



# DHAMMIC SOCIALISM



BUDDHADASA BHIKKHU

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# **DHAMMIC SOCIALISM**

by  
**Bhikkhu Buddhadasa**

Chief translator and editor  
**Donald K. Swearer**



**THAI INTER - RELIGIOUS  
COMMISSION FOR DEVELOPMENT**  
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*The Siamese, Cambodian and Laotian Buddhist Era seems to be one year later than that of Burma, Sri Lanka and India. In fact this is not so. The difference is that while the latter regards the year of the Maha Parinibbana as B.E.I, the former takes it to be the first anniversary after the Master's Passing Away. For example this year is B.E. 2529 according to the Siamese, Cambodian and Laotian Calendar, but it is B.E. 2530 according to the Burmese, Ceylonese and Indian Calendar.*

*This kingdom was known as Siam until 1939, when its name was changed to Thailand. Then it reverted to the original name again in 1946. Two years after the coup d'état of 1947 it was decreed that the country would be called Thailand, and it remains so officially. Ironically the kingdom has since been ruled by one dictator after another with very brief liberal democratic intervals. The name, Thailand, signifies the crisis of traditional Siamese Buddhist values. By removing from the nation the name it had carried all its history is in fact the first step in the psychic dehumanization of its citizens, especially when its original name was replaced by a hybrid, Anglicized word. This new name also implies chauvinism and irredentism.*

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## Preface

The Venerable Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's attainment of 80 years of age in May 1986 is a cause for Buddhist celebration. For he is a rare phenomenon in the history of Buddhism. With time, understanding and interpretation of religions can go much astray from their original essence. It needs the very wise ones to reinterpret them for contemporaries. Acharn Buddhadasa belongs to this group of very rare individuals with extraordinary intelligence. His voluminous teachings and styles have profound effects on the vision of a great number of people.

The Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development is pleased to be able to publish this book as a humble homage to the great sage. The Commission thanks Donald K. Swearer, Christian and Buddhadasa scholar, who has performed splendidly in bringing this book out. The theme he has chosen is very timely. The people in the world seem to be left with only two political choices, capitalism or socialism. These are too narrow and do not offer solution to present day world crisis. Actually, the crisis is precipitated by the two opposing choices.

Acharn Buddhadasa suggests *Dhammic Socialism* as a better alternative. The Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development hopes that this book will stimulate the English readership to pay more attention to the more voluminous works of this great sage. Only when we together are wiser can peace and development prevail.

**Prawase Wasi**  
*Chairman*



## **INTRODUCTION**





## **THE VISION OF BHIKKHU BUDDHADASA**

In February 1986/2529 I made my third pilgrimage to Wat Suan Mokh (The Garden of Liberation) to visit Acharn Buddhadasa Bhikkhu in honor of his 80th birthday. Since I first visited Suan Mokh twenty years ago many changes have taken place. Sounds from trucks hurtling along the southern superhighway disturb the quiet of this forested retreat. Two decades ago relatively few lay devotees found their way to this remote hermitage seven kilometers along a dirt road outside of the small, forgettable town of Chaiya. Today the grounds of Suan Mokh harbour several guest houses to accommodate the 800 people who are often there at any one time, a total of nearly 100,000 visitors a year. A special meditation retreat during the first ten days of every month has been established for the increasing numbers of foreigners coming to Suan Mokh, and ground has been broken for a meditation center to be known as Suan Mokh International. Over 1000 trainees a year receive instruction from Acharn Buddhadasa and Acharn Bodhi, the assistant abbot, who has been at Suan Mokh for 22 years. Furthermore, the small collection of books written by Bhikkhu Buddhadasa given to me by students at Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University 30 years ago has been dwarfed by what has become the largest corpus of thought ever published by a single Theravada thinker in the

entire history of the tradition. For years to come students of Thai Buddhism will be summarizing, distilling, and interpreting Buddhadasa's contribution to Buddhist Thought. History may well judge him as the most seminal Theravada thinker since Buddhagosa, and may evaluate Buddhadasa's role within the Buddhist tradition to be on a par with such great Indian Buddhist thinkers as Nagarjuna with whom he has been compared.

Buddhadasa's place in Thai Buddhism has certainly been assured, but the nature and extent of his contribution will continue to be clarified and developed for years to come. Like many original thinkers, Buddhadasa has been criticized from several fronts—by meditation practitioners for the prolixity of his writing, by traditional Abhidhamma philosophers for the unorthodoxy of his thought, by political activists for his social idealism, and so on. In particular, because he has chosen to teach from Suan Mokh, a forest hermitage removed from the hustle and bustle of modern urban life, Buddhadasa has been misperceived as one who epitomizes an otherworldly Buddhism, or as one who advocates a practice aiming at personal rather than social transformation. Nothing could be further from the truth. To be sure, Buddhadasa emphasizes the importance of right understanding and individual practice, but Suan Mokh, itself, represents an ideal *community* rather than an individualistic retreat from the world. There monk and laity, men and women, young and elderly, humans and all kinds of animals and plants live together in harmonious balance. Buddhadasa teaches under the trees surrounded by attentive listeners, sleeping

dogs and pecking chickens. Accommodations are adequate but not excessive. The simplicity of Suan Mokh represents an ideal balance (*prakati*), not a return to primitiveness but a state of Nature (*dhammajāti*) in which all sentient beings recognizing their common humanity, act out of mutual concern and respect for the good of whole. Buddhadasa calls such a community a dhammic socialism (*dhammika sanghaniyama*).

It seems appropriate in this day and age when the superpowers threaten the world with nuclear holocaust that in honor of Buddhadasa's 80th year his political philosophy be given special emphasis and attention. To be sure, his view of dhammic socialism cannot be divorced from the seminal themes of Buddhadasa's thought which emphasize, in particular, the overcoming of attachment to self, to "me and mine" (Thai : *tua kū khong kū*). In the most profound sense both personal and social wellbeing stem from a transformation of self-attachment and self-love to selflessness and love of others. A socialist society is a community based on a fundamental sense of the equality of all beings. Such a view does not deny the existence of differences, but all, regardless of position and status, recognize their place within the economy of the whole. Thus, the man of wealth should not be a 'capitalist' who hoards for his own pleasure but a *śreṣṭhi*, one whose high position enables him to be a benefactor to laborers, workers and common folk.

Buddhadasa's vision of the good and just society coincides with his view of an original state of nature or an original human condition, one of mutual interdependence,

harmony and balance. By its very being this state of Nature is selfless — individuals are not attached to self for its own sake. But with the loss of this state of innocence individuals are subject to the bondage of attachment (*upādāna*) and unquenchable thirst (*taṇhā*). Consequently, sentient beings need to find ways to return or restore this condition of mutual interdependence and harmony, love and respect. On the personal level the attainment of wisdom (*bodhi*) through the methods of awareness (*sati*), continuous attention (*sampajañña*) and focused concentration (*samādhi*) serve to break through the conditions of greed, ignorance and lust (*kilesa*); while on the social level those in positions of power promote economic and political policies which after meeting basic physical needs promote a balanced development in which matters of spirit (*citta*) assume their rightful dominance.

Buddhadasa's notion of a truly human community is a universal vision shared by all religions. This socialistic society is one governed by love (*mettā*). In the language of Buddhist millenarian expectations, it is the age of the Buddha Maitreya. But Buddhadasa's teachings regarding Buddhist Socialism cannot be consigned to an otherworldly messianism. His vision serves as a critique of Western political theories of capitalism and communism, and provides the basic principles for a political philosophy with the potential to guide not only Thailand in the coming years, but all societies struggling to create a just and equitable social, political and economic order.

As the editor and one of the translators of this volume of Buddhadasa's essays dealing with his social and political

philosophy, I wish to express my deep gratitude to the Venerable Buddhadasa not only for his exposition of the *dhamma*, but for what his teaching and example have meant to me over the past twenty years. I also wish to thank Sulak Sivaraksa for his long-standing support of my study of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, and for making the publication of this volume available on the occasion of Buddhadasa's 80th birthday.

The translations of Buddhadasa's essays were undertaken jointly by myself, Ms. Susan Miller, M.A., of Seattle and Chiangmai, and Dr. Pataraporn Sirikanchana, Department of Philosophy, Thammasat University. Phra Rajavaramuni also worked with the editor on the translation of the Value of Morality. While the translations are far from literal, we have done our best to render accurately the sense and meaning of the text. We hope that this volume will contribute to a broader understanding of the thought of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa; promote a discussion of the place of Dhammic socialism in Thailand's political future; and help to articulate a unique, yet universal vision of world peace and harmony.

Finally, the editor would like to express his gratitude to the Rockefeller Foundation and Swarthmore College for support to pursue research on the ways in which contemporary Theravada Buddhists are reinterpreting their tradition, especially in the area of social ethics. I also wish to thank the committee for the Promotion of the Arts and Culture at Chiangmai University, Chiangmai, Thailand, for making university housing available to me while I pursued research on traditional Lanna Buddhism, and also on con-

temporary religious movements in Thailand.

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## DHAMMIC SOCIALISM

Dhammic Socialism might be rendered simply as Buddhist socialism. I have chosen to use the Anglicized version of the Theravada Buddhist term, *dhamma* (Sanskrit: *dharma*) for three reasons: (1) the term reflects the language of the Thai monk, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, whose political philosophy is the focus of this discussion; (2) it is an expression other liberal Thai Buddhist thinkers either use or are sympathetic toward; (3) the title serves as a self-conscious contrast with the considerable amount of scholarship in the 1960's on Buddhist socialism. The following essay is not an extension of that discussion, but focuses specifically on the work of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa as it pertains to the subject of dhammic socialism within the context of contemporary Thai Buddhism. Before embarking on this task, however, a brief examination of Buddhist socialism, on the one hand, and the contemporary Thai religious situation, on the other, is in order.

### **Buddhist Socialism**

Buddhist socialism as an ideology and a political program came to the fore in the Buddhist cultures of Asia at the end of the colonial era and beginning of the modern Asian nation-state; roughly speaking, in the two decades

following the end of World War II. As an ideology it was indebted to the Buddhist understanding of the world and the meaning of human existence, and to many of the liberal democratic ideals of the West. As a political and economic program it reflected Western socialist egalitarian ideals of the production and distribution of wealth. It was, in short, a syncretic marriage of varying elements from Buddhism and Western political philosophies by Asian leaders who, for the most part, had either been educated in the West or under a Western educational system.

In the Theravada Buddhist cultures of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia the most prominent political leaders espousing the rhetoric of Buddhist socialism were S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike who became the prime minister of Sri Lanka in 1958 on a platform of Buddhist socialism, U Nu, the Prime Minister of Burma from 1948 to 1962, and Prince Sihanouk in Cambodia (Kampuchea) during the 1950's and 60's until his overthrow as a consequence of America's misguided policy in Indochina. It has been argued that the rhetoric of Buddhist socialism espoused by these leaders had more symbolic value than substantive meaning. While that may be true, in general Buddhist socialism can be characterized as an attempt to integrate a sense of cultural-national identity represented by Buddhism as an organized religion and a spiritual value into the political and economic structures and programs of the modern West. U Nu, for example, believed that a national community could come into being in Burma only if individuals were enabled to overcome their self-acquisitive interests. The state should guarantee sufficient material



needs for everyone—the four Buddhist requisites of food, shelter, clothing and medicine, should minimize class and property distinctions attendant with the colonial period, and should encourage all citizens to strive for moral and mental perfection. In short, the state was to meet the material needs of the people, and Buddhism their spiritual needs. Buddhist socialism, has, to be sure, not been limited just to Theravada cultures. Buddhist leaders during the Vietnam war used this language, and the head of the Sokka Gakkai movement in Japan and founder of the Kometo political party has characterized his political philosophy as a Buddhist socialism.

During the 1960's when the language of Buddhist socialism was on the lips of various Buddhist political leaders, Western scholars devoted a considerable amount of attention to this subject. There was and continues to be studies on the relationship between the classical ideals of Buddhist kingship and modern political leaders of the Buddhist-socialism stripe, as well as interpretations of the various aspects of Buddhism as a vehicle of political legitimation in both historical and modern periods.<sup>1</sup> To my knowledge, however, work has not been done on a Buddhist thinker who has evolved a theory of Buddhist socialism specifically out of Buddhist categories rather than a somewhat superficial amalgam of Western political philosophy and Buddhism. This essay represents a preliminary attempt in that direction, an analysis of the religio-political philosophy of Thailand's most creative, controversial and significant Buddhist thinker, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa. I emphasize preliminary because this study is

based largely on only three of several of his essays on dhammic socialism, namely: *Prachāthipadai Baap Sangha-Niyama* (“Democratic Socialism”), *Sangha-Niyama Chanit Thi Chuay Lok Dai* (“A Socialism Capable of Benefitting the World”), and *Dhammika Sangha-Niyama Baap Padetchakan* (“A Dictatorial Dhammaic Socialism”). Thus, although Buddhadasa’s several writings/lectures on this theme tend to be somewhat repetitive, the reader should keep in mind that this paper is not an attempt to offer a comprehensive analysis of his treatment of this timely subject.

### **Contemporary Thai Religious Situation**

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa has been and continues to be the most influential Buddhist thinker in Thailand, and he has certainly been the most creative and controversial Theravada interpreter in the modern period of world history. Earlier work on Buddhadasa in English has discussed various aspects of his life and thought and need not be repeated here,<sup>2</sup> but it will be useful to make a few comments about Buddhadasa’s place within the contemporary Thai religious situation.

Thailand is currently undergoing dramatic and rapid changes in nearly all aspects of life. Urban areas like Bangkok have grown dramatically as the nation has attempted to industrialize and promote tourism as a major source of foreign exchange. Throughout the country the effects of modernization and at least superficial Westernization are readily apparent. As one Buddhist

critic has observed, even in villages it is no longer acceptable to offer a guest the traditional glass of rain water; one has to offer a Pepsi or Coke, an observation which says a lot about changing traditions, values, and the economy.

The external pressures challenging traditional cultural norms and stimulating change are not simply economic and technological, but also political. For the past decade, in particular, Thailand has had to defend disrupted border regions in the northeast, northwest, and south. One of the most pervasive sources of change, furthermore, has been through education. Not only is modern Thai education essentially Western, many Thai professionals are educated abroad.

The effects of Thailand's development in the past thirty years have badly eroded the significance and meaning of traditional symbols, institutions, and cultural values. Traditional Thai Buddhism—its beliefs, practices and institutions—has lost its centrality in some sectors of Thai life, especially among the educated elites. For instance, a recent booklet prepared by a popular new religious group primarily for university students offers basic instruction to its readers on the proper way to pay respects to the Buddha image, instructions which seem to assume that the audience for which the book is intended is largely religiously illiterate. In a somewhat more caustic vein, a recent speaker at Chiang Mai University observed that Thailand has over a quarter of a million monks in robes in thousands of monasteries throughout the land, but that the country, nonetheless, has more prostitutes than monks.

Critics of traditional Thai Buddhism have pointed out that while monks used to be the most respected class of society, that for some people such is no longer the case. Monks may come from poorer classes of society and may not be well educated, or can be relatively lax in their observance of the Buddhist disciplines. Thus, in practical terms, the monastic ideal no longer has the impact it once had, especially among the educated elites. Critics also argue that the prestige of the *sangha* (monastic order) has also been compromised by its preoccupation with rituals (*pithi-kamma*) or with the "form" of the tradition rather than the substance. On the one hand, the ritualistic orientation of the function of the monk tends to characterize the role of the *sangha* as largely ceremonial. Monks spend a great deal of time chanting at auspicious occasions such as the opening of a department store or at the dedication of a new industrial site. On the other hand, the ritual function of the monk tends, in many situations, to make him little more than a magician with the power and ritual knowledge which can promote worldly success and good luck.

With the modernization of Thailand challenging the status of the monk and displacing him from many of the important social roles he once played, e.g. education, the *sangha* has almost been forced into relatively formal, ceremonial, and quasi-magical roles that in an earlier period occupied a much smaller percentage of the monks' time than today. It is unfortunate that in the face of the scientific and technological revolution which has impacted

on Thailand as a rapidly developing nation that the monk may be perceived largely as the preserver of ceremonies or a purveyor of magical power.

### **Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism**

The above characterization of Thai Buddhism does not tell the whole story, by any means; however, the loyal critics of the *sangha* and observers of the contemporary religious situation would agree to its truth. Buddhadasa, as a person ahead of his times, has, for more than the past thirty years of his monastic career been a severe critic of Thai Buddhism, especially its preoccupation with empty ceremonial and magical ritual. He has urged a return to an authentic *Buddha-dhamma*, replacing merit-making (Thai: *tham punña*) with a serious quest for Nibbāna/Nirvāna, the memorization of endless categories of Abhidhamma philosophies with an understanding of the Suttas, the performance of magical rituals with the practice of meditation, and an undue emphasis on the monk with a concern for the entire Buddhist community, lay and monastic.

In order to embody or actualize these concerns Buddhadasa established a community of monks outside of Chaiya, southern Thailand, with a special emphasis on teaching the *dhamma*. To that end the main building at the center, called The Garden of Liberation (Wat Suan Mokha), is a "spiritual theater" whose walls are covered with pictures from various religious traditions teaching such fundamental Buddhist truths as impermanence (*aniccā*), suffering (*dukkha*), not-self (*anattā*), loving compassion

(*mettā-karunā*), Nibbāna and so on.

As a person ahead of his times, Buddhadasa has anticipated several of the most recent developments in Thai Buddhism, in particular the criticisms of Buddhists both inside and outside the monastic order, and sectarian movements that have arisen within the past decade. For example, one center outside of Bangkok, Wat Santi Asoka, is so critical of the traditional obsession with form and ritual that its "temple" has no Buddha image, something unheard of in Thai Buddhism. It has established a community in Nakorn Prathom, 30 miles south of Bangkok, where monks and nuns (called *sikkhamāta*), and approximately 70 families live a simple disciplined life where, among other things, they eat only one vegetarian meal a day. Wat Phra Dhammakāya, the center of another new sectarian movement, while lacking the communal character of Wat Santi Asoka, accepts as members only those monks and laypersons who are willing to practice their Buddhist faith self-consciously, including attending training sessions in meditation on weekends and during the summers.

The intellectual orientation toward Buddhism represented by Buddhadasa, which is relatively atypical of the tradition in Thailand, has been picked up by other contemporary interpreters, both lay and monastic. While there is diversity among them and significant disagreement with Buddhadasa on some points, they would include the monastic order's most highly regarded intellectual, Phra Rajavaramuni, and such well-known lay spokespersons as Sulak Sivaraksa and Dr. Prawase Wasi of Mahidol

University. A concern these Buddhist interpreters share with Buddhadasa is the crisis in Thai society and culture produced by the impact of rapid modernization and the contribution Thai Buddhism might make to some sort of sane balance. Toward this end Buddhadasa has written several important essays of religio-political philosophy which include extensive discussion of dhammic socialism, that is to say a socialism rooted in Buddha-dhamma rather than Western forms of socialism or Marxism.

