buddha, that is, a *buddhadāsa*.

***Buddhadāsa* means one who offers her or his life in service of the Lord Buddha.** We do so feeling indebted to the Buddha's Great Compassion, out of gratitude, and seeing how such a life benefits all humanity. Thus, we wholeheartedly dedicate our bodies and lives to serve the Lord Buddha in every way we can, in order to carry out what we believe to be the Buddha's purpose.

Which Buddha do we serve? To answer in ordinary people language, we serve the historical person who appeared in the world, awakened as a Buddha, and taught sentient beings until the end of his life more than 2,500 years ago. However, if we answer in Dhamma language, we serve the Buddha spoken of in the words "***Whoever sees the Dhamma, sees me; whoever see me, sees the Dhamma.***" This is the Buddha that exists throughout endless time and is found in everyone who sees the Dhamma, that is, natural truth, the reality of how things naturally are. This natural Buddha is the mindful wisdom

(*sati-paññā*) that can quench suffering, as spoken of in the words “**Whoever sees dependent co-arising, sees the Dhamma.**”¹

If we follow this principle, serving the Buddha simply means serving the wise awareness in oneself that sees the Dhamma so thoroughly as to end suffering in oneself, and then helping others to end suffering also, thus benefiting the people of the world in line with the Buddha’s purpose. Servants of the Buddha take this to be the duty of their lives and carry it out wholeheartedly.

How do we serve? We serve by establishing correctness in the study (*pariyatti*) and practice (*paṭipatti*) that lead to true realization (*paṭivedha*) of Dhamma. We serve by helping fellow humans to understand Dhamma, accept Dhamma, use Dhamma, benefit from Dhamma, and live peacefully and coolly with Nibbāna here and now in proportion to the wisdom and ability of each person. We serve by propagating this wisdom throughout this world and all worlds. We disseminate Dhamma among all beings, including celestial and human. Humans are those who must live through their own sweat, while celestials are those who have no personal experience of perspiration. Here ‘all worlds’ refers to all the places where people wander aimlessly through indulgence in sensuality, physical and material forms, and formless or abstract things, such as power, fate, influence, and even goodness. In people language, ‘world’ means the externally visible, physical planet on which we live. In Dhamma language, it refers to the worlds within people, that is, the different levels and realms of mind. Dhamma must rule genuinely and thoroughly throughout both this world and all worlds.

How can Dhamma become popular throughout the world? When people from all walks of life incorporate Dhamma into their everyday lives, then everyone will be mindful, wise, clearly

¹ *Paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent co-arising) is the law of interdependent, mutual causality that shows how everything depends on other things as causes and conditions, especially suffering and the way out of suffering.

aware, calmly collected, and tolerant in carrying out their duties in all times and places, in every moment and square inch of their lives. People will do their duties joyfully all the while they work – not only when they get paid and spend their earnings on the various roads to ruin (*apāyamukha*, vices). They will live righteously all day long, so that when night comes, they can raise their hands reverently and bow to themselves. This is genuine heaven here and now. Nobody will be unemployed because everyone will know that all their work and duties are Dhamma itself, as people knew in ancient times, even before the Buddha appeared.

What is it to be correct in study, practice, and realization?

‘Correct’ or ‘right’ doesn’t depend here on the standards of logic or speculative philosophy. Rather, something is correct according to Buddhist principles when it results in nobody being harmed or oppressed, and everyone benefits. This can be experienced directly, without the need to believe an external authority or be told by somebody else (*sanditṭhiko*). Anybody can see for themselves when something is correct. Correctness is expressed in flesh and blood (*ehipassiko*) and it bears fruit unconnected with time – unconnected with past, present, or future lives – because the fruits occur immediately whenever duty is performed (*akāliko*). To be correct means to not bother or harm anyone and to bring good results to all involved, including oneself. The meaning is clear enough; there is no need to argue about it or take each other to court. *Pariyatti* is correct knowledge, *paṭipatti* is correct action, and *paṭivedha* is the correct result simply because one understood and acted correctly.

How can suffering be quenched? When people have sufficient understanding of *suññatā* (voidness), *tathatā* (thusness), and *atammayatā* (unconcoctability), nothing can stir them up or cause them trouble. Their minds don’t fall under the power of positivity and negativity because they see everything as impermanent (*aniccaṃ*), prone to decay and suffering (*dukkhaṃ*), and not-self (*anattā*). They have peaceful hearts and cool minds in daily life. They

don't hunger for anything except the contentment of knowing they have done their duties correctly. Their sweat is holy water that entices the gods and sacred things to help them. They know most clearly and certainly that if they don't live Dhammically, that is, do their duties, then nothing sacred can help them, even a herd of supposedly holy things. When they perform their duties correctly, their very sweat becomes the God, or 'All the Sacred Powers in the Universe,' that alone can help them. These people have firm conviction that whoever they seem to be, that 'self' alone will help them until such (illusory) self is finished and no more help is needed. While selfishness is hot and burns, unselfishness or the end of selfishness is cool and soothes. Whatever they do, they do it with mindful wisdom or right understanding, rather than through the power of selfishness that burns as long as it is around.