It is important to keep in mind that Buddhadasa's discussion of social and political matters fits into an overall scheme of thought which begins in many respects with an emphasis on non-attachment, or, in Buddhadasa's formulation, a mind freed from preoccupation with materialism (Thai: *citta-wang*) and with the acquisitive drives of the ego (= *anattā*/not-self). Many of Buddhadasa's early writings dealt with permutations of this theme including one of his major works, *Tua Kū, Khong Kū* (Me and Mine).<sup>3</sup> To be freed from the preoccupations which define one as a self separated from and overagainst others opens one to the fundamental inter-relatedness of life for which the usual doctrinal term is *paticca-samuppāda* (inter-dependent co-arising). Indeed, Buddhadasa has written extensively about this concept. Of more interest, however, is Buddhadasa's rendering of the fundamental inter-relatedness of life as nature (Thai: *dhamma-jāti*=born of dhamma). Inherently or in its true or pristine form, nature is a state of mutual, interrelational balance; if you will, a state of "normalcy" (*prakati*). The norm-al (*prakati*) in Buddhadasa's view has both an ontological reference, i.e.

nature, or the natural, true state of things = *paticca-samuppāda*, and a moral reference:

*Prakati* has two levels: the *prakati* of nature has following nature as its norm. For example, for the body to be in the state of *prakati* according to its nature means to eat, stand, walk, sleep, bathe, and excrete. This is one kind of *prakati*. Another kind regards the problems which arise which humankind must work together to try to solve. People have to conduct themselves towards one another in such a way that things will work together as they should.<sup>4</sup>

The morality (*sīla*) of nature (*dhammajāti*) or of the way things should be norm-atively (*prakati*) is an ethic of sufficiency or moderation. It contrasts with excessiveness of any kind:

Those who hold the, 'eat well, live well,' view do not have any limits. They are always expanding until they want to equal the gods (*devatā*). Those for whom there is never enough are characterized by, 'Eat well, live well.' Those who hold the 'Eat and live only sufficiently' view represent moderation; whatever they do, they do moderately. This results in a state of normal or balanced happiness (*prakati-sukha*). They will have no problem of scarcity, and there will be no selfishness.<sup>5</sup>

The moral order, in Buddhadasa's view necessarily involves the restraint of personal ambition and all selfish egoistic drives. This community of restraint (*sanghanyama*) is the norm-ative (*prakati*), true (*dhamma-sacca*), and natural (*dhamma-jāti*) state of things. This environment where everything can be itself and at the same time provide the context for all others to do the same is, by definition,



socialistic (Pali: *sangha-niyama*; Thai: *sangkhom-niyom*). Dhammic socialism, then, for Buddhadasa is the natural state of things; the original, normative state; the mutual interactive and co-arising moral, social and natural order. It is necessarily implied or contained in the meaning of *buddha-dhamma*. Buddhism for Buddhadasa, therefore, is inherently socialistic:

*If we hold fast to Buddhism we shall have a socialist disposition in our flesh and blood. We shall see our fellow humans as friends in suffering—in birth, old age, sickness and death—and hence, we cannot abandon them... This is the ideal of pure socialism which must be acted out, not just talked about for political purposes or for selfish, devious gain.*<sup>6</sup>

For Buddhadasa, however, we are far from such a pure socialist or natural state because we have allowed ourselves to be dominated by selfish desires (*kilesa*). As a consequence, our development as human beings has been stunted, our mental and spiritual capacities in particular, so that we are little better than animals—eating, sleeping, and procreating.<sup>7</sup> Our self-centeredness which blinds us to the true nature of things promotes personal suffering (*dukkha*), and in preventing us from acting compassionately (*karunā*) contributes directly to the arising of social ills:

*In modern society there is no compassion, because people have become selfish and are attached to the idea of a self and what belongs to it. They are ignoring God's wish that we love one another, that is, that we consider the good of society before we think of our own personal gain.*<sup>8</sup>

Social problems, in Buddhadasa's view are fundamentally a result of selfish greed, of "the fact that people are after as much as they can get hold for themselves."<sup>9</sup> Hence, while the problems of society cannot be simply reduced to the personal level, their solution cannot ignore the fact that individuals have to be transformed from materialistic and self-centered preoccupations.

Buddhadasa's analysis of the human situation shares much in common with the picture we find in the Aggañña Suttanta of the Sutta Pitaka, the so-called Book of Genesis. This Suttanta justifies the selection of a righteous monarch (*dharmma-rāja*) chosen by the people (*mahāsammata*) who has the wisdom and the power to bring order into a world fundamentally disrupted by human greed. This situation of moral and social chaos had devolved from an original natural state of harmony and unity. While Buddhadasa does not specifically cite this text, his notion of nature (*dharmma-jāti*) as an original condition of perfection, unity and harmony fits the picture of the Aggañña Suttanta as does his exposition of the fundamental character of our current situation as one of moral and social chaos motivated by selfishness and greed.

In terms of political systems Buddhadasa and other liberal Thai Buddhist thinkers tend to be critical of both Western Marxism and capitalistic liberal democracies. Both, in Buddhadasa view, are adhammic in contrast to his dhammic socialism. Each political perspective has divided the world into two sides, the communist side and the capitalist side. By doing so the notion of a single

human community has been completely undermined. Furthermore, given today's technology this dualistic way of dividing up the world runs the risk of the annihilation of the human species.

*When people have fallen to such a level how can we say that they are human beings... Each side has enough support to eliminate the other, and yet they contend that they will solve the world's problems. This is like cleaning something that is dirty with dirty water, or conquering evil with evil.<sup>10</sup>*

Buddhists, in particular, have the responsibility of bringing the light of dhammic socialism into a world in which the forces of communism and liberal democratic capitalism seem poised on the edge of world-destruction:

*It is imperative that we consider this matter immediately, because human beings in this world have already lost their sense of a human nature shared by all. They are bloodthirsty and blind, using adammic systems in the name of socialism to destroy one another. True socialism must be based in dhamma, in compromise (Thai: **prani-pranom**), mutual communication, and the building of a political system to prevent mutual destruction.<sup>11</sup>*

In his essays, Buddhadasa seems to attribute communism's adhammic nature to a brutality rooted in an authoritarianism which does not sufficiently respect individual differences, and liberal democracy's adhammic character to an excessive individualism. Dhammic socialism, as we shall see, respects individual differences but as part of the economy of the whole. Buddhadasa

characterizes communism as vengeful and expressive of anger toward others.<sup>12</sup> Abandoning “pure socialism”, “worldly socialism” imposes itself on others with the power of military weapons and proposes to solve the problems of the world through armed conflict. This, in Buddhadasa’s view, is utter insanity. Furthermore, there is a fundamental flaw in the philosophy of Marxism which considers the unequal distribution of wealth to be the major problem, a problem to be corrected through force and power. What is needed,

*...is an approach that emphasizes not taking more than is needed and at the same time is in accordance with the laws of Nature, for then people would share whatever extra they had out of mettā-karunā—compassion and loving kindness. People would set aside for themselves only what they needed; anything in excess of that would be left for society.<sup>13</sup>*

Liberal democracy fares no better, however. It is based on a philosophy of the individual good rather than the good of society as a whole and inevitably promotes both selfishness and greed. The capitalistic side of liberal democracy is particularly insidious because it promotes both wanting and acquiring more than one really needs, directly counter to dhammic socialism. Buddhadasa defends a degree of economic disparity, but argues that wealth must be countered with generosity. In other words, in a dhammic socialistic society the vast disparity of wealth one finds in capitalistic societies would not be tolerated, but the wealthy would be motivated to distribute their wealth as a result of the ideals of generosity and loving kindness

instilled by religion and morality rather than being forced by the state.<sup>14</sup> Buddhadasa provides the following example;

*A person of great material wealth (Sanskrit: śreṣṭhī) in the Buddhist tradition differs greatly from the capitalist (Thai: nai thun) of today. Outside of Buddhism, śreṣṭhī has the same meaning as nai thun—one who keeps accumulating material wealth far beyond what he actually needs. In the Buddhist tradition, however, the status of a śreṣṭhī was measured by the number of rong than (Thai) he had. A rong than was a communal place where those in need could find what they lacked materially. The more rong than one had, the wealthier one was considered to be. Because of the surplus produced by the śreṣṭhī and the large number of servants and laborers they employed, they were able to build rong than as a kind of social service. Śreṣṭhī in the non-Buddhist sense, however, are strictly nai thun. They accumulate endless wealth and reinvest all the profits for themselves, while oppressing their workers. A śreṣṭhī in the Buddhist sense, on the other hand, employs workers in a cooperative effort for the welfare of the entire community.<sup>15</sup>*

Buddhist socialism is, as we have seen, rooted in the *dhamma* and, hence, is fundamentally dhammic, i.e. not to be understood either in terms of communism or liberal democratic philosophies. Dhammic socialism in Buddhadasa's view is inherent in the way things really are (=nature/*dhammajāti*). Thus, the phrase, "dhammic socialism" (*dhammika sangha-niyama*), may be said to characterize the original moral (*śīla-dhamma*) condition of individuals and society. As the original human condition of a world far from such perfection it represents the ideal societies should attempt to embody.

Dhammic socialism has three basic principles: the principle of the good of the whole, the principle of restraint

and generosity, and the principle of respect and loving-kindness. The first informs all political, economic, and social structures; the second governs individual behavior; and, the third prescribes the correct attitude toward all forms of life.

Buddhadasa addresses the first principle in the light of the crisis proportions of our current situation:

*Because the context of these problems is social and not just individual, we must turn our attention to the source of the problem: society. Whatever system is laid out for the functioning of a social group, the principles of such a system must be for the good of society as a whole and not just for individuals or for any one person. In a society that puts the interests of any one individual above those of the community, social problems cannot be effectively addressed because the context of the problems is the way society operates as a whole.*<sup>16</sup>

The principle of the good of the whole pervades all aspects of life. The body, for example, is unhealthy if its various parts are not working for the good of the whole; the well-being of a particular village depends upon the cooperation of the villagers, and, in turn, cooperation among villages:

*The entire universe is a socialist system. Countless numbers of stars in the sky exist together in a socialist system. Because they follow a socialist system they can survive. Our small universe with its sun and planets including the earth is a socialist system. Consequently, they do not collide.*<sup>17</sup>

In short, nothing in the world can exist in

isolation. Everything co-exists interdependently as part of a larger whole, whether we are speaking of an atom or molecule, human beings and societies, or the cosmos.<sup>18</sup> This, in sum, is the way of nature or the way things are constituted in essence or in truth (*dhamma-sacca*).

The original or ideal state also operates according to the principle of restraint (*niyama*), i.e. acting in terms of or in relationship to the whole rather than as an isolated entity. In terms of social groups or society, individuals restrain or limit behavior which infringes on the good of the whole. The positive side of this principle is sharing or generosity as we saw in Buddhadasa's example of the *śreṣṭhī*. He explains that an earlier age was much more aware of the almost miraculous way in which everything existed together in unity:

*Our ancestors knew this. Thus, they taught that we should do what we can to promote the co-existence of all beings, and that we should be kind to one another according to the law of nature. All living beings are able to exist to the degree they form a society, a mutually beneficial cooperative. This is the handi-work of nature. If nature lacked this character we would all die. Those who know this principle hold fast to it. Even their rice paddies are planted for the benefit of wild animals who feed on it as well as for their own consumption. They grow as much as they can to share with all forms of living beings.*<sup>19</sup>

The principle of restraint should be understood as an optimal way of life rather than as limiting human freedom. Buddhadasa's concept of nature as an original state of unity does not undermine the distinctiveness of the separate elements composing that unity. We are not only

free to be ourselves, we have an obligation to fulfill our natural being or character; however, our very distinctiveness is defined in relationship to the whole. Freedom as a doctrine of liberal democracy in capitalistic societies tends to isolate the individual from the good of the group, putting the two in tension or competition. In dhammic socialism, however, freedom necessarily involves a sequence of inter-relational matrixes from the atom to the vast reaches of the cosmos. Restraint, then, is an optimal rather than a limiting notion for it recognizes that the good of the individual parts is the good of the whole.

Dhammic socialism dictates a lifestyle of simplicity and moderation. While it recognizes that what counts as moderation, on the one hand, or excess, on the other, may vary among individuals, groups and cultures, the principle of non-excess or moderation pertains to all ages. As a Thai Buddhist monk, Buddhadasa, finds the example of the life of the Buddha and the nature of the monastic society of which he is a member particularly instructive regarding the living out of such a dhammic-socialistic-lifestyle:

*The Buddha prescribed the system of monastic discipline (vinaya) which, as we can see, binds all things together into an indissolvable group or aggregation. We know this from the word, sangha, itself which literally means such a community. It does not refer to a singular individual. When human beings live as an aggregation or group they need something to hold them together, an essential principle (dhamma-sacca) to unite them into a community in which they can live together in happiness. Upon further investigation we see that this social group lives together harmoniously with nature. For example, the vinaya demands*



*contentment and moderation in style of life. In particular, monks are under a special rule not to take more than they need. If they take more than they need they transgress the vinaya. If a monk has more than three robes, he commits an ecclesiastical offense. He has only one alms bowl and a small room in which to live... The ideal which teaches monks not to take in excess is the real foundation of socialism (sangha-niyama).<sup>20</sup>*

Buddhadasa is not here advocating that everyone should become a monk. Rather the Buddha's own "middle way" between the extremes of self-indulgence and austerity, and the example of the monk living simply according to a rule of moderation and respect for the group (*vinaya*), provide a kind of exemplary ideal of what a dhammic socialist society could be. On the material level it would provide for the four basic requisites of life—adequate food, clothing, housing and medicine. But, above all, it would provide for the moral and spiritual well being of the human community and the natural environment.

This leads us to a third principle of dhammic socialism which I would characterize as the principle of respect for life and loving-kindness, an attitude acknowledging the place of each individual within the interdependent universe we all share. This principle upholds peace and condemns war:

*Today people are so cruel that they have dropped a bomb knowing that it could kill thousands of human beings. Our ancestors would have surrendered before committing such a horrendous act. Both so-called socialist as well as capitalist countries are prepared to drop such bombs... If we want peace we should chose the path of peace. Killing others will only lead to being killed. The only way of living harmoniously together is*

*to act out of loving-kindness(mettā-karunā)... We should overcome evil with good, for evil cannot be overcome by evil.<sup>21</sup>*

In valuing all kinds of living things the principle of respect for life also provides a vantage point from which to criticize the ecological threat posed by our technological, industrialized society:

*We have entered a brutal, selfish age. Human beings have devastated nature until some kinds of plants and animals have become extinct. Indeed, some groups of humans have become extinct because of the tremendous upsurge of anti-social thought and behavior.<sup>22</sup>*

While Buddhadasa expostulates dhammic socialism from a Buddhist perspective, the philosophical underpinnings of his view are universal. His understanding of socialism as a moral theory imbedded in a particular ontology or view of reality imbues his view with the normative character of truth. Thus, to the extent that our world does not follow the principles of dhammic socialism (i.e. the *good of the whole, restraint and generosity, respect and loving-kindness*) it denies the way things really are and, consequently, represents falsity or untruth. Buddhadasa is explicit about the universalism of his view:

*All religions the world over are socialist... The founders of every religion wanted people to live according to socialist principles so that they will act in the interest of society as a whole.<sup>23</sup>*

*As to the assertion that a socialist view exists in Buddhism, in fairness, we should say it exists in all religions... Buddhism and all*

*religions are founded on the ideal of love and compassion toward all things. This engenders equality and freedom, and a sense of the inter-relatedness of all things.*<sup>24</sup>

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's interpretation of dhammic socialism is one of the few attempts on the part of an original Theravada Buddhist thinker to propose a political philosophy for his time generated out of an Asian belief system within an Asian context. Asian political leaders, the likes of Mao Tse Tung or Ho Chi Min were very much influenced by the revolutionary theories of Karl Marx; furthermore, Buddhist political leaders such as S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike were more indebted to Western political theory than Buddhadasa.

Buddhadasa has been criticized for not applying his philosophy or spelling out how his ideas might be put into practice; also, for not developing many of his ideas fully and systematically. Even though these criticisms have some merit, they need to be qualified.

The first qualification is circumstantial. While the Buddhadasa corpus of writings is vast, the great majority were taken from taped lectures. Although he has written a few systematic treatises, e.g. on *paticca samuppāda*, many topics, such as his political philosophy of dhammic socialism, have the informal and contextual character of their original lecture format. These provide the raw material for further exposition and/or analysis.

A second point to be kept in mind is that Buddhadasa's approach to questions of social ethics shares much more in common with traditional Western religious

ethics than with modern Western philosophical ethics. Buddhadasa, indeed, roundly criticizes “philosophizing”,<sup>25</sup> and it is unfair to judge his thought in terms of the intellectual rigor and sophistication of Western philosophy. When we analyze Buddhadasa’s proposals in regard to dhammika socialism we find that he combines an emphasis on universal principles with the practical concern for teaching virtue through the means of moral exemplars like the Buddha and the *sangha*. Buddhadasa, himself, of course is an important moral exemplar in Thailand today. He is not only a thinker or philosopher, but has sought to embody his ideals in building a community in southern Thailand which has attracted thousands of visitors, and which, in turn, has inspired the development of other modern Buddhist movements, e.g. Wat Santi Asoka.

Finally, it should be pointed out that Buddhadasa’s lectures and writings reflect the profound Buddhist conviction that without right understanding (*sammāditṭhi*) there will not be right action. Buddhadasa is trying to *provoke* a right understanding which will transform people’s lives and inspire them to build a better and more humane world. I use the word, “provoke”, rather than “inculcate” with self-conscious intent. Buddhadasa clearly believes that the truth cannot be taught in a conventional sense, nor can it be adequately described in words. For this reason, much like a Zen monk, Buddhadasa acts the provocateur in his lectures, writings and his actions. In doing so he is trying to stimulate us to be mindful, to think profoundly about who we are and what we are doing as

individuals, groups and nations, and, finally, to be so grasped by the truth that we shall take action. For example, we find that Buddhadasa often speaks in paradoxes or uses contradiction as a hermeneutic method. In *Democratic Socialism* he argues that we need to go *backward* in order to go *forward*, i.e. we need to discover our original nature in order to recover it and put it into practice in the future. In another major essay dealing with the theme of Buddhist socialism, Buddhadasa uses the odd and seemingly inappropriate term “dictatorial dhammika socialism.” Having caught his hearer’s attention with the phrase, he then goes on to explain dictatorial in terms of expeditions, that is, as a means to actualize or put into effect his ideal of dhammika socialism.<sup>26</sup> Buddhadasa, therefore, should be seen not primarily as a philosopher, but as a man of action, as someone who is trying to provoke the truth about the way things really are so that people’s lives, their communities and even the world will be changed.

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## Endnotes

1. For example see Emanuel Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1965), Bardwell L. Smith, ed., *Religion and Political Legitimation in Thailand, Burma and Laos* (Chambersburg: Anima Books, 1977).
2. See Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, *Toward the Truth*, Donald K. Swearer, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), Donald K. Swearer, "Bhikkhu Buddhadasa on Ethics and Society," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 7 : 1 (1979).
3. *Tua Ku, Khong Ku* has been translated by Phra Geoff DeGraff and will appear in a second volume of translated essays by Bhikkhu Buddhadasa to appear in the Cornell University Southeast Asia monograph series.
4. *The Value of Morality (Khunkhā Kong Sīladhamma)* (Chaiya: Suan Mokha, 1976), p.8.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 11-18.
6. *A Socialism Capable of Benefitting the World (Sangha-Niyama Chanit Thī Chuay Lok Dai)* (Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, 1976), p. 4-5.
7. *Democratic Socialism (Prachāthipadai Baap Sangha-Niyama)* (Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, 1974), p. 14.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 16. In Buddhadasa's view in essence terms like *dhamma*, God, Tao convey the same meaning.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

10. *A Socialism Capable...*, p. 20.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
13. *Democratic Socialism*, p. 26. It is interesting that Phra Thepkavi of Wat Padaraphirom, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai Province, uses this principle in his setting up rice and buffalo "banks" in poor villages in his district.
14. See Russell Sizemore and Donald K. Swearer (eds.), *Attitudes Toward Wealth and Poverty in Theravada Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming) for a discussion of generosity and distribution of wealth in Theravada Buddhism.
15. *Democratic Socialism*, p. 20.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
17. *A Socialism Capable...* p. 26.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 12-13
21. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
23. *Democratic Socialism*, p. 18.
24. *A Socialism Capable...*, p. 11.
25. *Democratic Socialism*, p. 5.
26. *A Dictatorial Dhammic Socialism* (Dhammika Sangha-Niyama Baap Padechakan) (Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, 1975).

# TRANSLATION



## DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

It gives me great pleasure to see all of you gathered here, brought together by your common interest in serving humanity through social work. It is my hope that in the end people everywhere might work together in harmony, no matter what their nationality, language, or religion might be. All people, after all, are fundamentally the same. We divide people into groups according to nationality, language, and religion merely for the convenience of having labels, but we all face the same basic problem: overcoming *dukkha* or suffering. Social service is for the benefit of all humanity in the most basic sense: to overcome *dukkha*.

In speaking about social service – not just in Thailand but the world over – I would like to say that at this point in history the highest form of social service one could perform would be to enable people to go *backwards* so that they can get back onto the right track. People scorn the suggestion that the most useful, correct, and necessary direction for our times is backwards. Though the idea is unpopular, just look at how far off the track people have gone these days – so far that we are about to fall into an abyss, if we have not gone over the edge already. It is imperative that we all back up and get onto the right track.

If we drive a car off the road halfway into a ditch, what do we do? We must back up and get back onto the road so that we can go on driving. This is the situation of the human race these days. We have left the correct way, the way of the Dhamma, the way of God, or whatever way one may call it. We have strayed far from that way quite far, indeed – so far that one might say we have turned our backs on religion, on God, on the Dhamma. If we push on like this much further, we will fall into an abyss. We must back up and get ourselves turned in the right direction so that we can find the path of the Dhamma.

We are getting away from religion, both in terms of morality (*śīladhamma*) and absolute Truth (*paramatthadhamma*). By *śīladhamma*, I mean a kind of social order. By *paramatthadhamma*, I mean Dhamma on an individual level, a kind of self-discipline that enables us to realize ultimate reality to whatever extent we are capable. What we call religion combines both dimensions. Nowadays, people are getting further and further away from religion, from both *śīladhamma* and *paramatthadhamma*. There is only one solution to our immediate problem of *dukkha*: to go backwards, to find the Dhamma, so that we might go forward in the right direction. Just as when we drive a car off the road we must back up to get back onto the road, so true social service must help people back up and get onto the correct way. This is the best and the most urgent kind of social service called for in these times.

The problem of poverty is a result of our getting off track. Even the current problems of illiteracy and ignorance of good health practices arise from our going in the wrong

direction. The solution lies in getting back onto the right track. The solutions, taken together, can be called religion. Practicing religion means acting in accordance with the Dhamma, which means whatever brings peace, and eliminates suffering (*dukkha*). Unfortunately, these days there is more study about religion than the practice of it.

Religion belongs to the realm of science in that it combines both theory and application. All religions address basic human problems with empirical methods derived from observing cause and effect relationships. Philosophy, however, is limited to theorizing and is basically just an intellectual exercise, viz. reasoning for its own sake. Religion is not like that. Every religion deals with basic human problems and solves these problems through a clear perception of their nature, whether the approach be through intellect, faith, or disciplining the senses (*āyatana*). All religions begin as a kind of applied science, but gradually they tend to become more a matter of mere words or logic or philosophy, moving further and further from actual practice.

True religion is practice (*patipatti*). Without actual practice, there is no religion. Even speaking must be in accordance with correct practice. Nowadays words have become idle chatter divorced from correct practice. At best the language of religion has become the purview of philosophers. This is why it can be said that religion is disappearing. The practice of religion, which could bring peace to all of humanity, is disappearing. All that is left is the study of religion, that is to say, thinking and theorizing rather than practice. Different schools of thought break off in one direction and another until people find themselves arguing

about theories of religion. Even within the same religion, groups split away from one another and argue among themselves. This is no longer religion, because the essence of religion is always its practice. Knowledge is only a preparation for practice, and only when it is actually put into practice is it religion; only then can there be real benefits; only then is there religion in the fullest sense of the word. Acting in absolute, unwavering accord with the principle of Truth – that is religion. No matter where it occurs, in what period of history, under whatever name, it is all one and the same. There can be no separation of theory and practice in true religion.

Whatever it may be called – God, Dhamma, Tao, the laws of Nature – it is all the same thing. It is that which is Highest in every aspect of reality, manifested in various religions as justice, reward and punishment, creation, preservation, and so on. It is all one and the same, no matter what label one gives it. All might be seen as various parts of the whole, yet they represent the same thing, whether it be seen as the path, the journey, or the realization of the goal. They are all One and inseparable, and it serves no purpose to distinguish one from the other.

The Dhamma is the path, the journey, and the realization of the goal of the journey. All are the same and go by the same name: Dhamma. But no matter what name it goes by in different languages or religions – God, Dhamma, or Tao, for example – I am sure that all can be used in the three meanings I just mentioned, if not more. All religions must have a clear path; all show us correct knowledge, the correct journey, and the correct realization of the goal at the

end. They are all One: that which is Highest, no matter what one may call it.

When we talk about all the major religious founders (*sāsadā*), such as Jesus and Buddha, I want to emphasize that the differences are all just a matter of expression. There is a fundamental point of these religions, whether it is called Dhamma or God or something else. Buddha, Jesus Christ, and other founders (*sāsadā*) are all simply mediums for manifesting a central Truth to humanity, so that humankind can escape from *dukkha* or can find salvation. It is not necessary, therefore, to have all these different religions in conflict and disagreement.

Though this One, this highest Truth, is the same everywhere, and the founders of different religions are really just avenues for revealing this Truth, it is understandable that its expressions in language would vary according to time and place. In their deepest, most important sense, however, all of these different words are getting at the same thing: how to find salvation – that is, what we must do so that we may become One with that which is Highest, that which is the ultimate good that humankind can know.

The goal of all religions is salvation, and throughout history all religions have shown the way to salvation. Nowadays, however, people have confused the purpose of religion to the extent that they have split off into a great many hostile groups. The conflicts among them have given rise to social problems the world over. In many cases, adherents of different religions cannot even communicate with one another anymore.

The people in these opposing groups are going against

a universal religious precept in that they are all being selfish and are governed by a “me” and “mine” kind of thinking, which conflicts with the universal principles of religion. According to Buddhist thought, there is no self. There is only Nature, only Dhamma; but people are still under the illusion that they have a self. In religions that have a God, everything is said to belong to God or to be a manifestation of God. Nothing can be regarded as “me” or “mine”. Therefore, one must not be so arrogant as to claim that one “owns” one’s self. Such thinking gives rise to selfishness and mental impurities (*kilesa*) and leads to suffering (*dukkha*).

If we were to act according to the principles of religion, that is to say, to acknowledge that everyone exists in God, in the Dhamma, in Tao, in Nature, then our problems would disappear. There would be no illusion of “me” leading to mutual conflict, and the entire world would be peaceful. We would have peace on a smaller scale, as well. Each person’s problems would disappear, because every individual would be free from suffering that arises from attachment to the ego. Even if there were a global disaster that engulfed the entire world in flames and killed everyone, we would not experience *dukkha* because there would be no “me”, no attachment to self. We would understand that our bodies do not belong to a self but to Nature or God or Dhamma.

In order for people all over the world to live in happiness, then, we must all go backwards and return to the correct way or the Dhamma. This is the most important point to bear in mind in performing any kind of social service.

If we were to put our religious principles into practice, even the problems of global shortages would disappear.

People are destroying the earth's raw materials, the natural resources that belong to Nature, to God, to whatever one may call it. The earth's resources are being dug up in unnecessarily large quantities, only to be used carelessly and wastefully. Not only are they often not put to any constructive use, but they are turned into instruments of harm. Minerals are taken from the earth and made into weapons for fighting and killing. How could that possibly lead to any good purpose? Eventually those resources will become depleted, and for wasteful, utterly useless ends. It is said that the world's oil will be gone in just fifty years if we continue to use it in such wasteful ways as we do now.

If we were to use the earth's resources according to the laws of Nature and within its limits, we would not need to use as much as we do now. There would be plenty for everyone for years to come, or even indefinitely. Nowadays, however, we are squandering the earth's minerals so destructively that before long they will be gone. Acting in such a way is contrary to the Dhamma, to religion, to God. If we were to use them as we should, according to the laws of Nature, there would always be an abundant supply.

A story about Jesus comes to mind. Jesus was able to feed thousands with just two or three loaves of bread and five or six fish and still have some left over. If people would use only what is necessary, the world would have sufficient resources for all. This is not the case, however, and already we are seeing critical shortages. If we were to eat and use only what we actually need, our material needs would be adequately met, and we would also reap the spiritual benefits of living according to the way of Nature (*dhammajāti*). We

would feel calm and fulfilled, and we would not be under the power of unbridled desires (*kilesa*). In modern society, however, people are ruled by desires that know no limit.

If we were all to live together according to Nature's plan, we would see that Nature's way is one of peace. When people go against Nature, the result is confusion and turmoil. The role of religion is to solve our basic human problems in order to bring about peace, to put an end to turmoil and confusion. It performs this role by showing us the perfect, absolute power of Nature. We need to live in harmony with the way of Nature. When we do not, we are not fully human in that we cannot experience peace and fulfillment in a way that only humans can. When such is the case, we are no better than animals. Animals at least live according to the way of Nature, and so they experience relatively little suffering. Humans have used their advanced intelligence to take advantage of one another, going against the way of the Dhamma and the way of God. Actually, we should experience fulfillment on a higher level than animals, but we make our condition a kind of living hell, a suffering (*dukkha*) even worse than animals, when we go against the way of Nature. Animals, on the other hand, do not experience this particularly human kind of dissatisfaction or pain.

These days we are lacking those special qualities of mind and spirit that make us human. We are only creatures with human forms. If we consider the human race in the best possible light, we would say that we are God's children, as it is written in the Bible. The reason humans are given the special position of being God's children and not the offspring of Mara or Satan or something similarly undesirable is



because the word “human” implies a mind and spirit of a high level – higher than the rest of the animal kingdom possesses. When the mind is truly on a higher level, it is above all problems, above all kinds of anxiety and suffering. We are so far off the path now, though, that we can hardly be called human in the fullest sense of the word. Indeed, we cannot even be called the offspring of humans, let alone the offspring of God. We have strayed so far off the path that we are only creatures with human forms. We are no better than animals. We only have the feelings and desires of animals – eating, sleeping, procreating – and so we are basically on the same level with them. We are not living according to our human potential, according to the way of the Dhamma. In order to do so, we must go backwards and get onto the right track.

Every religion claims that degradation and death constitute suffering (*dukkha*). Today, however, we are in a state worse than death and the most excessive degradation because humankind is under the domination of *kilesa*. Physical death cannot equal the cruelty of suffering brought about by the power of the most overwhelming *kilesa*. Solving social problems really means going to their basic cause: *kilesa*.

It is almost laughable simply to speak of solving the problems of hunger, illiteracy, and illness, because these are not the real problems at all; they are only symptoms. The fundamental problem is the lack of religion (*sāsanā*) and moral principles (*śīladhamma*) in modern society. If we were to solve these basic problems, would illiteracy, hunger, and illness disappear? Even if they did not, people who had never

learned to read could still be happier than the most literate among us. We might point out, that at one time when no one could read, people were fundamentally happier than many modern people whose minds are full of book learning.

What use is food if one's life is but enduring suffering and anxiety? Would death not be preferable to such an existence? Instead of talking so much about food and hunger, we must understand that life in the truest sense is sustained by the Dhamma not just by food. If we do not live according to the Dhamma, we are not fully human. All religions hold this to be true. Not only are we losing our humanity, but we are in a condition worse than death, because at least in death there is no suffering (*dukkha*).

Because people have deserted religion and the way of the Dhamma numerous problems arise making social work necessary. If people would just hold firm to the way of the Dhamma and to religion, none of the social problems we have been talking about would exist. Modern society lacks compassion, because people have become selfish and are attached to the idea of a self and what belongs to it. They are ignoring God's wish that we love one another, that is, that we consider the good of society before we think of our personal gain. For this reason, society's problems will continue to increase, and social work will be even more necessary. It is pitiful and even laughable that we will continue to deal with these problems by treating the symptoms and not the basic cause.

I have been speaking to my first major point: that is, that the highest form of social work one can perform is to help people back up and get onto the right track. That would

be a true service to society, because people nowadays have gone so far off course that the world seems headed for disaster.

My second point is what the term “social work” or “social service” should really mean. Social service means service to society. The Council for Social Service was set up to carry out various kinds of social work. Why do we use the word “social,” which clearly implies service to society as a whole? Why do we not use a term that emphasizes service to persons or to individuals? When we emphasize instead the social-ism of such work, are we talking about the socialism that seems to be so feared and hated? These days if someone talks about socialism, that person is thought to be a Communist and is arrested and taken away to prison, but when we talk about the Council for Social Service, does anyone think of Communists or so-called Socialists?

Social service is a kind of socialism, but not the kind associated with Communism. Do not be deceived by the usual associations of the word. Many problems in the world occur because people misunderstand the meanings of words in their own language. Words have great power to deceive. On the one hand, socialism is despised, but here we are about to perform what we call social service. Social work is, in fact, a kind of socialism.

All the religions of the world, furthermore are socialistic, not individualist democracies where people can do whatever they like. The founders (*sāsadā*) of every religion have wanted people to live according to socialist principles in order to act in the interest of society as a whole. Whenever anyone puts personal interest before the good of

society, *kilesa* takes over – that is, one becomes ruled by selfish desires. The teachings of Buddhism make it a particularly socialist religion.

A good way to look at the meaning of socialism is to think of it as not taking more than one's fair share – using only what is necessary so that the rest is available for other's use. Both in the teachings of the Dhamma and in the rules for the monastic order (*vinaya*), it is written that Buddhist monks must live with only the bare necessities.

In the *vinaya*, for example, a monk is allowed only three pieces of cloth for his robe. Having more than three is considered a breach of monastic discipline. If a monk has extra pieces, he must give them to the *Sangha*, the community of monks. The extra cloth cannot belong to any one person – only to the *Sangha* or to the community at large. As for a dwelling, the *vinaya* allows a monk a structure no larger than seven feet wide and twelve feet long. It is a serious violation of monastic rules to have a dwelling that exceeds this size. Such a rule is to ensure that a monk will use no more than he really needs so that the community as a whole will have enough. A monk, furthermore, is allowed a single bowl for his food. If he is given more than that, it must be given away, because to keep an excess is to break another rule of the monastic order. All of these rules are simply to guarantee that monks will not take more than their share, so that others will be sure to have enough to meet their needs.

The Dhamma also teaches us to be content with what we have, that is, to accumulate and own just enough to take care of our material needs. Accordingly, it places great emphasis on being generous with what we have. A true

Buddhist community, even of lay people, would be content with the basic necessities of life. Whatever a person did not really need would be left available for the use of the entire community.

Let me give an example. A person of great material wealth (Sanskrit: *śreṣṭhī*) in the Buddhist tradition differs greatly from the capitalist (Thai: *nai thun*) of today. Outside of Buddhism, *śreṣṭhī* has the same meaning as *nai thun* – one who keeps accumulating material wealth far beyond what he actually needs. In the Buddhist tradition, however, the status of a *śreṣṭhī* was measured by the number of *rong than* that person had. A *rong than* was an almshouse, a communal place where those in need could find what they lacked materially. The more *rong than* one had, the wealthier one was considered to be. Because of the surplus produced by the *śreṣṭhī* and the large number of servants and laborers they employed, they were able to build *rong than* as a kind of social service. *Śreṣṭhī* in the non-Buddhist sense, however, are strictly *nai thun*. They accumulate endless wealth and reinvest all the profits for themselves, while oppressing their workers. A *śreṣṭhī* in the Buddhist sense, on the other hand, employs workers in a cooperative effort for the welfare of the entire community.

All members of the Buddhist community – monks and lay people – are not only taught but are required to consume no more than their share of material goods. Excessive consumption is wrong and demeritorious. Buddhism, therefore, is truly a socialist religion, both in its principles and its spirit. The Buddha said, “I was born into this world to help all beings.” He was not born to benefit any one person

or even himself. The founders of all religions have affirmed that they appeared for the benefit of all beings, and all have spoken out against excessive consumption.

In this sense, all religions are socialistic. The word, socialism, however, inspires hatred. Socialists are said to be Communists and are arrested. How stupid! We have become enslaved to a deception generated by our own language. To carry out our task of social work, that is, service to society, we must embrace the social-ism of our work; otherwise we are advocating individual-ism, or service in the interests of specific individuals. Then we are no longer serving society as a whole.

If you preach democracy, it must be a socialist form of democracy, not a democracy of individualism which fosters self-centeredness. Many constitutional forms of government, such as liberal democracies, allow individuals to accumulate vast amounts of material wealth. A socialist democracy, on the other hand, has to put the needs of society as a whole first. In socialist societies, therefore, individuals cannot appropriate excessive amounts of wealth for themselves. A socialist democracy is, then, in keeping with the principle of Nature (*dhammajāti*) that would have us take only what we need, thereby respecting the rights of all beings.

The problems we have been discussing arose as societies formed. When people lived isolated from one another or in small groups, as in the Stone Age, these problems did not exist. As the population increased and people began living together in larger and larger groups, social problems began to appear. As societies grew and

multiplied, people oppressed one another and the problems grew to crisis proportions.

Because the context of all these problems is social and not just individual, we must turn our attention to the source of the problem: society. Whatever system is laid out for the functioning of a social group, the principles of such a system must be for the good of society as a whole and not just for individuals or for any one person. In a society that puts the interests of any one individual above those of the community, social problems cannot be effectively addressed, because the context of the problems is the way society operates as a whole.

The spirit or essence of socialism is the Dhamma of Nature (*dhammajāti*). The goal of socialism is the way of Nature. By living with only what we really need, we are living according to the way of Nature whether we are aware of it or not.

Notice that among all the many non-human forms of life in the Natural world, no one kind takes more than its share. According to science, before humans evolved there were lower animals and plants, and before that, single-celled forms of life. In all these various levels of living things, none ever consumed more than it needed. Even the first cellular organisms took in only what their simple cell structures required to survive. Groups of cells consumed only enough to sustain the colony; then plant life evolved, each plant consuming only what it needed to maintain itself. Then followed animals – fish, birds, and so on. All consume only as much as their systems require. They have no granaries or storehouses in which to hoard or stockpile supplies, so they

cannot accumulate any more than they need. A bird eats only what its stomach will hold. It is incapable of taking more than it must have to live.

When humans first evolved and inhabited the forests and jungles, they had no granaries or storehouses either. They ate only what was necessary to survive, and day by day they gathered whatever food they needed. No one person or group stockpiled a surplus of anything, so the social problems we have been discussing did not yet exist.

According to Buddhist scriptures, our problems began when someone got the idea of stockpiling grains and other food, causing shortages for others. Once supplies began to be hoarded, problems of unequal distribution and access arose. The problems multiplied over time. Leaders of groups of people would be in charge of stockpiling supplies for the group, and fighting among the groups was inevitable. Even when primitive humans inhabited forests, some people or groups began to take more than they needed for themselves. To maintain control over society and to limit *kilesa*, laws and moral systems developed.

Nature would have each of us use no more than we actually need. For years people have failed to heed the way of Nature, competing with one another to take as much as they could, causing the problems that we live with to this day. If we were to take only what is enough, none of these problems would exist, because then people would not be taking advantage of others and oppressing them.