How do we end selfishness? We end selfishness by studying the lack of a real, abiding self (*anattā*). Body and mind are natures able to know, think, feel, speak, and act in all kinds of ways without needing any spirit or ghost – self or soul – to possess them. Thus, everything can be done in line with natural law according to whatever results are required. If one is still foolish enough to think there's a self, at least don't be selfish about it; otherwise, it will bite and chew with greed, hatred, and delusion, which are like fires. Be mindful and fully aware when experiencing the objects of the senses, so that experience isn't concocted into selfishness; simply deal with each object wisely as circumstances require. With right understanding (*sammāditṭhi*), see clearly and continuously that selfishness, or clinging to body-mind or the five *khandhas* as 'self,' always causes the painful experience of *dukkha*. Such clinging is suffering itself. Without such clinging, *dukkha* can't happen and life doesn't get hot and bothered.

What is the highest right understanding? The highest right understanding begins with the knowledge or understanding that all things are concoctions created by causes and conditions,

which are themselves concocted and which subsequently lead to the creation of other things through processes that go on endlessly. All this concocting is the stream of change or impermanence called *aniccam*. Due to this constant interaction with inconstant, changing things, they are difficult to bear and endure. This symptom is called *dukkham*. Because there is nothing that is immune to change and unsatisfactoriness, we see that there is no lasting self or entity, that everything is not-self (*anattā*). That everything is transient, unsatisfactory, and without an abiding self is called *dhammatthitatā*, the ordinary, natural way things are. They are this way because the law of nature makes them so.

The law of nature is called *dhammaniyaṃatā*. The fact that everything happens according to causes and conditions is called *idappaccayatā*, which is the law of nature equal in power to what people call ‘God.’ That there is nothing able to withstand or block the law of *idappaccayatā* is called *suññatā*, the voidness that is empty of self and any meaning of selfhood. The highest truth is called *tathatā*, thusness, that things are just as they are and don’t jump to our wishes; whoever tries to go against this truth by indulging their desires will be bitten, chewed up, and spit out, that is, will suffer. Finally, there arises the experience of *atamayātā* (unconcoctability), the realization that nothing can be relied on or depended upon ever again, which we express in ordinary street language as ‘I ain’t gonna mess with you no more!’ When dependency is abandoned, the path and its fruits are realized.² *Dhammatthiti-ñāṇa*, knowing the truths of all created things, is fulfilled in *atamayātā*. From there follows the group of *nibbāna-ñāṇa*, the insight knowledges that transcend worldly experience and are the beginning of coolness, the core meaning of Nibbāna.

The world is transformed into a cool, peaceful place once

² He later spoke of these insights as ‘the nine eyes.’ They are explained in more detail in *Mindfulness with Breathing: Unveiling the Secrets of Life* (Wisdom, Boston, 1998) and elsewhere.

it is full of *sīladhamma*, the natural, normal unperturbed condition of people's minds. This can happen despite the ordinary busyness and commotion of the external world. A cool peace of mind is easy to find among these people, no matter how confused and tumultuous the situations they are in, because their minds are free of foolish clinging, refusing to fall for the ordinary ways of the world. In a world full of *sīladhamma*, there will be fewer prisons, police stations, courts, psychotherapy clinics, psychiatric hospitals, and suicide hotlines. Loving-kindness and honesty will be common everywhere in such a society, like the world of Phra Sri Ariya Metteya, the future Buddha of Loving-kindness.³ Even if nuclear missiles strike, people will still laugh, being free of clinging to self, and won't see it as anything strange. Due to the power of *sammādiṭṭhi* (right understanding) as explained above, they won't let it stir up any suffering or fear. All of this will be the fruits of the labor of all the buddhadāsas who have done their duties to the fullest of their capabilities and wisdom.