The question, then, is how much is enough? There is no set rule. It varies according to the time, place, and situation. These days it seems that nothing is ever enough. There is a



Buddhist saying, “Even two entire mountains of gold are not enough to satisfy the desires of a single person.” The saying is a way of illustrating how our desires keep multiplying, increasing our wants at the expense of society.

Even Communism considers the unequal distribution of wealth to be the major problem it must address. Its approach, however, is inconsistent with the way of Nature. What is needed is an approach that emphasizes not taking more than is needed and at the same time is in accordance with the laws of Nature, for then people would share whatever extra they had out of *mettā-karunā* – compassion and loving kindness. People would set aside for themselves only what they needed; anything in excess of that would be left for society.

Then there is the question, what is more than we really need? We can stretch the meaning of “need” considerably. What some people say they need, they do not actually have to have. For example, if we were to give away just five percent of what we have, we could still survive. People all over the world should learn to share a portion of what they have but still consider essential. Such sharing would be in accordance with the *śīladhamma* of God, and everyone would benefit from it. If children go to school and each one takes along 50 satang for lunch and supplies, each child could easily share five satang with the poorer children who did not have even one satang. With fifteen satang, a child can buy a little something to eat, so if many children were to share just five satang out of fifty with their friends who had none, then no child would go without. We can still share something of what we have, even when we think we have nothing extra to

give away.

Any religion, but particularly Buddhism, depends on such sharing for its existence. This temple, for example, survives on the generosity of the village people who live in the area nearby. They all live in poverty, yet they still manage to spare enough food for the monks' bowls in the morning by sharing with us what they would otherwise be able to eat themselves. Because of their willingness to give, sixty monks from this temple will be supported this rainy season by a tiny, sparsely-populated village of poor folk. Bangkok is another story entirely. There you find immensely wealthy people, but they would never share what they have in the way these village people support this temple. Why is this so? Villagers still live according to the traditional ways; Bangkok people, on the other hand, have become modern – so modern that they have practically become gods unto themselves.

What is meant by having something extra to share with others? For some, a hundred million baht still is not enough; they never have anything extra to spare for anyone else. They want billions and trillions. For them there is no such thing as a surplus or having more than they need. Then there are others who have only modest resources, yet they can find enough to share with others who have less.

Socialism, then, is based on this one simple principle in accord with the way of Nature, that none of us should take more than we really need. We should share whatever extra we have with those with less. This does not mean that we should not produce a surplus. People have a right to produce more than they need, and it is even appropriate to do so if the

surplus is shared with others. Even those with little to spare have something to share, although they may not realize it.

We all have a natural right to take as much as we need, but not more. If we were each to exercise this natural right to the extent allowed by Nature, this world would be filled with a contentment such as we attribute to heaven, the realm of God, or the Buddha Maitreya, where there is no *dukkha*, no unsatisfactoriness. This then is the highest law of Nature: to take for ourselves only what we need, and to try to accumulate or produce something extra for the benefit of society as a whole. This is socialism according to the laws of Nature. It is consistent with the purpose of the Dhamma, the way of God, or with the basic principles of any religion. This kind of religious socialism can address the seriousness of contemporary social problems because it sees these problems as rooted in the fact that people are after as much as they can get hold of for themselves.

In carrying out what we call social service, we should see to it that we serve in the very best way there is, that is, with *smmādiṭṭhi* (right view), with the correct understanding and effort. *Micchādiṭṭhi* (wrong view), an incorrect understanding of Nature or Truth, is the basic cause of our problems. Solving such problems, then, is dependent on *sammādiṭṭhi*. Such understanding enables people to realize when they are doing something wrong, and to bring their thinking and actions in line with the correct way, the way of Nature. If everyone were to have *smmādiṭṭhi*, there would be immediate changes in society for the better; hence, we must all go backwards to get onto the right track. Nowadays, we are ignoring God, the Dhamma, or even the teachings of

science, viz. the correct way to live according to the laws of Nature.

All of the above pertains to my second major point, regarding the true meaning of the term, "social service." My last point deals with an increasingly serious problem in the modern world: the alarming degree to which religion (*sāsanā*) and morality (*sīladhamma*) are disappearing. Religion can take many forms: *sīladhamma*, *paramatthadhamma*, living in accordance with the laws of Nature, or obedience to God. All are disappearing from our lives, which is why the world is in a perpetual state of crisis. The situation never improves because the same selfish people who have contributed to the problem cannot possibly solve it.

How can people who form international organizations solve the world's problems when they are made up of selfish people? Be very careful not to let yourselves become caught up in an organization led by those whose motives are basically selfish and who have formed the organization to advance their own personal interests. Satan, Mara, and all the powers of Evil would get a good laugh out of your misguided efforts. Why do we not, instead, solve the problem by becoming human in the fullest sense of the word, according to the way of God and Nature, that is, putting the welfare of others before our own selfish interests.

In this world of selfishness and *kilesa*, religion and morality have been pushed aside. As a result, humankind has become a mass of suffering individuals. Our religions have become so superficial that they cannot rightly be called religions. This is why I say that religion is disappearing from

our lives to a frightening degree.

We could sum it up by saying that true religion has all but vanished, and all that is left is philosophy, which, though it has to do with religion, is not at all the same thing. Nowadays, it has become more and more common for people to approach religion through literature, liberal arts, and philosophy. People are crazy about philosophy in particular. Philosophy is not religion. The study of philosophy uses reasoning to theorize about abstract things that we simply cannot know.

Religions use a scientific method. First they identify the immediate problem: *dukkha*, or suffering. Then they identify the cause and present a solution to fit the cause. In this way, religion is scientific in its approach, even though it deals with the mind and spirit rather than material things. Philosophy, on the other hand, makes up hypothetical problems, such as why we should or should not believe in God or the Dhamma, why we should do one thing and not another, whether or not something is really true, really good, whether something we call happiness is really happiness, and so on. These are all thoughts of people who have no confidence in themselves. They look for the problem within the minds and solve it rationally. This is the situation people get themselves into with philosophy. The more hypothetical problems we think of, the more that arise; all of them getting further and further away from anything useful.

In a children's textbook there is an apt, amusing example of the futility of philosophical thinking. A runner runs along between the two rails of a railroad track noticing that the two rails appear to become a single rail farther

ahead, so he runs on and on, trying to find out where the two rails become one. Philosophy takes us on a similarly futile misadventure.

Scientific problem solving, on the other hand, requires a concrete problem and a solution that fits the problem. Religion is similar. If we say, for example, that attachment to the illusion of possessing a self causes suffering, then letting go of that attachment frees us from suffering. So long as we do not completely accept this truth, we will still suffer, but as soon as we internalize it, our suffering ends. This, then, is the true practice of religion.

Because we do not practice our religion, what we call religion only becomes philosophy or logic. We need to get back on the right track, to bring true religion back into our lives; that is, to put religious principles into actual practice so as to overcome suffering. Philosophy will never solve our problem because its theorizing is never-ending. If we apply scientific methods to our religious practice, however, we can expect results, because then we clearly define the scope and nature of the problem. Such practice could bring happiness to humanity within a lifetime. If we depend on philosophy to solve our problems, however, it will be impossible to reach our goal in one lifetime, or even within 100 lifetimes.

We pride ourselves on how progressive our religions have become, how we find signs of religion everywhere but we are destroying true religion. We have become blind to what is really happening. What is left of religion cannot rightly be called religion. The Buddhism we see nowadays is Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist literature, Buddhist studies,

Buddhist logic, and so on. People interpret this as a sign that religion is flourishing. The opposite is true. It is vanishing from the world, and the superficial aspects of religion that remain cannot solve the problem of suffering. All religions the world over are disappearing in the same way.

The goal of every religion is to put an end to self-centeredness, to a “me” and “mine” kind of thinking. Accordingly, every religion has certain practices intended to eliminate self-centeredness. Such practices are what constitute religion. If there were no practice but only discussion about overcoming self-centeredness, then there would be no true religion, no matter how skillfully people spoke about it.

Morality, or *sīladhamma*, is also disappearing to an alarming extent. People lack self-discipline and think only of fun and the pursuit of sensory pleasures, of taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing. They have discarded morality, or worse yet, trampled on it, calling what is wrong, right, and what is evil, good.

It used to be that *sīladhamma* was in humankind’s very flesh and blood. All Buddhists, for example, seemed to have honesty, gratitude, patience, and forgiveness as an integral part of their very being. No one had to be taught these things. Children had only to observe their parents to see *sīladhamma* in every aspect of living. Children did not have to be ordered to behave correctly. They did not have to write down the rules of *sīladhamma* in their notebooks and then memorize them or be coerced into practicing them. Children

used to learn honesty, gratitude, and patience by seeing it all around them at home. Nowadays, however, children spend less time with their parents, so they are less likely to learn *sīladhamma* from them. Children's behavior, therefore, has changed considerably. They have become selfish and aggressive. We are losing our cultural heritage, of which *sīladhamma* has been an integral part. Religion was the foundation of our culture, our *sīladhamma*. Countless generations of our ancestors have been practicing religion as a central part of their culture. It was a fundamental part of each person's life, of every home, and even of the entire country.

Let's take an example. When villagers in this area went out to the fields to plant something – a fruit tree, vegetables, or grain, for instance, they recited this little verse as they planted the seeds:

Food for a hungry bird is our merit;

Food for a hungry person – our charity.

The villagers considered that they would receive merit (*punnā*) if a bird ate food from the plant, and if a hungry person stole food from it, they considered it as alms-giving or charity on the part of the one who planted it. Enough was always planted so that birds and hungry people could have what they needed. You can see what kind of spirit these villagers had! These days, however, if a bird comes to feed on the plant, someone shoots it; if a person comes to take something from a plant, people call the police. This is how mean-spirited people have become everywhere these days.

It used to be that whenever people planted a banana tree, a pineapple plant, rice, beans, or whatever, they would



recite that verse. This act and many others like it formed a body of unwritten rules that became the foundation for *sīladhamma* in people's daily lives. They were passed on from generation to generation as an integral part of the culture. We do not see these kinds of acts anymore. They have gone the way of patience, compassion, gratitude, honesty, forgiveness, – the list goes on and on. We have lost all this because we have no self-discipline, because we cannot resist the temptations of the modern world.

Nowadays, children spend little time around the good influence of their parents, who still lead their lives according to the old cultural traditions. When children are on their own with too much freedom, they come under the influence of many kinds of temptations. After awhile, they no longer listen to their parents and teachers' advice about their behavior. Eventually they change so much that they differ completely from how they once were.

All that is left of religion and *sīladhamma* is what students write about it in their notebooks. True *sīladhamma*, however, cannot be found in our schools and universities because there is no practice of *sīladhamma* – only writing about *sīladhamma*, answering questions in class about it, and receiving marks from the teacher for the answer. What is to become of a world in which there is no religion, no *sīladhamma*? Real religion is scientific in the sense that it is based on identifying real problems and solving them in a valid way. Do not replace religion with rambling, philosophical nonsense.

The term, "science", encompasses a broad range of things. There is much to be said for the kind of science that

has become so advanced in the modern world, so long as it does not endanger us. If we become enslaved by science, however, then it becomes dangerous to us. How can we make the best use of science? There is a science of behavior, which when we can apply its principles to our speech and actions, our behavior will not cause *dukkha* or bring about *karmic* consequences. The science of human behavior is not nearly so important, however, as the science of the mind, that is, the identification of those thoughts which cause suffering and those which do not. We must make every effort to understand the consequences of our thoughts and to preserve that way of thinking which does not cause *dukkha*. This is the science of the mind.

The building in which we're gathered today is called a "Spiritual Theater," which, in its own way, illustrates the science of the mind. Though this building shares similarities with other theaters, its subject is the mind or spirit, hence the term Spiritual Theater. Those who enter this building can enhance their understanding of the mind, of how it can overcome temptation and become truly liberated.

Sometimes we depend too much on verbal means to explain the mind. For instance people often become confused by words or phrases, such as "empty" or "empty mind." Although, "empty mind" is, in fact, an accurate term, people do not understand what it means. An empty mind means a mind free from temptation, attachment, deception, or whatever makes it unsteady. Here we have a painting on the wall where it is written, "An empty mind can hear the grass speaking." What does this mean? When we have an empty mind free from *kilesa*, deception, and temptation, we can

“hear the grass speaking;” that is, we can hear the voice of Nature (*dhammajāti*). The grass is saying to us, “If people would only overcome their madness, they could be happy, free and ‘normal’, and could dance about gracefully as we do.” The image is one of the grass dancing and swaying in the breeze. This is an example of how we use illustrations to help people understand how the mind works, and this is why we call this building a Spiritual Theater. In its own way it demonstrates our scientific or investigative method which differs from either myth or philosophy. I want to be perfectly clear about this: we do not collect philosophies here. Philosophy slows down the process of understanding and gets people into theoretical knowledge over their heads, such that they cannot ever really help themselves. Be a scientist, not a philosopher, but be a scientist of the mind. Try to comprehend what Nature is in its most profound sense.

The Buddha was truly a “comrade” of Nature. He was born “on the ground,” reached Enlightenment on the ground, sat, slept, taught, and died on the ground. Yet his so-called followers seem to prefer more heaven-like surroundings in which to live and die. The Buddha reached Enlightenment under a tree at the river’s edge. He walked, talked, and preached while on the ground, and lived in a hut on the ground. How could anyone say that the Buddha was not on the ground, among earthly surroundings? He reached Nibbāna and even died on the ground. We, the followers of the Buddha, would do well to follow his example: to remain firmly “grounded” in Nature. In doing so, we would keep the Buddha’s ways and honor his memory. Jesus, too, was born

“on the ground”. The founders of other religions were similarly comrades of Nature, but we, the so-called followers of their religions, want to live in a paradise of our own creation, fabricated from our imaginations. Such desires take us off in the opposite direction from where we should be headed.

Are religion (*sāsanā*) and morality (*śīladhamma*) still really a part of our lives? Conditions in the modern world have drastically changed the way we live. We should be comrades of Nature; instead, we despise it. We should live according to our Nature-given rights; instead, we hoard resources in untold numbers of banks, warehouses, and granaries. We have things completely backwards, and the situation appears to be getting worse. Philosophy, logic, and psychology have replaced true religion. The morality of sensory self-discipline has been replaced by a morality of *kilesa*. How can we possibly solve social problems under such conditions? Producing more food and goods is not the solution; that would only make things worse, because people would become even more selfish than they are now.

Solving social problems is dependent on living in a socially moral way: acting in the best interests of the entire community by living according to Nature’s Laws; avoiding the consumption of goods beyond our simple needs; sharing all that is not essential for us to have with others, even if we consider ourselves poor; giving generously of our wealth if we are well-to-do. This is the way we will solve our social problems. If we all scramble to grab whatever we can for ourselves, where are all these material goods going to come from? How is Nature going to come up with resources

to fill our limitless demands? How can there not be social problems when people live and behave in such selfish ways?

The demise of religion and morality in our world becomes most alarming when we consider the seriousness of our social problems and realize that religion and morality which would have enabled us to overcome these problems, no longer exist in practice but only in name. Philosophy is no substitute for religion. When we practice our religion with observation and commitment, our behavior and actions manifest a truly selfless way of living and thinking, free of possessiveness. Such a way of life may be called socialist, as it enables us to solve the problems that occur when people live together as a society. Do not, therefore, fear and hate the term "socialism" or worry that you will be called a Communist and get arrested. If it makes you feel more comfortable, just add one more word and call it Dhammic Socialism. Dhammic Socialism is socialism of the Dhamma or socialism of God. It is this kind of socialism that can help humankind survive the modern world.

What we call Dhamma has value and meaning far beyond what words can express. It is erroneous to think that Dhamma exists only in Hinduism or Buddhism. In Pali and Sanskrit, Dhamma means all of existence, just as God means all of creation — everything that was, is, and will be. It is just that we do not easily recognize what this means in its most profound sense; we see only that which is immediately understandable. Dhamma means all phenomena manifest and the principles of Truth that are inherent in them. Dhamma is also the duty of humankind to live according to these laws. The consequences of any action, be they good or

bad – these, too, are Dhamma. Dhamma is all inclusive; just as God is; the words are used in the same way. God means everything that exists; God is manifest in all phenomena. The Word, or God's laws, are the laws of Nature or the laws of Dhamma. It is our responsibility as part of this order to live according to it; in fact, we must be very careful to heed that aspect of God which is natural law, because when we act against that law, we are inevitably punished. We can actually see this happening in the destruction going on in the world now. However, following the law of God will result in happiness (*sukha*), the reward of a life beyond death. That is called Dhamma – results that will bring us fulfillment in our lives and elevate us above a spiritual death.

That so many opposing religions have proliferated is a result of the inadequacy of mere words to express the profundity of Truth. Misunderstandings brought about by such shortcomings or incorrect uses of language have caused people to form opposing groups and even to oppress others who do not agree with them. If we do not comprehend Truth in its most profound sense, then we do not really understand Dhamma, God, Tao, or, in scientific terms, Natural Law. When we fully comprehend Natural Law, then we also understand the meaning of Dhamma, of God, of Tao – in short, of everything. This is the full meaning of the Pali word, Dhamma. Other languages, as well, have a word that is similarly all-encompassing in its meaning – the word Tao, for example. Such a word takes in everything in existence, just as the word Dhamma does. In whatever language the word is found, we must go to the heart of its meaning in order to fully comprehend its significance. Only with such understanding

can we truly solve our problems.

There is really only one society in the world: the community of humankind. We must collectively attempt to overcome our common problem, *dukkha*, by doing whatever will bring us to a fuller understanding of the term Dhamma or God in its most profound sense. I know that all of you here are dedicated to working for the betterment of society, raising funds and carrying out various activities to further your goals. It concerns me, however, that you may be overlooking the most important thing of all, that which is at the bottom of all our problems: selfishness. This me-and-mine mentality results from people trampling on religion and morality. As a consequence, humankind is experiencing the retribution of Dhamma (or God). We have only to return to the way of Dhamma to solve our common human problems. Crime and poverty will be taken care of by returning to the way of religion, by living in *siladhamma*, for no one would then take advantage of anyone else; people would not hoard resources for themselves. If the society of humankind were to work hard at producing the things we all need, there would be plenty to go around if we shared among ourselves all that we could spare. Modern technology must be put to use to produce surpluses to be made available to all who need them -- not for the selfish profit of specific individuals.

These days, when people set out to accomplish something, they do it for their own personal benefit. Very few benefited from the impressive equipment that was assembled to take humans to the moon. Our goals are still self-centered and are not established with the benefit of all

humankind in mind. Our amazing new tools and inventions benefit individuals only – not the entire human race. Instead of bringing about peace in the world, they actually push us closer to a crisis. We must take great care to ensure that all these gadgets – radios, televisions, computers, and such – are not used by individuals solely for personal gain and selfish ends. If we were to use these inventions in truly socialist ways, we could achieve peace and genuine happiness in the world in a very short time. We need only to apply our brainpower to socialistic ends to see immediate results.

The problem is not merely one of external things, but of mental or inner aspects of life as well as we can see by the fact that religion and *sīladhamma* have all but disappeared. What we call religion and morality bear little resemblance to what they originally were in the time of Buddha, Jesus, or other religious founders. This is why humankind has unknowingly deviated so very far from the way we should be going; this is why we are about to push ourselves over the edge, and why we must back up and get back on the correct way or track.

This, then, is a brief summary of what I would like to encourage all of you to consider, as people dedicated to giving themselves to carry out social work: we must make a collective effort to pull ourselves back to the way of the Dhamma, to remain there, and then to go forward according to the principles of Dhamma. Only then can we be free of our problems. Simply thinking in the correct way brings immediate merit and beneficial results. By acting according to such thoughts you will see even more fruitful results.



## A DICTATORIAL DHAMMIC SOCIALISM

Everyone is familiar with the word, "socialism," as the name of a political system, or a political ideology. Most people mean by the term, a system which is the enemy of liberal democracy. When referring to socialism today people generally mean "communism." But what we are speaking about here does not take the word in that sense. We are, rather, speaking about socialism according to religious principles or norms, or even more fundamentally, according to the principles of nature. In particular, we shall understand the true meaning of socialism if we understand it in terms of morality. By morality (*sīla-dhamma*) we mean that which brings about normalcy or the natural balance of things (*prakati*). From the perspective of cause, morality is that which brings about balance or normalcy; from the perspective of effect or result, it is the condition of being in balance. Seen in this way, nothing is, in fact, not moral or unrelated to morality. Moral action is that which conduces to peace and quiet. Confusion and chaos are, conversely, the consequence of not having morality. Socialism, then, should be seen in these terms. It is a type of morality. In order to understand socialism in the most profound sense we need to see it in terms of its normal, moral character. In moral terms, then, socialism is a system which brings about balance (*prakati*) in society, rather than un-balance or confusion. It

will be helpful at the outset to clarify some terms which are associated with a discussion of socialism as a political system.

First, let us consider the word, "politics" (Thai: *kān mu'ang*), because socialism is a political system or system of political ideals. The word, politics, is problematical. Some see it as something worthless, deceptive and as a strategy for exploitation. Others see it as a means or a strategy capable of making the world peaceful. In its root meaning politics can be defined simply as: "concerning many people or things." Politics, in this sense, is a strategy for addressing the problems that arise from increasing numbers of people living together. This is its basic meaning, and in this sense may be considered moral or even religious. Ideally, then, politics is a moral system for addressing the problems arising from the need for social cooperation. Basically, socialism is a more moral political system than any other.

The same kind of point can be made about the term, "economic system." Most people think of it only as a method to satisfy physical needs or use it to differentiate political systems. But we must be careful to preserve the original meaning of the moral dimensions of economics or an economic system.

Let us consider the broad topic of "governance." Governance can be thought of as a means of running the village, the town, the nation, or even the world. Governance thus means solving the problems that arise in relationship to large aggregates of people. Governance is, therefore, inherently moral (in the sense that solving problems brings about harmony or natural balance). Even the study of society, the "social sciences" (*sangham-sāstra*)

should be seen as basically a moral enterprise. The term *śāstra* originally meant that which is sharp, used for cutting. In religion it is used to refer to an explanation of that which is difficult, profound, and extremely terse, a *sūtra*. When *śāstra* is applied to society as *sangham-śāstra* (social sciences) we can see that it means something sharp which will cut through the problems of society whether political, economic or social. Politics, as one of the social sciences, can be seen as a method of cutting through social problems. We should not forget that religion is included in what we call *śāstra-sangham*, social science.

The word, “religion” (*sāsanā*), and politics have an essential relationship. Religion means the most perfect state of morality. Since a political system should be essentially a system of morality *sīla-dhamma*, politics and religion share a common ground. Of course, people think of politics only in terms of the physical and material aspects of life. But, as true religion aims at spiritual (*vin<sup>na</sup>na*) or mental (Thai: *cit cat*) development, therefore, so should politics. Buddhism has been criticized by some as too spiritualistic and others as too materialistic. In fact, it is a middle way between the two. It is a balanced synthesis of both. Religion at its best is neither a slave to the material world nor fanatical regarding matters of the spirit.

Now politics is usually seen as materialistic. For example, people say that politics is “dirty business.” But if politics is “dirty” it is not really politics because it lacks morality. True politics is a struggle against misunderstanding, wrongview, craving after defilements and the like. Unfortunately, since we see so much political

corruption, young people assume that politics is a dirty business. We cannot blame them when they rarely see politics in the true sense. All over the world politics has become a means to take advantage of others, and politicians speak only for their own advantage. This poisons the real meaning of politics (*kāra mu'ang* = "making a town".)

Let us return to my basic principle, namely, that no part of society whether it be politics, economics or religion can be excluded from morality, and that the "science of society" (*śāstra-sangham*) is fundamentally ethical in nature for it proposes to "cut through" the problems of society in all its facets in order to bring about a natural harmony and balance among the parts.

We need to see politics as a form of practical morality, not morality in the philosophical sense. Philosophy deals basically with language or words, rather than with the realities of human experience. Politics or political science, in the form of philosophy which seems so popular nowadays, is useless. But, when politics is seen as a form of morality, it can help the world. It will be even better if politics is taken as a form of religion because religion is the perfection of what is called morality. In a less developed form we call it social ethics. In its mature form it is a religious morality which is necessary for society. Politics as a political philosophy or mere ideology may lead to mutual slaughter and destruction with atomic bombs, but as a form of religion it will lead to a state of peace and equanimity.

"Democracy" like communism is an expression of discussed political term. But its meaning is ambiguous, and it is used in different ways. On the one hand, democracy can be a means

of taking advantage of and destroying others. On the other, it is an instrument to create peace. The term is used by both capitalists and the proletariat against one another. Capitalists use it to defend their acquisition of wealth and property, while the proletariat use it to deprive them of it. What is the basic meaning of democracy? Is there a fundamental meaning of the term, or is it simply contingent on context and point of view? Let us look more closely at the meaning of democracy in terms of "liberal democracy" on the one hand, and "socialist democracy" on the other.

Liberal democracy, above all, upholds the ideal of freedom (Thai: *saerri*). But the freedom it upholds is so ambiguous that it seems always to be controlled by the power of human defilements (*kilesa*). Though the ideal of freedom is beautifully portrayed in the philosophy of liberal democracy, it is difficult to put into practice. The liberal philosophy or ideology of freedom does not have the power to resist the strength of human defilements. The ambiguity of the meaning of liberal democracy promotes the idea that anything one wants to do is all right. The thug as well as the wise man claims freedom for himself. If he is not given freedom, then it can be said that there freedom does not exist. We must accept the fact that we all have defilements. That would be true even if all the people of the world were joined together. Liberal democracy cannot deal effectively with this fact.

A more controlled form of democracy which is better able to cope with human defilement is socialism (*sangham-niyama*) which is opposed to the ideal of the individual freedom of liberalism. Socialism focuses on social

utility, and the examination and correction of social problems. Liberalism cannot provide a basis for social utility because it promotes selfishness, individual benefits rather than social benefits. From a Buddhist point of view we can say that there are two types of socialism—dhammic and adhammic. Dhammic socialism can save the world from what appears to be its self-destructive course. Adhammic socialism, on the other hand, cannot save the world because of foolish ignorance. As a political system, socialism is better than liberalism because the latter promotes selfish, egoistic interests. Liberalism in the ideal sense or in the fullest dhammic sense, however, promotes liberation or Nibbāna. Freedom in the fullest sense is the freedom which leads only to Nibbāna. Worldly freedom which characterizes liberal democracy has a dangerous flaw, i.e. it fails to account adequately for *kilesa* or defilements. It contrasts with socialism in the most complete sense, “*dhammika-socialism*” or socialism rooted in *dhamma*.

Let us examine a very controversial notion, “dictatorial democracy” (*prajādhipatai-phadetjakāra*). We tend to shy away from the word, “dictatorship,” because we are so infatuated with liberalism (*saerri-niyama*). The term dictatorship has two meanings. As a *principle* of action or an ideal as, for example, a political ideal, it is not practical. But as a *method* of action it can be useful for it simply means to handle things expeditiously. If a socialist country is fully democratic, when problems seem to take a long time to solve they will be treated “dictatorially”, that is they will be dealt with expeditiously and it will be an “expeditious democracy.” A dhammic socialist democracy is “dictatorial”

in this sense.

To sum up, there are various forms of democracy such as liberal democracy and socialist democracy. The ideal form is dhammic socialist democracy in which “dictatorial” means are used to expedite solutions to social problems. We must not be misled by the usual associations of the word, “dictatorial.” Dictatorship in the sense of tyranny has no place in dhammic socialism. If dictatorial methods are consistent with *dhamma*, they will help expedite moral solutions to social problems, and should be used to the fullest extent. Our own country is currently in great turmoil, and we seem to have no clear vision of where we are headed. If we were more “dictatorial” in a dhammic way, we would be able to solve our problems quickly.

If we apply dictatorial methods to matters of the mind (*Thai: cit cai*), then dictatorship takes on a truly dhammic or religious meaning. If we were more dictatorial with the defilements of our minds, we would soon see the power of these defilements weaken or entirely disappear. Indeed, if we were all “dictators” in this sense, there would be no need for governments at all. Everyone would be free from defilements, and we would have achieved the highest condition of morality. It is precisely the problem of defilements that makes liberal democracy impractical as anything but an ideal. By nature, people give in to their defilements. As a consequence, “liberal democracy” tends to be interpreted simply in terms of our own selfish, egoistic interests and not the good of the whole. A political system must first address the problem of defilement. It must take into account that while we were born in a state of

non-defilement, the moment sensory existence begins defilements arise and increase throughout our lives. Personal or individual freedom is subsidiary to the problem of defilement.

The word, "freedom" as it is widely interpreted is actually inconsistent with the fundamental meaning of politics. If we think of politics as something that concerns groups of people living together, then the emphasis of a political system would be the wellbeing of the entire group. "Freedom," on the other hand, is an individual matter. An emphasis on personal freedom shifts the focus from the group to the individual. Such a focus is at odds with the meaning of politics. There is a story about someone who caught a monkey, a bird, a large lizard, a turtle and a tiger, tied them together with a long rope, and then let them do whatever they wanted. Of course, each one wanted to do something completely different, and they all struggled and strained to go their own directions. The monkey tried to climb a tree, the bird attempted to fly, the turtle wanted to crawl in a swamp, and the lizard tried to go off into the forest.

Anyone infatuated with the word, "freedom" or "free democracy" should remember that upholding the personal freedom of individuals who are ruled by *kilesa* goes against the fundamental meaning of politics which is concerned with the good of the whole. A political system that does not focus on society as a whole is an immoral system. Freedom in the religious or dhammic sense is important to keep in mind here because it means in the most fundamental sense to be free from defilements (*kilesa*). A free democracy succeeds as a political system only to the extent that the people in it are



freed from *kilesa*. There is the phrase, “freedom from *kilesa* leads to Nibbāna.” Unfortunately, you will never see freedom referred to in this sense in any political treatise, nor will you hear it mentioned in contemporary political discussions. Such freedom is only discussed in terms of religion. Yet, it is precisely this kind of freedom which is at the basis of a dhammic society and the attainment of Nibbāna.

Let us look more closely at the kind of socialism that contrasts most sharply with *kilesa*-dominated “freedom.” What is at the very core of this concept of socialism? One way of expositing the concept is to go back to the basic meaning of “politics”. If we take this term to mean “pertaining to many people,” and society as a collection of many people then the basic sense of politics and socialism is the same, namely, pertaining to the interactions of many people. Another perspective is to look at socialism from the perspective of Nature. Nature in its pure state is an example of pure socialism. Had Nature operated according to the ways of a “free” or liberal democracy, it would have destroyed itself soon after the world began. Where socialism in the most basic sense has continued to exist, it has done so because it has reflected its natural condition of interdependent and harmonious balance.

Consider how Nature has maintained this complex balance among all its manifestations since the time the earth came into existence. After the earth became separated from the sun or wherever it came from, it gradually cooled and hardened. As years went by this stone-like matter eroded into soil and dust, and various elements took shape. No one

thing existed or came into being independently. The primordial waters gave rise to the first single-celled organisms we call life. Over time this life evolved into multi-celled forms and then into plants and animals.

If we are observant, we will notice what Nature's secret plan has been from the very beginning: the entire natural world should exist in harmonious balance for it to survive, develop and thrive. We may call this interdependence and balance the plan of direction of nature. In this plan, no one part should consume more than its share of resources. A stomach, for example, has the capacity to hold just the right amount of food for survival and growth. Hoarding or storing food in granaries and warehouses undermines this plan. In the natural world Nature sharply limits and controls any form of hoarding. Throughout the process of evolution, from single celled organisms right up to the appearance of the first primitive humans, the natural world remained inherently socialistic. Nature did not provide any of its various forms with the means of hoarding more resources than were necessary for survival and development.

Birds, insects, trees—all consume only as much as Nature has given them the means to take in, a level of consumption perfectly adequate for their needs. It is precisely this limiting, or, if you will, "dictatorial", aspect of nature that has allowed the plant and animal world to survive and multiply in such profusion and diversity.

Even the earliest humans had no social problems as we have today, because they had not begun to hoard resources. They lived according to a natural socialism for hundreds of thousands of years. We are here today because Nature has

maintained a harmonious socialistic balance through the entire evolutionary process. This natural balance was not threatened until a few “un-natural” humans began to produce and store for themselves more than they needed. This hoarding gave rise to competition instead of cooperation. Social problems began when human intelligence was applied to methods of accumulating wealth, power, and resources in order to take advantage of others. Even nowadays, “freedom” of the liberal democratic type is used as an excuse for individuals or groups to appropriate large amounts of wealth for themselves at the expense of others.

In the Pali scriptures there is a passage about someone who thought it would be better to gather in a large amount of grain all at one time and store it rather than to gather it daily as needed. This person began to take so much grain, however, that others did not have enough to eat. People had to fight for their food. Such problems plague us today, and various economic theories have been put forward to address this competition for resources. Unfortunately, the confusing jumble of economic theories tends to lead us away from any real solution because they do not operate according to the perfect morality of Nature.

By “morality of Nature” we mean the state of normalcy (*prakati*) that exists in a pure form in the natural world. We can see this condition of normalcy all around us: stones, sand, trees, and insects simply *are*; no artificial theory or social system directs their interrelationships. They exist in a pure, natural state of balance. In nature we find the perfect essence of morality (*sīla-dhamma*), which is one and the

same with the basis of socialism: the condition of harmonious balance and normalcy.

Politicians and political theorists will not take this definition of socialism seriously. Their views are not based on the kind of profound, spiritual perceptions we have described. A profound understanding of our total condition is a concern of religion and morality, however, and for that reason the insights of religion can greatly benefit those who form political ideologies.

The socialist system we associated with the condition of innocence created by God is the natural state or the original state of nature (*dhamma-jāti*). People existed in this condition for ages until they lost such a natural socialism as a consequence of their ignorance and their lack of obedience to God. This was the beginning of sin (*pāpa*). This original socialist condition encompassed both the human and animal worlds as part of the state of nature. It was not the creation of human beings. Indeed, social problems arose when humans acted against the original intention (*cetanā*) of Nature. More and more problems arose over time as a result of human effort and more and more distinctions were created among people until it became necessary for them to construct a socialist system themselves because they had so separated themselves from Nature.

An ancient Thai legal text which came from India has a story relevant to this discussion. It tells us of King Sammādirāja, the very first king in the world. This story provides an example of socialism or of what constitutes politics in the best sense. In the olden days people lived in the forests and jungles and had no culture, but they lived in

peace with sufficient for their needs. This condition prevailed until people began to hoard, steal and quarrel, holding the original socialist condition of Nature in contempt. People began living according to *kilesa* (defilements), like monkeys acting without intention (*cetanā*). People took advantage of one another leading to widespread trouble until king Sammādirāja appeared to bring about peace and order. He was strong, clever, a singular leader who brought contentment to the people. He had the responsibility of preventing quarrels, instructing the people, punishing wrongdoers, and rewarding those who acted in the right.

According to the Pali scriptures it became necessary to extend natural socialism to the political foundations of the community when oppression in the community became intolerable. People saw fit to invest a particularly capable, just leader with their trust and power. This leader or *rāja* would govern in such a way that no one could oppress anyone else and the community would thus enjoy contentment (Thai: *po cai*). Indeed, the word *rāja* actually means contentment. Socialism as a political system, then, is truly socialistic in so far as its leaders secure the contentment of the entire community.

The Pali scriptures describe in detail how human inspired socialism began with a mythological first king of the world, whose rule brought contentment and ended oppression. Throughout the period of history when India was ruled by kings, the most highly respected ones were those who could claim direct descent from this first mythological *rāja* of the world. The important point to keep

in mind is not the position of the *rāja*, but the original meaning of the word that joins the concepts of political leadership and social wellbeing. Not all historical *rājas* have ruled well, however, because some have been dominated by defilements. They have wielded their power for personal gain and not the good of the community.

The ideal ruler fulfills all of the Ten Royal Precepts or Virtues as set down in the Pali scriptures. Western political theory does not mention anything like the Ten Royal Virtues. Does that mean we should consider this something of the past just as we have ended absolute monarchy because we consider it inappropriate for modern times?

If a monarch rules with tyranny, of course such governments should be done away with. If, however, the monarch fulfills the Ten Royal Virtues, then his rule will embody the principles of socialism and bring about contentment in society. Under such rule there would be no capitalist oppressors or division of labor according to wealth and power; there would be no underclass of angry laborers resentful at being oppressed and at not having the power to accumulate wealth for themselves. A truly socialistic government would embody the characteristics of *dhamma*. It would not allow for class distinctions based on wealth. Nor would it permit anyone to accumulate private wealth at the expense of others. Because it would set limits on "freedom" as such, it could be called "dictatorial"; but, it also maintains a harmonious balance that brings about wellbeing in the community, and so extends the socialism of nature to the basis of a political system.

Buddhism is a prime example of dictatorial dhammic

socialism not only in theory but also in practice. Activities within the *sangha* are “dictatorial” in that limits are set on what any one person can have or use so that there will always be enough for everyone. The *vinaya* makes clear the extent of these limits on what monks can eat, use, and set aside for themselves. The slightest transgression of these limits is considered a serious breach of monastic discipline.

In regard to dress, monks were allowed only three robes. To claim ownership of more transgressed the *vinaya* and required punishment. Monks had to give up any extra robes to the group. This is the spirit of socialism. As for food, it could not be hoarded and to store it overnight was a transgression of the monastic code. One ate sufficient for the day and gave the remainder to others. A monk’s dwelling according to the *vinaya* was to be constructed by the monk himself, approximately 9' × 12', the size of yonder bathroom. A dwelling larger than that was a punishable transgression. Finally, as for medicine, the *vinaya* stipulates that it is a transgression for a healthy monk to take medicine. When it was necessary to take medicine it was to be easily acquired natural things such as urine, excrement, wood ashes, earth or vomit. In short, monks could not take whatever they wanted, nor was it necessary to eat well. There was no superfluidity and any excess was to be shared with others. This created a society where there was no want. Every religion has a similar intent—excess of any kind is considered sinful and contrary to the purposes of God because it promotes selfishness. In Buddhism we have the saying, “All living beings are mutual friends in the process of birth, old age, sickness and death,” a saying which cuts

through selfish individualism.

The Buddha developed a socialist system with a “dictatorial” method. Unlike liberal democracy’s inability to act in an expeditious and timely manner, this dhammic dictatorial socialism is able to act immediately to accomplish what needs to be done. This approach is illustrated by the many rules in the *vinaya* against procrastination, postponement and evasion. Similarly, the ancient legal system was socialistic. There was no way that someone could take advantage of another, and its method was “dictatorial” in the sense that it cut through confusion and got things done.

Now we need to look more closely at the system of kingship based on the Ten Royal Precepts or Virtues. This is also a form of dictatorial socialism. The best example is King Asoka. Many books about Asoka have been published, in particular concerning the Asokan inscriptions found on rock pillars throughout his kingdom. These were edicts about Asoka’s work which reveal a socialist system of government of an exclusively dictatorial type. He purified the *sangha* by wiping out the heretics, and he insisted on right behavior on the part of all classes of people. Asoka was not a tyrant, however. He was a gentle person who acted for the good of the whole society. He constructed wells and assembly halls, and had various kinds of fruit trees planted for the benefit of all. He was “dictatorial” in the sense that if his subjects did not do these public works as commanded, they were punished.