How many buddhadāsas can there be? If we don't overlook them out of carelessness or narrow-mindedness, we will find Servants of the Buddha all over and in great number. However, they don't call themselves 'buddhadāsa,' fearing dishonor, and prefer to be called *upāsaka* and *upāsikā* (devoted followers, men and women who are close to the Buddha and His teaching). Each day during the evening service, they all chant "*Buddhassāhasmi dāso va, Buddho me sāmikissaro*" (I am the Lord Buddha's servant, the Lord Buddha is my master). Are they blindly declaring themselves to be servants of the Buddha without knowing what they mean? Or do they understand the profound meaning of these words? This should be carefully examined.

³ Tan Ajahn liked to refer to this popular belief, emphasizing that this Buddha would appear when we practiced appropriately and not merely after a certain number of years (popularly believed to be 5,000 following the passing of the Buddha of this era, Gotama).

To be a buddhadāsa truly and fully according to the Buddha's purpose means to carry out that duty perfectly and not just declare something loudly without understanding it. To be a buddhadāsa is to carry out one's duty wholeheartedly and successfully according to the Buddha's purpose. Expressed most succinctly, the Buddha's purpose is for everyone to fully understand, be awakened, and blossom perfectly into life free of suffering. Current understanding treats Nibbāna – which is directly experienced by oneself (*sandiṭṭhikaṃ*), unconnected with time (*akālikaṃ*), for inviting others to come and see (*ehi-passikaṃ*), and the heart of Buddhahood – as something beyond our abilities and, anyway, out-of-date. In effect, this means that Buddhism has disappeared in an unbelievably pitiful way. All who volunteer to be buddhadāsas need to be sufficiently aware of this situation.

Everyone can be a buddhadāsa and has everything needed to be one, lacking only *sammādiṭṭhi*, right understanding or correct view. If we look carefully, we will discover that there are more than a few buddhadāsas around, only they don't reveal themselves because when thoroughly committed it isn't necessary to show off. This invitation to be a buddhadāsa doesn't require declarations or displays. Just do it genuinely by being a good example of the cool, peaceful life; by endeavoring to point out that life to others so they better understand this system of life; and by striving to help fellow humans understand Dhamma. Further, don't consider any of these a favor to anyone or expect anything in return. Everyone can participate more or less; there isn't anyone who is incapable of helping somehow.

Finally, when we Buddhists have carried out the Buddha's purpose to the fullest of our capabilities, the Buddha's wishes will be fulfilled. Benefits and happiness will fill the world; all worlds, including the worlds of celestials (*deva-loka*), tempters (*māra-loka*), and gods (*brahma-loka*); and all beings, including sages (*samaṇa*), priests (*brāhmin*), celestials (*deva*), and humans (*manussa*), fulfilling

the Buddha's purpose for the benefit of all beings.⁴

So, please, let's all be buddhadāsas. There's no better time and place than right here and now. Let's do it!



⁴ These various worlds and kinds of beings are mentioned throughout the Suttas, and are chanted every morning in Thai temples:

Yo imaṃ lokam sadevakam samārakam sabrahmakam
Who for this world, including the worlds of benevolent, tempting, and
godly beings,
Sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiṃ pajam sadevamanussam
For the benefit of all beings, seekers and sages, celestials and humans,
Sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā pavedesi
Has through supreme insight realized and revealed the final quenching
of dukkha.

They may be interpreted literally or as qualities of being or states of
existence that one may inhabit at any time, depending on circumstances.

BIA 3.1/20 (1/2) Box 6

สังขสาร = มา เป็นพุทธทาสกันเถิด! (แนบพัน)

พุทธทาส = ทาสของพระพุทธรองค
 ทาสที่ไม่ต้องเอ็ก = ยิ่งมากยิ่งขึ้น
ผู้มีใจพระพุทธรองค อย่างถวายชีวิต โดยพระบาทสมเด็จพระปกเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว

พุทธรองคไหน = ผู้ใดเห็นธรรม ผู้ใดเห็นเรา ผู้ใดเห็นในเง
 เห็นธรรม = เห็นปฏิจสงฆมุนาพ-ปริยัติ-ปฏิบัติ-ปฏิเวธ
 สรวม = ระบอบปฏิบัติ ที่คัมพุทธโคสันเจิง ในฐานะหนาที่

ทาสรับใจอย่างไร = ใหม่ความถูกต้อง ทั้งส่วนปริยัติ และปฏิบัติ
 ไพบรรหลายทั่วทั้งโลก และทุกโลก

ถูกต้องอย่างไร = ชนิดคัมพุทธโคจริง
 ในลักษณะ สันติปฏิโค - อกาลิโก - เอติมัสสิโก

แพร่หลายอย่างไร = กลายเป็นสิ่งที่มีในชีวิตประจำวัน
 ทุกคนมี สติ - ปัญญา - สัมปชัญญะ - สมาธิ ในหน้าที่
 ทุกคนทำหน้าที่ อย่างสมบูรณ์ มีความสุขในการ

✓ ทุกโลกอย่างไร = โลกในภาษาคน โลกนอกตัวคน - โลกทิพย์
 โลกในภาษารวม โลกในตัวคน - ในจิตภูมิ ๘

คัมพุทธโคจริงอย่างไร = มีความเป็นในชีวิตประจำวัน ของทุกคน.
 โลกมีนิพพาน เพราะหิมีทีความเห็นแก่ตัว.