After King Asoka gave his orders, one of his officials, the Dhammajo or Dhammāmātaya, determined if they had been faithfully followed out through all the districts of the



kingdom. If he found a transgressor a "dictatorial" method was used to punish him. The punishment was socialistic in the sense that it was useful for society and not for personal or selfish reasons.

The final piece of evidence supporting King Asoka's method occurred at the end of his life, when all that remained of his wealth was a half of a tamarind seed. Before he died he gave even this away to a monk. What kind of a person does such an act— a tyrant or a socialist? That King Asoka also preserved the ideals of a Buddhist dictatorial socialism is also supported by an examination of his famous rock and pillar edicts.

Socialism in Buddhism, furthermore, is illustrated by the behavior of more ordinary laymen and laywomen. They live moderately, contributing their excess for the benefit of society. For example, take the case of the Buddhist entrepreneur or *śreṣṭhī*. In Buddhism, *śreṣṭhī* are those who have alms houses (Thai: *rong than*). If they have no alms houses they cannot be called *śreṣṭhī*. The more wealth they have the more alms houses they possess. Do capitalists today have alms houses? If not, they not *śreṣṭhī* as we think of them during the Buddhist era which was socialistic in the fullest sense. The capitalists during the Buddhist era were respected by the proletariat rather than attacked by them. If being a capitalist means simply accumulating power and wealth for oneself, that differs radically from the meaning of *śreṣṭhī* as one who uses his or her wealth to provide for the wellbeing of the world.

Even such terms as slave, servant, and menial had a socialistic meaning during the Buddhist era. Slaves did not

want to leave the *śreṣṭhī*. Today, however, "slaves" hate capitalists. *śreṣṭhī* during the Buddhist era treated their slaves like their own children. All worked together for a common good. They observed the moral precepts together on Buddhist sabbath days. The products of their common labor were for use in alms houses. If the *śreṣṭhī* accumulated wealth, that would be put in reserve for use later in the alms houses. Today things are very different. In those days slavery was socialistic and did not need to be abolished. Slave and master worked for the common good. The kind of slavery which should be abolished, exists under a capitalist system in which a master treats slaves or servants like animals. Slaves under such a system always desire freedom, but slaves under a socialist system want to remain with their masters because they feel at ease. In my own case, for example, it would be easier to be a common monk than to bear the responsibilities of being an abbot. Similarly, a servant in a socialist system has an easier life than a master (*Thai : nai*), and is treated as a younger family member.

In the Buddhist view, *śreṣṭhī* are those who have alms houses and a great *śreṣṭhī* has many of them. They have enough for their own use and share from their excess. Buddhists have espoused socialism since antiquity, whether at the level of king, wealthy merchant or slave. Most slaves were content with their status even though they could not, for instance, ordain as monks. They could be released from their obligations, or continue them, as they chose. Slaves were recipients of love, compassion, and care. Thus, one can see that the essence of socialism in those days was pure and totally different from the socialism of today.

Let us look again at the Ten Royal Precepts or virtues (*dasarājadhamma*) as a useful form of Buddhist socialism. Most students at secondary and college levels have studied the canonical meaning of the *dasarājadhamma*, and did not find it of much interest. In Buddhism this is called the ten *dhamma* of kingship: *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (morality), *pariccāga* (liberality), *ajjava* (uprightness), *maddava* (gentleness), *tapo* (self-restraint), *akkodha* (non-anger), *avihinisa* (non-hurtfulness), *khanti* (forebearance), *avirodhana* (non-opposition).

*Dāna* is giving or the will to give; *sīla* is morality, those who possess morality (*sīla-dhamma*) in the sense of being the way things are (*prakati*) freed from the forces of defilement (*kilesa*): *pariccāga* means to give up completely all inner evils such as selfishness; *ajjava* is truthfulness; *maddava* is to be meek and gentle toward all citizens; *tapo* or self-control refers to the fact that a king should always control himself; *akkodha* means to be free from anger; *avihinisa* is the *dhamma* which restrains one from causing trouble to others, even unintentionally; *khanti* is being tolerant or assuming the burden of tolerance; *avirodhana* is freedom from guilt. A king who embodies these ten virtues radiates the spirit of socialism. Why need we abolish this kind of kingship? If such a king was a dictator, he would be like Asoka whose "dictatorial" rule was to promote the common good and to abolish the evil of private, selfish interest.

Let us now look at the way in which the Samuhanimit monastery (*wat*) in Phumriang District was built as an example of Buddhist dictatorial socialism. An inscription in the monastery tells us that the *wat* was built during the third

reign under the sponsorship of the Bunnag family, and that it was built in four months. To finish the *wat* in four months called for "dictatorial" methods. Thousands of people from the city were ordered to help complete the work, and occasionally physical punishment was used. The labor force made bricks, brought stones, animals, trees—everything they could. After the work was finished, the head of the monastery in the city who had resided at one of the city *wats* was forced to be the abbot at Wat Samuhanimit. To be sure, dictatorial methods were used in the establishment of this monastery, but the end result benefitted everyone.

The character of the ruler is the crucial factor in the nature of Buddhist dictatorial socialism. If a good person is the ruler the dictatorial socialism will be good, but a bad person will produce an unacceptable type of socialism. A ruler who embodies the ten royal virtues will be the best kind of socialist dictator. This way of thinking will be totally foreign to most Westerners who are unfamiliar with this kind of Buddhist kingly rule. A good king is not an absolute monarch in the ordinary sense of that word. Because we misunderstand the meaning of kingship we consider all monarchical systems wrong. The king who embodies the ten royal virtues, however, is a socialist ruler in the most profound or dhammic sense, such as the King Mahāsammatta, the first universal ruler, King Asoka, and the kings of Sukhodāya and Ayudhaya. Kingship based on the ten royal virtues is a pure form of socialism. Such a system should not be abolished, but it must be kept in mind that this is not an absolute monarchy. In some cases this form of Buddhist dictatorial socialism can solve the world's

problems better than any other form of government.

People today follow the Western notion that everyone is equal. Educated people think that everyone should have the right to govern, and that this is a democratic system. However, today, the meaning of democracy is very ambiguous. Let us ask ourselves what the kind of democracy we have had for at least one hundred years has contributed to us as citizens. Questioning this kind of worldly democracy may make us suspect. I, myself, am not afraid to be killed because of rejecting this kind of democracy. I favor a Buddhist socialist democracy which is composed of *dhamma* and managed by a "dictator" whose character exemplifies the ten royal virtues (*dasarājadhamma*). Do not blindly follow the political theories of someone who does not embody the *dasarājadhamma* system, the true socialist system which can save humankind. Indeed, revolution has a place in deposing a ruler who does not embody the *dasarājadhamma*, but not a place within a revolutionary political philosophy which espouses violence and bloodshed.

The *dasarājadhammic* system is absolute in that it depends essentially on one person. It was developed to the point where an absolute monarch could rule a country or, for that matter, the entire world as in the case of the King (*rāja*) Mahāsammatta. The notion of a ruler (*rāja*) needs to be better understood. The title, *rāja*, was given to the first ruler thousands of years ago when people first became interested in establishing a socialist society. We also need to rethink the notion of caste or class (*varṇa*). The ruling class (*kṣatriya*) has come to be despised and people advocate its abolition. Such an attitude ignores the fact that a ruling class of

somekind is absolutely necessary, however, it should be defined by its function rather than by birth. For example, there must be magistrates who constitute a part of a special class of respected people.

Caste or class (*varṇa*) should be based on function and duty rather than by birth. *Varṇa* determined by inherited class should be abolished. The Buddha, after all, abolished his own *varṇa* by becoming a monk and prescribed the abolition of other's inherited class statuses. But class by function and responsibility should not be abolished. It is the result of *kamma*. For instance, *kamma* dictates that a king should rule, and that a Brahman should teach or should be a magistrate in order to maintain order (*dhamma*) in the world. Class in this sense should not be abolished. The ruling class (*kṣatriya-varṇa*) should be maintained, but as part of the *dasarājadharmika* system to govern the world.

There was another system of government typical of small countries during the time of the Buddha, e.g. the Sakya and Licchavi, worthy of examination. The Licchavis, for example, were governed by an assembly composed of 220 people of the *kṣatriya* class. The elected head of the assembly acted as a king, having been chosen to rule for a designated period of time, e.g. seven months. The best of those born into the *kṣatriya* class were chosen as members of the assembly. One may imagine how progressive their kingdom was. Such was the Sakya kingdom of the Buddha. Large kingdoms like Kosala could not conquer these small states because they were rooted in dhammic socialism. When they gave up this system of government social harmony was undermined which resulted in their destruction. The Buddha

used the Licchavis as an example of a people who followed a socialist style of life—careful in personal habits, attentive to the defense of the nation, and respectful of women—but who departed from this way and were eventually destroyed. Western scholars have not written very much about this ancient type of government in which the king and his assembly ruled by the *dasarājadhamma*. But this type of government, an enlightened ruling class (*kṣatriyavarṇa*) based in the *dasarājadhamma* is, in fact, the kind of socialism which can save the world.

The sort of socialism I have been discussing is misunderstood because of the term, *rāja*. But a ruler who embodies the ten royal virtues represents socialism in the most complete sense—absolute, thorough, effective—like King Asoka and other rulers like him in our own Thai history. For example, upon careful study we can see that Rama Khamhaeng ruled socialistically, looking after his people the way a father and mother look after their children. Such a system should be revived today. We should not blindly follow a liberal democratic form of government essentially based on selfish greed.

The last point I want to make and one especially important for the future is that small countries like our own should adhere to a system of “dictatorial dhammic socialism” or otherwise it will be difficult to survive. An illusory democracy cannot survive. Liberal democracy has too many flaws. Socialism is preferable, but it must be a socialism based on *dharma*. Such dhammic socialism is by its very nature “dictatorial” in the sense I have been discussing today. In particular, small countries like Thailand should

have democracy in the form of a dictatorial dhammic socialism.

An ancient proverb which is rarely heard goes, "You must ignite the house fire in order to receive the forest fire." Elders taught their children that they should burn an area around their huts in order to prevent forest fires from burning down their dwellings. If small countries like our own have a dictatorial dhammic socialist form of government it will be like burning the area around the house in order to protect us from the forest fire. The forest fire can be compared to violent forms of socialism or to capitalism both of which encompass the world today. A dictatorial dhammic socialism will protect us from being victimized by either capitalism or violent forms of proletarian revolution.



## A SOCIALISM CAPABLE OF BENEFITING THE WORLD

Why should we consider the concept of socialism? Is it for rather frivolous, politically fashionable reasons? Socialism can be examined from various perspectives. Buddhism, for example, has a socialist view of the world. There are other forms of socialism, however, which espouse violence. Since the term, socialism, has become part of ordinary discourse, and because socialism as a political force is actually spreading, understanding its meaning has become problematic. Buddhists in Thailand and other parts of the world need to develop a more adequate understanding of socialism.

How can we understand socialism in order to benefit the human situation in the world today? Given the fact that in Buddhism there is already a profound concept of socialism, this question is somewhat incongruous. Still, I would like to say that we are fortunate to live in a time when there is a great interest in this subject. Compared to the Buddhist teaching, however, worldly socialism seems to be a childish matter. It cannot lead to a final solution. If it can be said that by nature (*dhammajāti*) all human beings or animals can live according to the true (*dhammasacca*) ideal of socialism, then the form of socialism which prevails in the world today is only a kind of provisional truth (*saccanivesa*) and may be false and misleading. Worldly socialism creates

serious problems and disrupts the natural order of things.

The term, "socialism", as we find it in the texts or in academic circles, takes various forms, but these types of socialism which have arisen indifferent times cannot surpass the ideal of Buddhist Socialism. Buddhists, we might say, have an unconscious ideal of socialism. It has existed in the form of monastic administration since the Buddha's time, and also within the system of Buddhist doctrine. If we consider the Buddha's behavior toward all living beings we can see the highest form of socialism. Since humankind cannot attain the true form of socialism it does not reach its ultimate truth or expression. We get stuck in various opinions regarding different forms of socialism. In particular the term has been connected with contemporary politics and has a special significance for the world today.

We must keep in mind that socialism is not something new and fadish. If we were to go back about 2000 years we would meet the finest socialist system which was part of the flesh and blood of the Buddhist community. Consequently, if we hold fast to Buddhism we shall have a socialist disposition in our very being. We shall see our fellow humans as friends in suffering--in birth, old age, sickness and death--and, hence, we cannot abandon them. Everyone here should be able to understand this statement. The elderly, especially, may remember how our forefathers taught us to be altruistic, to consider others as friends in all aspects of life and death. This ideal of pure socialism must be acted out, not just talked about, and not just for political purposes or for one's selfish, devious and false gain. Buddhists need to become familiar with the socialism inherent in the Buddhist

community, using it as a weapon against bloody forms of socialism which promote one's own evil deeds and forces them on others.

Since the Buddhist community has had a noble socialism within itself, let us hold fast to the Buddhist teachings. All aspects of the Buddha's teachings have the spirit of socialism. When we have something precious and unsurpassable already, we should not become infatuated by childish things. That is pitiable, indeed. Soon socialism will spread through the world. Therefore, we should not become infatuated with it. This would be as ridiculous as a few years ago when someone from MRA (Moral Rearmament) propagated the teachings in the Buddhist community that there was no self, and that we should love and forgive one another. How utterly ridiculous. I, myself, was taken in. It was a strange situation, that when we already have a far better teaching, he presented this as something new, superior and special in order to enlist monks and nuns to be members of the MRA. It would be equally foolish if one were to offer a violent form of socialism in place of the noble socialism Buddhists hold in their hearts.

There are many different kinds of socialism. We shall discuss true socialism, however; the socialism inherent in nature which can benefit the entire world. It is the essence of the *dhamma* (*dhammasacca*) which is also the essence of nature (*dhammajāti*). It follows, then, that the essence of nature is socialism: nothing can exist independently; everything exists interdependently. Without the earth how could there be trees? Without trees how could the earth exist? Or, could there be water without trees and earth? The

elements (earth, sky, atmosphere) of a suitable and happy life cannot exist independently. They must exist relative to one another. Looking at this assertion at greater depth, if only the earth element exists, how will it be useful? There must also be elements of water, fire, air, and spirit (*vinnana*). If they interrelate well, there will be a balance in nature among human beings, animals, trees, earth, water. Anything which exists in a proper condition has everything in balance.

The socialist intends that all aspects of life operate in conjunction with one another. Those who study anatomy and medicine are able to understand what this means. In these realms nothing exists independently: eyes work in conjunction with the ears, the ears with the nose, the nose with the mouth. It is important to study these matters because simple observation leads to true understanding of the nature of things only with great difficulty. All organs, big and small, need to work together performing according to their true nature (*dhammasacca*) as bodily components. Similarly, the spirit of socialism exists in everyone: the necessity of living together in a properly harmonious, balanced way.

That which we call love and unity is a kind of socialism in which we can trust. Irresponsibility, competition, quarreling, and discrimination aimed at destroying others lead to the arising of a radical socialism. Bloodshed within socialist communities comes about through this kind of competition among different groups. If we correctly follow the true *Dhamma* of nature, however, there will be but one types of socialism. There will be no bloodshed because there

will be no conflict. The fundamental meaning of socialism (*sangha-niyama*) means the ability to live together in harmony. A society which is *niyama* by its very nature or definition means to be unified, without conflict. When conflict arises society cannot be *niyama*; or, we might say, if one group extols itself as right and condemns another as wrong there is no spirit of socialism. The truth (*dhammasacca*) of nature is simply this: that things are imbued with the spirit of socialism; that, miraculously, all things exist in unity with one another even though we may not have the eyes to see this truth or the wisdom to comprehend it.

Our forebearers knew this truth. Thus, they taught that we should do whatever we can to promote the coexistence of all living beings, and that we should be kindly toward one another according to the law of nature. Human beings are able to exist today because they form a society, a cooperative unit providing mutual benefits. That humans are this way is nothing but the handiwork of nature. People who know this truth will hold fast to this principle; that is, they will support everything according to the plan of Nature or of God. For example, traditionally rice paddies were for the benefit of monkeys [i.e. forest animals] as well as the human beings who planted them. In India paddy farmers planted with the forest animals in mind as well as their own consumption. They thought that monkeys should be in the world, too, so a natural balance should be maintained. Buddhist socialism, then, includes all living beings, not just humans.

The traditional culture in India that promotes the love of all living beings is so persistent that devout Indians today

do not eat meat. Therefore, the country is filled with all kinds of mice, crabs and fish which cannot be seen in Thailand because we are not as loving and compassionate toward all living creatures as they are. This is an indication that a socialist view remains strong in India, and in the hearts and minds of the Indian people.

I have asserted that Buddhism has espoused a socialist view from its beginning. In fairness to other religions, however, it must be said that all are socialistic in the most profound sense. That is, Buddhism and all religions are founded on the ideal of love and compassion toward all beings. This attitude engenders equality and freedom, and the sense of the essential interrelatedness of all beings. In Buddhism this attitude resulted in the creation of the monastic order.

The Buddha prescribed the system of monastic discipline (*vinaya*) for the purpose of binding all persons together into an indissolvable group or aggregation. We know this truth from the word, *sangha* itself. *Sangha* literally means an aggregation or group. It never refers simply to a single individual. When people live as an aggregation or group they need something to hold them together, a principle imbedded in the nature of things (*dhammasacca*) which will bind them together. In the Buddhist community the *vinaya* embodies such a principle. Above all, it calls for moderation and balance. In particular, monks are enjoined not to take more than they need. To take in excess is to transgress the *vinaya*. For example, if a monk has more than three robes he commits an ecclesiastical offense. He is to have only one almsbowl, and living quarters no larger than

twelve by seven which is about equal in size to yonder bathroom! Monks are to be content with moderation in all aspects of life to uphold the *vinaya* and not to obstruct the *dhamma*.

A monk who consumes or acquires in excess will be overwhelmed by things and will not progress in the *dhamma*. From another perspective, if each person does not take in excess there will be much left over. That excess will be shared with others, and they will not be in short supply. Excessive hoarding leads to scarcity, and scarcity leads to poverty. Therefore, not to take or consume in excess will lead to the elimination of poverty. Those who take more than they need do so driven by greed. Greed, then is at the heart of scarcity and poverty. Consequently, the ideal which teaches monks not to take in excess is the real foundation of socialism (*sangha-niyama*). In addition to this principle, there are clearly established monastic regulations which demand that monks support one another. The socialistic ideal of Buddhism finds expression in the concept of the *bodhisattva*. The *bodhisattva* is one who not only helps others, but sacrifices himself, even his own life, for others. Buddhism upholds this ideal because of the socialist intention which prevails throughout all aspects of the tradition. The socialism of Buddhism is nothing but the truth of nature (*dhammasacca*), namely, that nothing exists independently. A tree standing by itself will easily fall down; animals must live in groups and so must human beings. The phrase, "living together in *sangham*" represents nothing less than the necessity of nature. The need to procreate and produce children is, after all, a social matter. Human survival depends

upon the support of others in the spirit of cooperation and care.

We have, unfortunately, entered an age of brutality and selfishness. Human beings have devastated nature (*dhammajāti*) until some kinds of plants and animals have become extinct. Even some kinds of humans have become extinct because of the tremendous upsurge of anti-social thought. Selfishness has also led to great disparities among people with some becoming excessively rich and others excessively poor. Both the rich and the poor do not understand socialism correctly. This ignorance has been partially responsible for their respective conditions, the poverty of the poor and their exploitation by the rich. Wealth need not be condemned in and of itself. The rich may work to alleviate the conditions of the poor for the good of society. If they behave as exploiting capitalists, however, dire consequences will emerge.

The poor, for their part, have done many things wrong, largely out of ignorance. Many cannot control themselves. They are dominated by desires which lead them to poverty and ruin. Whoever is poor because of causes other than birth blindly accuses such factors as nature or others such as capitalists. Yet, upon careful consideration, it is clear that poverty often arises out of moral misconduct. If people are virtuous there will be neither capitalists who exploit nor poor people who are the subject of their exploitation. Morality (*śīladhamma*) will create a system of mutual aid called "pure socialism" (*sangha-niyama*), a system which, in fact, is inherent in the nature of things if we can but recover it.



In the present age we are reaping the consequences of our misconduct. We have abandoned pure socialism, thereby creating mutually destructive forms of socialism. The conflict in the world today is a form of insanity. These kinds of attempts to solve the problems of the world are like cleaning something muddied with muddy water. It only makes matters worse. Armed conflict cannot solve the problems of the world. It leads to senseless and enormous cost of life. The only real solution is to live in terms of the true nature of things (*dhammasacca*) which we may call God, that alone which possesses absolute power, sustains morality, and which can produce the cooperative social conditions of love and compassion (*mettā* and *karunā*).

We must fight to overcome *adhamma* with *dhamma* and overcome evil by goodness. Only through this means can we survive. If we acted in another way we would transgress the *dhamma* and worsen the situation. As Buddhists we are fortunate in that we possess all aspects of the *dhamma*, even the *dhamma* of social existence from which we can build a good society. An analogy will help us understand this statement. We are in the kind of situation where we must "ignite the home fire in order to receive the jungle fire." The home fire refers to that part of our lives governed by the ethical system (*sīladhamma*) and can be controlled. The jungle fire refers to that which occurs violently and randomly. If we are to protect against the jungle fire we must quickly light a fire near our house so that everything will not be consumed, with no victim left for the jungle fire, no victim for ignorance to consume. A house in a thicket of reeds is subject to the danger of fire. When a jungle fire occurs it will

burn up the whole thicket including the house. But, if we burn off the thicket around the house we will protect it from the jungle fire. Similarly, we should use the dhammic socialism we already possess as a means of confronting the violent forms of socialism controlled by selfish people who desire to create dissention and who condemn others unjustly, and rely on the teachings of the Buddha. Buddhism can be seen as the “religion of the people who know.” The term, Buddha, means one who knows, one who is awake, who is enlightened. Thus, the religion of the Buddha should provide knowledge, awakening, delight, and righteousness in all aspects of the world.

The term, “socialism” applies not only to human beings, but to all of nature (*dhammajāti*) such as the various elements (*dhātu*), aggregates (*khandha*), sense-fields (*āyatana*) and so on. Everything is within the framework of socialism (*sangha-niyama*), the proper relationship of one thing to another. Today, however, socialism has deviated from the truth (*dhammasacca*) of nature. Groups act against the harmony of nature, or the good of the whole, one from its position of financial power, the other from the power of its labor. The confrontation threatens mutual destruction. This sort of violent, bloody socialism arises from excessive selfishness which does not consider others’ right to live in the same world. The division of human beings into different groups at enmity with one another is neither the purpose of nature (*dhammajāti*) nor any religion. All religions aim to achieve a perfect unity or harmony. Consequently, religions advocate love and compassion (*mettā* and *karunā*) to rectify error rather than condemnation and destruction. Religion

aims at reconciliation rather than retribution. The latter simply promotes retaliation and the cycle of hatred and bloodshed goes on and on.

Today human beings are so cruel that they are willing to drop a bomb which they know can annihilate people by the thousands. Our ancestors would have surrendered or fled rather than bring about this kind of destruction of their fellow humans. How can we label this kind of deterioration of morality (*sīladhamma*) socialism when people are willing to use this kind of weapon? Capitalist countries as well as proletarian countries are ready to use weapons of such destruction. Both sides are equally cruel. In a true human community (*sangha*), however, people take pity on the unfortunate, and rectify wrongs by means other than taking life.

If we want peace we should choose the path of peace. Killing others can only lead to being killed. If we are to be harmoniously united with one another, we should act out of mutual compassion (*mettā* and *karunā*). No one today believes in the saying, "If we have universal love even fierce beasts will not harm us." People today hunt not only animals but human beings as well. We should consider well the saying, "We should overcome evil by good; we should not overcome evil by evil." The best way for Buddhists to confront violent forms of socialism is not with violence, but to "light the home fire in order to prepare for the jungle fire." By being strong in the *dhamma* we can destroy *adhmma*. Even though we may have to die we will not sacrifice *dhamma*; we will uphold *dhamma* instead of pursuing life *adhmmically*, and will create *dhamma* by

every means possible. Socialism constituted by *dhamma* or *dhammika-sangha-niyama* is not a socialism of vengeance, anger and hurt which encourages defilements toward one another. Such a socialism is adhammic, and inconsistent with a Buddhist society which prefers death to those kinds of acts.

Taking refuge in the *dhamma*, the monkhood (*sangha*), and the religion (*sasana*) means right conduct according to the *dhamma*, as with our ancestors who took *dhamma* as their refuge, protector and restraint from hostile disunity. In those days quarrels tended to be restrained whereas nowadays quarrels may easily lead to a total annihilation. Today we misunderstand what it means for people to live together in what we call "human society." We simply accept the fact that half the people in the world are considering killing the other half and say, "Oh, people will be people!" When we have come to this state how can we say that we are human beings. Socialism, rather than being a way of affirming the essential interrelatedness of everything, i.e. a true *dhammika-sangha-niyama*, has become a political philosophy opposed to capitalism. Both sides are poised to slaughter one another, believing that by such a means they can solve the problems of the world.

Even though we Thais have not created this world confrontation, we are part of this tragic situation and will be affected by it even accidentally, like being hit by a stray bullet. We cannot just sit back and say, "Well, the world is really going crazy!" The chaos of the world today affects all of us either directly or indirectly. Thus, we Buddhists have the responsibility to help solve this problem by means other than "cleaning mud with mud." We need to help clean up the

situation with the clean water of *dhamma*. We should cleanse the person we consider our enemy with the *dhamma*. This is called conquering evil with goodness. We should not take the contemporary political situation as the way things have to be. It is only a recent, minute and rather foolish portion of the whole human enterprise. We need to consider the more humane ingenuity of our forebearers and utilize it to solve our current problems without violence and bloodshed.

Everyone knows the tragic dimensions of the world situation today--how many people have been killed, the immense loss of property--and the continuing extent of the numerous problems we confront. We need to consider this situation so that we can understand it for what it is without being overwhelmed by regret on the one hand, or continuing the persecution of those with whom we disagree, on the other. We need to "make merit" not in the traditional, selfish sense, but in order to reestablish morality (*śīladhamma*). By returning to the true, moral nature of existence, a socialism capable of benefitting the world will arise. Without such a moral basis, however, true socialism cannot exist. Rather, we will see a continuation of the kind of socialism that prevails in the world today, one dominated by the sort of self-centeredness which leads to violence and bloodshed. We shall enter the age of "judgment by weapons," driven by the power of our defilements (*kilesa*). It will be an age of brutal stupidity. Therefore, let us turn to the (*dhamma*), to religion (*sāsana*) for models of righteousness which have proven themselves over the years as being valid to guide us in the present and the future.

To be sure, the term, *dhamma*, cannot be described

completely. We can all see how widely it is used and how varied its meaning. Indeed, this is part of its significance. *Dhamma* applies to all human concerns; everything is related to it. For example, the body is called *rupadhamma* and the mind is called *namadhamma*. The term which relates them is *dhamma*. Nothing can escape from being *dhamma*: the law which governs all phenomena, the practice according to this law, the results which arise such as pain and happiness are all referred to as *dhamma*. The problems of society cannot be solved by fighting the flesh, but only by realizing that they, as everything else, is grounded in *dhamma*.

True socialism is established by *dhamma*, and should be seen as the essence (*dhammasacca*) of Nature (*dhammajāti*). Nothing else in Nature establishes socialism, including human beings. Indeed, without this dhammic spirit of socialism rooted in Nature nothing could survive. We should, therefore, be grateful for the intention (Pali: *cetanā*) or truth of Nature which establishes everything in the most perfect pattern or form of socialism. Dhammic socialism exists as the fundamental interrelational pattern of the body so that it can survive; indeed, so that the village and the entire world can survive. It is not out of place to say that the entire universe (*cakravala*) is a socialist system. The countless number of stars in the sky exist together in a socialist system. Our small universe has the sun as its chief, and the planets, including the earth, as its followers. They exist within a socialist system, consequently, they do not collide. At the present time human insanity has created a state of bloody conflict. We are blinded to the true, dhammic nature of socialism, and are following adhammic

socialism.

Time is running out. In our adhammic quests we are destroying one another. We are denying what is most fundamental to what it means to be a human being within Nature, namely, mutuality, give-and-take, and the building of the sort of system that will prevent both destruction and the divisions that deny the mutually co-arising nature of the world. We have entered the most demeritorious age of humankind, one which attempts to defy the law of Nature. The cataclysmic nature of warfare threatens all forms of life. Even animals are unintentionally subject to the brutal behavior of human beings. It is imperative that we cultivate those higher qualities of mind and spirit that we, as humans, have within us. We must not allow ourselves to lose our humanity, and fall to a level even lower than that of animals. We must realize that the foundation of real socialism is *dhamma*, Nature (*dhammajāti*), the laws of Nature, the truth of Nature (*dhammasacca*).

The more *dhamma* is present in our minds, the more it will be present in the way we live. Only by greatly increasing the presence of *dhamma* everywhere can we withstand the powerful adhammic forces which are rapidly taking over the world. The world has never been in such a critical situation as today. Some might say that we have reached this crisis because of overpopulation. The most fundamental problems, however, are not material ones like overpopulation, but in the alarming increase in defilements (*kilesa*), ignorance (*avijjā*), and craving (*taṇhā*). The essence or truth of things (*dhammasacca*) has been driven out by the forces of *kilesa* and *taṇhā*. Such unnatural forces do violence to the balance

and mutuality of things. This violence, furthermore, goes beyond the physical. Even more tragically, it destroys the spirit (*vinñāna*) of dhamma. Of course, Nature itself cannot be destroyed; however, the presence of Nature expressed in the way we live is destructible. When we transgress the natural balance in the cosmos we suffer the consequences of our stupidity. Nature punishes us for our stupidity, and for the destruction we inflict on it.

We need to put our collective energy into discovering the common elements of our humanity in order that we might better communicate and improve our mutual interaction. If, however, we emphasize our differences and use brute force and impose our will on others, we become like wild animals upsetting the limits of nature and the natural balance of things.

To use another metaphor—if we fortify ourselves by living according to the principles of *dhammika* socialism, we will be able to resist the raging fires of adhammic socialism. Dhamma not only helps us serve humanity, but provides a shield protecting us from the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death. When we are not attached to the notion of self, we cannot be disturbed by suffering associated with the ideal of a self. We do not even fear death. Do not, therefore, let yourselves become distracted by everyday, trivial matters. Concern yourselves with what matters more than anything else—*dhamma*. By living in the *dhamma* not only will you benefit personally, but you will be acting in the interests of society.

It is imperative that we live or practice *dhamma* rather



than simply talking about it. These days many groups claim to be working for society, but they are actually after personal gain and glory. They spread the propaganda of world peace when, in fact, the interests they serve are their own, not those of society. Such deceit is demeritorious for them, for others, and for the *dhamma*. Many of us, furthermore, talk a great deal about socialism and the good of humanity, but in our hearts we still cling to the notion of self. Inevitably we come to feel a conflict between this "self" and the "selves" of others. Such conflict gives rise to disputes and disharmony. By practicing *dhamma* we will be able to work for the benefit of the whole, not just ourself.

Bear in mind the saying, "Practice *dhamma* with integrity." This saying points out that the *dhamma* can be distorted for deceitful purposes. When people claim that what they say is based on *dhamma*, but they behave dishonestly, they are using *dhamma* for deceitful ends. Many propagandists of socialism fall into this category. The socialism sweeping through Thailand nowadays is not a socialism grounded in *dhamma*. Its proponents use such persuasive methods, however, that they have taken over half the world. Unfortunately, their opponents are equally selfish. The two sides have squared off, thereby endangering the entire world.

As we sit here in this forest, surrounded by nature, we feel the calming effects of the natural environment. "Socialist" thoughts and feelings arise from such a calm state--socialist in the most profound sense of the truth of Nature. Here, we are not under the influence of a violent, worldly socialism so our minds can remain undisturbed,

allowing us to see and participate in the natural balance that pervades everything—earth, water, air, fire, and consciousness—the internal and external aspects of everything. Here is true socialism—the embodiment of Nature in a pure, balanced state. Here there is no deceit, no “me/mine” distinctions; they simply do not exist.

Nature, as I have said time and again, is the embodiment of socialism; its characteristics and direction or “intent” (*cetanā*) are inherently socialistic. Nothing in Nature exists independently; no creature, element, or molecule can exist by itself. All aspects of Nature combine in an interdependent relationship. Even an atom is a socialistic system of interdependent parts. A molecule also exhibits socialistic characteristics in that it is made up of several interdependent atoms. On and on it goes—molecules combine to form tissue, tissues combine to form flesh or leaves or whatever, all interdependent and in balance, according to the principles of Nature’s pure socialism.

Whenever this harmonious balance is disturbed, problems arise. Whenever any group sees itself as separate or independent, other groups will respond in like manner. Conflicts arise; people kill each other and so on. Without an understanding of the balance of Nature we will be unprepared to withstand the raging fires of violent socialism that are invading and taking over this country.

I say this to provoke a sense of responsibility that we, as Buddhists, should all feel. If no one acts responsibly there will be chaos. We must act to preserve *dhamma* in society and the world. When we become the agents of *dhamma* in all we do, we become *dhamma*. We might say that in this sense we

become immortal for though our physical body dies and disintegrates, *dhamma* continues through us.

The socialist direction and characteristics of *dhamma* manifest themselves in the harmonious balance of everything. When we fall out of harmony with this natural balance, we experience suffering in the form of anxiety, insomnia, and so on. We might say that *dhamma* makes us experience suffering in return for going against this natural balance. I urge you all to give yourselves over to living in this harmonious, dhammic balance. In doing so, you are giving yourselves over to the Buddha, and the *sangha* as well. All three (Buddha, dhamma, sangha) are really one and the same, but we shall use the term *dhamma* for what they all represent. Do not let yourselves fall into the habit of paying mere lip service to the Buddha, the *dhamma* and the *sangha* while living according to entirely different ideals. When you say you take these as your refuge, really do so--otherwise you will not be living up to your potential as human beings.

Some may be wondering what all this talk about socialism and political ideologies has to do with *dhamma*. Upon reflection you will see that the correct application of politics is a moral matter. For a political system to be moral it must be consistent with the truth or the essence of nature (the *sacca* of *dhammajāti*). A moral political system embodies *dhamma*, whereas a political system not based in morality is dishonest, destructive and inconsistent with the essence or fundamental truth of Nature.

No matter what kind of activity we carry out--be it politics, economics, or, indeed, even war--if done morally will maintain the natural, harmonious balance of all things,

and will be consistent with the original plan of nature. It is absolutely correct to fight for the preservation of *dhamma* in the world, but it is wrong to fight for anything other than that. Indeed, we should be happy to sacrifice our lives in fighting to preserve *dhamma* for the Greater Self, that is, for all humanity. If we follow the desires of our Lesser Self, the individual "I", we will be led astray by selfish motives. To live according to the socialism of Nature is to live in harmony with the Greater Self of the universe—the *paramātmān* or *mahātman*—the Great Truth of the universe. To realize this truth and preserve it is to become fully human. One need not be a Buddhist in a formal sense to do this. Whoever lives according to the natural balance of the *dhamma* does so. To understand Buddhism in this way is to enhance its meaning because its fundamental ideals are universal, dharmic ideals in which all facets of social existence, indeed, of the universe and other universes are based. The *dhamma* includes all living beings and all worlds so that the extension of the loving kindness (*mettā*) of the *dhamma* knows no limit.

## THE VALUE OF MORALITY

Today I'm going to address the topic, "The Value and Necessity of Morality," that is, the value of morality, and the necessity that humankind be moral.

Let's ask a simple question, "If a village does not have roads, is this because the village is not moral?" Those who answer such a question affirmatively realize that because the people are selfish they do not cooperate to make roads, or do not construct them because the villagers are lazy. Hence the question of whether a village has roads can be seen as a moral issue.

Or, take a person's house that is dirty and neglected. Even though this may appear to be an inconsequential illustration, at a deeper level it can be seen in terms of morality. If a home, furthermore, is filled with the noise of quarreling, altercation and abuse, that also represents a lack of morality, as well as the overt acts of stealing and robbing. The lack of morality today can be seen in the extent of selfish behavior, people taking advantage of one another, disputes between groups pursuing only their own self-interest, c.g. capitalists vs. peasants. The lack of morality can be seen in all walks of life--students, teachers, administrators, merchants, customers, lawyers, policemen, judges.

What are the consequences of the crisis of morality in the world today? People accuse one another of not dealing properly with the problems of society. They blame economics, politics and so on. However, they do not see the real cause, namely a lack of morality. For example, even with very good political leaders, if the people lack morality, they cannot be governed. Things will be unmanageable, and there will be no progress.

What do we mean by morality? It has been studied at great lengths. Indeed, what is called "morality" has so many names that it leads to confusion. It has been referred to in so many different ways that the concept has become meaningless, even absurd. Statements like, "The good morality of the people," seem to indicate that people have another morality which is bad. Morality cannot be spoken of as good, on the one hand, and bad, on the other. Morality by its very nature means that which is right or good and beneficial.

The meaning of morality is sometimes too broad and at others too narrow. The real meaning of morality, the deep meaning as it is in nature (*dhammajāti*) is overlooked. This meaning is indicated by the Pali term for morality, *Sī-La*. *Sī-La* means "normal" or the way things are (*prakati*). If anything conduces to morality and not to confusion it is called *sī-la*, and the *dhamma* (truth, reality) that brings about that state is called *sīladhamma*.

The meaning of the term *prakati* has many levels. If you think of *prakati* as "normal" in the sense of the condition of a stone, then you will be as motionless as a stone (i.e. do nothing) and call that condition one of having morality. That

is absurd. If *prakati* or normality is understood in this way then it is understood only in a material way. To speak about this matter from the perspective of a person who has insight and wisdom we must look at the deeper meaning of morality, that is, having a *prakati* mind, speech and action. *Prakati* does not mean being silent, not speaking or not moving. *Prakati* means not colliding with anyone, even oneself, not disturbing one's state of calm. Not colliding with anyone means not colliding with others, or not disturbing others' state of equanimity. This is called *prakati* according to the meaning of the word, *siladhamma*. It might be asked how being immersed in sitting around doing *prakati* and not colliding with anything can lead to civic progress. Such a criticism must be explored.

If we consider those occasions when the civic (Thai: *ban mu'ang*) order is not *prakati*, and we help to make it *prakati* we would call this *siladhamma*. As was said earlier, not having roads in the village creates difficulties. This is called un-*prakati*, that is, not *prakati-sukha* or happiness arising from *prakati*. If we correct such a problem, we then may say that things are *prakati*, that there is not an excess of trouble or disruption. If a village is cluttered with trash it is said to be contrary to *prakati*. Cleaning it up and making it neat creates a "cool" and balanced environment. Such action is called making *prakati*, or morality.