ทำอย่างไรจึงเป็น = หมกความเห็นแก่ตัว - มูลเหตุแห่งวิกฤตกาล พ.
หมกความเห็นว่ามีตัว - มูลเหตุแห่งความเห็นแก่ตัว

ทำอย่างไรจึงจะหมด = เราดึงหัวใจของพุทธ ควบ สัมมาทิฏฐิ ๘
 จนมีสัมมัตตะ 10 = (มีปัญญา-ศีล-สมาธิ-มรรค-ผล)

สัมมาทิฏฐิอย่างไร = ทั้งหมดมีแต่กระแสแห่งอัมปิมีปัจจัย
 อนัตตา-สุญญตา-คตาตา- สัพเพ ชัมมา นาสัง อภินิจรสวปะ อจันตปะ

ในที่สุดโลกเป็นอย่างไร = เพิ่มไปด้วยศีลธรรม - ภาวะปรกติ
 เพิ่มไปด้วยเมตตา-ข้อสัจย์ - โลกพระศรีอารยเมทไตรย

“Let’s All Be Buddhādāsas” Notes typed by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu.
 Ref. Archives document of the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives
 BIA 3.1/20 (1/2) Box 6. page 121.

* archives.bia.or.th *

About the Author

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

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

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

About the Translator

Santikaro went to Thailand with the Peace Corps in 1980, was ordained as a Theravada monk in 1985, trained at Suan Mokkh under Ajahn Buddhadasa, and became his primary English translator. Santikaro led meditation retreats at Suan Mokkh for many years, and was unofficial abbot of nearby Dawn Kiam. He is a founding member of Think Sangha, a community of socially engaged Buddhist thinker activists that has given special attention to the ethical and spiritual impact of consumerism and other modern developments.

Santikaro returned to the USA's Midwest in 2001 and retired from formal monastic life in 2004. He continues to teach in the Buddhist tradition with an emphasis on the early Pāli sources and the insights of Ajahn Buddhadasa. He and his wife Jo Marie are founders of Kevala Retreat, a modern American expression of Buddhist practice, study, and social responsibility in rural Wisconsin. There he continues to study, practice, translate the work of his teacher, teach, and imagine the future of Buddha-Dhamma in the West.

‘Messages from Suan Mokkh’ Series

- #01 *Education Critique*
- #02 *Nibbāna for Everyone*
- #03 *A Single Bowl of Sauce Solves All the World’s Problems*
- #04 *Kamma in Buddhism*
- #05 *Let’s All Be Buddhadāsas*
- #06 *Help, Kālāma Sutta! Help!*

Recommended Reading (Books)

- *Mindfulness With Breathing: A Manual for Serious Beginners*
- *Handbook for Mankind*
- *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh*
- *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*
- *Keys to Natural Truth*
- *Living in the Present without Past without Future*
- *Natural Cure for Spiritual Disease: A Guide into Buddhist Science*
- *Nibbāna for Everyone*
- *No Religion*
- *The Prison of Life*
- *Patīccasamuppāda: Practical Dependent Origination*
- *A Single Bowl of Sauce: Teachings beyond Good and Evil*
- *Void Mind*
- *Buddha-Dhamma for Inquiring Minds*

Online Resources

www.bia.or.th

www.suanmokkh.org

www.kevalaretreat.org

www.youtube.com/@buddhadasabhikkhu7829

www.soundcloud.com/buddhadasa

Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives

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



Kevala Retreat

Kevala Retreat is a Dhamma refuge in the USA's Midwest inspired by Suan Mokkh. Here, Santikaro and friends work to nurture a garden of liberation along the lines taught by Ajahn Buddhadāsa, where followers of the Buddha-Dhamma Way can explore Dhamma as Nature and in the Pāli suttas.



“Buddhadāsa means one who offers her or his life in service of the Lord Buddha. We do so feeling indebted to the Buddha’s Great Compassion, out of gratitude, and seeing how such a life benefits all humanity. Thus, we wholeheartedly dedicate our bodies and lives to serve the Lord Buddha in every way we can, in order to carry out what we believe to be the Buddha’s purpose.”

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