Now let us consider the meaning of *prakati* even more carefully. If one is poverty-stricken beyond the point of toleration, that is un-*prakati*. One must work in order to earn money so that *prakati* in the sense of material assets will be increased. In this respect such activity is called *siladhamma*

or morality. Therefore, we should take the word *sī-la*, which is the heart of *sīladhamma*, in the sense of the word *prakati* (i.e. normal, balanced). If the subject is material things then it will be the *prakati* of material things (*vatthuprakati*); if living beings (*satva*) then the *prakati* of living beings; if the mind (Thai: *cit-cai*; Pali: *citta*), then the *prakati* of the mind; if the body then it is the *prakati* of the body (Thai: *rangkaya*; Pali: *kāya*).

*Prakati* has two levels; the *prakati* of nature has following nature as its norm. For example, for the body to be in the state of *prakati* according to nature means to eat, stand, walk, sleep, bathe, excrete in this manner. This is one kind of *prakati*. Another kind regards the problems which humans must join together to solve. People have to work together in order that things will be the way they should. This is the *prakati* of society, or social morality.

Let us first look at morality *sīladhamma* in terms of value (Thai: *Khā*). First it is necessary to define "value." The term is used very often in such words as "price" (Thai: *rākhā*), "worth" (Thai: *khunkhā*), "qualifications of a person" (Thai: *khunasompati*, Pali: *gunasampatti*). All of these can be subsumed under *khā* (value). But what is *khā*? In looking at this matter carefully we will see that the meaning of *khā*, in the first instance, arises out of human necessity (Thai: *khwām tong kān*). *Khā* as the necessity of nature (*dhammajāti*) is its deepest level of meaning, however, because such value has not been established or formulated by people. *Khā*, therefore, has two meanings: 1) according to the mandates of human necessity, and 2) the deepest significance which is the necessity of nature.



Let us look at the first level of meaning. *Khā* (value) may be interpreted at this level as material things and material pleasure, the enjoyment of the flesh. This values only the material aspect of things and does not consider value according to the mind *namadhamma* or the heart (Thai: *cit-cai*). "Value" according to a materialistic view in the most general sense limits itself only to material things. From this value perspective, when the demand is great, prices are expensive; when they are not, prices decline. Furthermore, taking *things* as the standard of value leads to a real inconsistency in valuing: one person has one need; another does not; things that are valuable or expensive for one person are not valuable or are inexpensive for another.

The foolishness of this way of assessing values is illustrated by "The chicken and the sapphire." When a very expensive sapphire falls on the ground the chicken does not know it has any value. To the chicken it cannot compare with a grain of rice. Likewise, an emerald has no value to a monkey. One small cucumber is better. Or, a person overly attached to material things says, "This Buddha image only has the value of five fish." A person who understands the value of a Buddha image will not be able to comprehend such a statement; however, if one takes material things as the norm, then a Buddha image is worth only five fish. Such a person interprets *khā* (value) according to his own mouth or stomach, i.e. only in material terms.

A second type of material value (*khā*) follows from magic (Thai: *saiyasaṣāstra*) which depends on blind belief. *Kha* in the realm of magic has its origin in ignorance (Thai: *ngom ngai* = foolishness); things become potent or

miraculous when people believe in them--little things like a lump of earth or blood are bought and sold for tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars, and hocus-pocus rituals cost a similar amount. This is value (*khā*) in the eyes of magic.

A third type comes from real economic needs and takes its meaning from the principles of economic activity. *Khā* of the economic kind is associated with material demand, and things which fulfill these demands. In the face of heavy demand, there may not be sufficient supply and things will be expensive. If demand is reduced prices will be lower because supply will be sufficient to meet the demand. This is *khā* in the sense of the price (Thai: *rākhā*) of different things. It is *kha* as currency which is regulated in various ways, for various uses, and for various groups. But mere economic value cannot correct the basic problems of the world. An economic value perspective ignores morality (*siladhamma*). It is infatuated with things with which one should not be infatuated, and to which one should not be attached. There is a humorous example of this problem. Some people today are nearly crazy because pork is so expensive, especially people in Bangkok. Why do they get so hot-and-bothered? If pork is expensive, don't eat it. Don't make a shameless hue-and-cry about how difficult the situation is! This is called *kha* which arises out of human demands and necessity. From the perspective of morality (*siladhamma*) *khā* in this sense is deceptive (Thai: *lok luang*) and causes confusion about real value which is based in morality.

Today people do not seem to need morality *siladhamma*. Morality has almost no value (*khā*). Suffering

arises from such ignorance. If morality is something necessary for people, but people do not think they need morality, morality is devoid of value *khā*, or no one takes an interest in its value. When morality is not part of the lives of the people, and people are devoid of morality there is bound to be an increase in various kinds of problems, creating confusion and trouble everywhere.

Another and more profound meaning of *khā* originates from the necessity of nature (*dharmajāti*). If nature has a particular norm, whatever we do must be done in accordance with it. If we do not, there will be suffering, pain and death. For example, there are four necessities (*paccaya*): food, clothing, shelter and medicine. This is the *dharmajāti* of things (*vatthu*), and we must have them according to the dictates of nature. Sometimes it is peculiar that the necessities of life are very cheap, and utterly frivolous things are expensive. For example, why does rice not have a value (*khā*) as dear as gold, diamonds or sapphires? If we compare the value (*khā*) of precious gems with things that are necessary to the body, we would say they do not equal a single glass of water or a handful of rice. Food and water are necessities of nature; without them life is valueless, regardless of wealth.

Consider clothing. We should think about its true usefulness rather than misusing it, dressing up only to be attractive or to be unusual in order to show off, rather than dressing primarily to cloth ourselves. As for a place to live, if it is sufficient and adequate there are no great problems. But we want to live like we are competing with the gods (*devatā*), and build houses like palaces. Medicine for curing

diseases is the same. “Play” medicine, medicine we do not really need, sells better than essential medications.

Nature (*dhammajāti*) follows its own particular way. If we transgress its fundamental laws we are, in effect, transgressing morality according to nature; that is, we lack morality according to the dictates of nature. As a consequence, problems arise in the body, and even more so in the mind. That is, nature establishes the mind in a particular way for it to exist in a state of normal happiness *prakati-sukha*, in a state of balance. But we then do not look for it until finally we suffer mental disorder. Consider this: the law of nature is like the moral law (*sīladhamma*), only more profound. People who take an interest only in the law of things--flesh, mouth, stomach--are out of balance. Hence, they transgress the morality of nature. In the bodily sphere if one abandons the morality of nature one becomes sick or physically dies; in the mental sphere one dies mentally, that is, goes insane, or has nothing left that is of value. An individual or a society becomes worthless when the morality of nature is not followed.

The *khā* (value) of morality according to nature means that nature requires people to have a particular kind of morality, a morality of balance, moderation and sufficiency. Unfortunately, human beings tend to be interested in *kha* only in terms of the demand of the flesh--mouth and stomach--which causes an ever increasing self-centeredness leading to competition, exploitation and worldwide disaster. *Kha* as people decree it according to their own physical and material necessity is one thing, but true *khā* (value) accords with the deep and profound necessity of nature.

Let us now look at *khā* (value) from the angle of misguided rules (literally, “wrongview-rules”, Pali: *micchāditthi-paññatti*) and correct rules (literally, “rightview-rules”, Pali: *sammāditthi-paññatti*). Things which misguided rules value highly, rightview rules do not value at all. The wrongview takes the flesh as its standard—mouth, stomach, things. Rightview takes the subjects of mind (Pali: *citta*) or consciousness (Pali: *viññāna*), subjects of true value, (Pali: *guna-sampatti*) as its foundation. When that occurs, the happiness-of-being-the-way-things-are (*prakati-sukha*) arises. Hold firmly to this foundation: *si-la* means the nature-of-things (*prakati*) or the happiness-of-being-the-way-things-are (*prakati-sukha*). If we hold firm to this kind of value, results will arise according to the way things are, a calm happiness (Thai: *sangop-sukh*). Do not listen to the decrees generated by the power of wrongview. This will only lead to the arising of difficulty and confusion.

To make a simple comparison, wrongview takes the position, “Eat well, live well,” but the rightview asserts, “Eat and live only sufficiently.” These perspectives differ greatly. Those who hold the, “Eat well, live well,” view do not have any limits. They are always expanding until they want to equal the gods (*devatā*). Those for whom there is never enough are characterized by, “Eat well, live well.” Those who hold the “Eat and live only sufficiently” view represent moderation: whatever they do, they do moderately. This results in a state of normal or balanced happiness (*prakati-sukha*). They will have no problem of scarcity, and there will be no selfishness. If people are overly ambitious, they become selfish. Those who limit their ambition are not

selfish. They are not consumed by the fires of desire. The values represented by rightview and wrongview differ. The one leads to appropriate consumption. The other to excessive consumption.

In the most basic sense the wrongview will see very little or no value to morality; the right view, however, will consider morality to be very important, valuable, and of great interest. If everyone in towns and villages today sees no value in morality, how can we say that they hold the rightview or the wrongview? If everyone in the entire country pays no attention to ethical problems, nor considers moral issues because they do not see their value, how can we say that something is the wrong or the right view? If all the people throughout the country neither pay attention to ethical problems, nor consider moral issues because they do not see their value, how can we distinguish between wrongview and rightview.

The value of morality is assessed differently according to the estimation of wrongview (*micchāditṭhi*) or rightview (*sammāditṭhi*). To which group do we belong? If we do not see the value of morality, or only see it as having little value, we should admit to having the wrongview, at least in part. If we hold the rightview, knowing the value of morality, why do we not attempt to root ourselves in morality, and cultivate morality among those near and dear to us as well as neighbors and others throughout the entire world? Why do we not sacrifice in order to support morality? We always speak of making merit (Thai: *tham bun*, Pali: *puñña*), but we really do not understand what we are doing. The best merit-making is establishing people in morality. No merit is

better or truer than this. If we see the value of morality, we should try our best to improve and support morality in our society, country, and the world.

If we do not study morality we shall not see it, and its value will be obscure. It is so valuable that the world and humankind cannot survive without it. If we lack morality the world will become meaningless; it will be destroyed.

We have explored morality in terms of *kha* (value/valueing), but is there another sense of morality beyond *khā*? *Khā* is, in one sense, the cause (Pali: *hetu*) or ground of all problems. If there is no value or nothing related to benefit, no problems arise. Problems arise because we desire benefit, and things of value. Value (*khā*) arouses our desire, and sense of necessity. Whenever we find something is valuable desire immediately arises. Something can be valuable in either a good or a bad sense owing to what is called *khā*. But there is a level of morality beyond comparative valuing. When one finds nothing in the world that can be labeled *khā*, one will become an *arahant* or saint. One cannot be an *arahanta* if one is attached to *khā* (value) or worth (Thai: *khunkhā*) which is the cause of desire. To desire to take for oneself leads to love; to desire to avoid something leads to hatred. There are only two kinds of *khā*: one causes love, the other hatred.

In Pali the word for *khā* is *guṇa*. *Guṇa* in Thai is *khunkhā*, "worth" or "quality" which can be good or bad. *Guna* in Pali is neutral. *Khā*, however, can be disadvantageous or advantageous. The mind (Thai: *cit-cai*) is moved according to what is called *khun* or *khā* i.e. value. If the mind is good it has the quality (*khun*) of goodness and

attaches to the good, and vice versa. If we hate evil we then love goodness. If we both hate evil and love goodness then we firmly grasp *kha* or *khun*.

Only an *arahant's* mind can transcend the influence of *khā* or *khun*. A person cannot free his/her mind from defilements and suffering because he is attached to *khun* or *kha*. He becomes a slave to *khun* or *kha* which may be good or evil. Some take evil for good. Others can see good as good and evil as evil according to whether they hold the right or the wrong view. One may be a person of rightview able to differentiate good from evil, but if one's mind is still attached to *khā* or *khun*, it cannot be freed from the domination of value and worth. Thus desire arises as *kāmatanḥā*, *bhavatanḥā*, and *vibhavatanḥā* (desire for sense pleasure, desire for existence, desire for Nibbana).

We need to be particularly careful of what is called *kha* because it is the heart of all problems. Misunderstanding of value or worth creates confusion, undermines morality *sīladhamma*, and diverts us from the attainment of Nibbana. Be careful about what is called value, quality, worth or property because it is the foundation of all attachment. There are two principles: one makes us hate, the other makes us love. If we are foolish we shall be attached to the *kha* of something; we shall love one side and hate the other. This will destroy the state of normalcy or balance (*prakati*), and we will have an *a-prakati* mind and view. The *a-prakati* mind will express itself through our body and words making them *a-prakati* also. The impact of this *a-prakati* state will disturb both ourselves and others. All of this is caused by our misconception of *khā*.



If we have a sense of attachment we are under the power of *khā* or *rākhā*. To like one moment and dislike the next is a form of attachment (*kilesa*). The Stream Enterer (*sotappana*), the Once Returner (*sakidāgāmi*), and the Never Returner (*anāgāmi*) do not transcend the power of *khā*. Only the *arahant* has a mind which transcends that power of that which we call *khā*. Beginning with the most modest form of *khā*, say, a grain or rice, up to the *khā* of the highest morality, all of this is called *khā*, and is the basis of attachment.

Now, if we want to hold on to something correctly we should do so in such a way that we progress until finally we transcend *khā* (the need to evaluate). If we are foolish we shall be falsely attached and regress unnecessarily; we shall waste our time being preoccupied with evil things, thinking they have value. Although we may be able to reject evil things for good, we are still preoccupied with the question of the value or worth (*khā*) of good things, indeed, even the value of goodness itself. Consequently, we are still oppressed by that which we label "*khā*". We are, therefore, heedlessly worried and troubled. We must raise ourselves up in order to be freed from the power of what we call, "*kha*", even the *khā* of goodness. This is the highest stage of morality (*śīladhamma*). People today do not want to attain this state. They find it sufficient only to live well together, to have the *kha* of goodness, to be morally good.

Now, let us consider the true value (*khā*) of morality. The aim of morality should be this: to enable individuals to make their minds *prakati*, and to enable societies to be *prakati*, to live together in peace and harmony. This is

morality (*sīladhamma*). True morality or *sīladhamma*, then, is the ability to control *kha*. If we cannot control what we call *khā* or *rākhā* or *khun khā* [i.e. attachment to distinctions of worth, value, quality] it will lead us to act according to the values we attribute to things. Those who blindly mistake the values of evil for good will be led to do evil; those who are led astray by the supposed values of things said to be good will do what is said to be good. But, even the latter is not the highest state of *prakati*. That is, we still love the good and hate the evil. If we still have love, anger, hatred, and so on, can we be said to have a good morality? According to the standard of the world, loving the good, doing the good, attempting to do good, sacrificing one's life for the good is right and correct; however, according to the higher *dhamma* (truth) more is required; that is, we must become more *prakati* [i.e. realize our true, natural state]. We should restrain the arising of love and hatred. We should not let things which have *kha* cause love or hatred in us. If we can control these two it can then be said that we have morality (*sīladhamma*).

If we cannot control our attachment to the poles of love and hatred, they will lead us to do either good or evil. Then we shall suffer, be so madly in love with good that we may kill ourselves for its sake, or become so attached to goodness that we cannot even sleep and become neurotic. Such a morality is impure. The more we can control that which we label *khā* [i.e. distinguishing things as good and evil, love and hate] the more we have *sīladhamma* (morality); the less we can control *khā*, the less *sīladhamma* we have. We should control *khā* which dominates our mind. The ability to control *khā* is true morality.

Take the case of a Buddhist monk or a novice. Because they are ordained they follow a higher *dhamma*; however, if they cannot control their mind concerning that which is called *khā*, they cannot really be a monk or a novice. They will love, having been tempted by objects of love; they will hate having been tempted by objects of hate. This is against the aim of ordination which should be to train the mind in order to transcend the power of that which we label "*khā*."

What will happen if we can control the power of *khā*? The answer is the arising of *prakati* [i.e. one's true nature] in each person: individuals will be *prakati* in mind, body and speech, and society will not be chaotic because all its members will be *prakati*. This is called the arising of *prakati*. It is the result of morality or the lack of defilements (*kilesa*). If we can control the power of evaluating things which tempt us, defilements cannot arise. If there is no defilement, there is no *kamma*. Then, there is no suffering (*dukkha*). We can then become human beings (Pai: *manussa*) in the fullest sense of the word.

A human being is one who has a noble or high mind. Noble means free from control because the noble mind is freed from good or evil, love or hatred. Human beings who possess a noble mind cannot be persuaded to love or hate anything. Human beings today are not noble in this way. It is enough that they are not so blind that they become overwhelmed by love or hatred, the basis of the human problematic. According to the highest *dhamma* if we can control *khā*, no evil consequence will arise. There will be no violent or untimely death, whether physical, mental or spiritual.

Human beings are much more developed than animals. Animals are reasonably fixed with brains that have stayed essentially the same. Their morality is appropriate to their nature. The human intellect is always growing, however. With this development there are increasingly complex desires, intentions and so on which have led to the creation of an insane society. Our morality must keep pace with the rest of our life. By helping us control our body, speech and mind, morality controls the influence of what is called *khā*. In this way we shall have a balanced (*prakati*) mind. Whenever *sīladhamma* is lacking, trouble, anxiety, and unhappiness arise, creating a situation none of us can live with. Solving the problem is dependent on a return to the practice of *sīladhamma*.

Without *sīladhamma*, everything “dies.” Not only do living humans die, but the world itself dies; everything is destroyed in the sense that if nothing has meaning it is the same as if nothing exists — human beings or anything else. Peace and happiness cannot exist, either, where there is no *sīladhamma*.

Nature requires that *sīladhamma* be present in our minds in the most profound dhammic way, for that is the only way we can truly survive. Not only do we survive, but everything else does as well. We must have *sīladhamma* at this basic level at the very least, and we must have it at even higher level if it is to keep pace with human evolution.

Let me summarize my basic point, that is, the reason for having *sīladhamma*. *Sīla* or *sī-la* means *prakati*; we all desire *prakati-sukha* (the happiness of existing according to our true nature). *Sīladhamma* is whatever causes

*prakati-sukha* to arise.

On the most basic level, we need to keep our lives simple, living with only those material things necessary to sustain us in such a way that we can get by without undue hardship. Our ancestors lived in this way, but people today want more than they need. Wanting only what is necessary: this is the first level of *sīladhamma* and an easy one to practice.

We must avoid becoming overly enamored of the so-called beauty and orderliness we associate with being “civilized” or “developed.” When we favor such things, our moral system changes to accommodate our desires. Look at all the money spent on satisfying our desire for attractive things that only serve to make our greed (*kilesa*) grow stronger. It is this very desire that makes people become thieves and criminals. Our ancestors lived simply, getting by with the basic necessities of life, but they also had compassion and love; they did not take advantage of one another. Today, our ever-growing desires for a kind of artificial beauty make it difficult to live in a truly moral, *prakati* way, and make peace, compassion and love for fellow beings harder to achieve.

At the highest level, we need a *sīladhamma* that is the foundation of religion. Such a *sīladhamma* requires in us a readiness to be free of *kilesa*, that is, to realize *nibbāna*, the ultimate purpose of *sīladhamma*. Practicing such a *sīladhamma* is not easy, for we keep wanting to satisfy the desires of the senses – sight, sound, smell, taste, and so on. We would rather sit under a wishing tree than a tree of enlightenment. When we want to sit under the latter,

wisdom and awareness of impermanence, suffering, and not-self will arise. If, however, we want to sit under a wishing tree, attachments arise – the desires of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and feelings: such is the nature of a wishing tree – to call forth desire. The natures of these two kinds of seeking are in opposition. When we realize that sitting under a wishing tree actually punishes us in a sense, then we will seek peace, freedom from *kilesa*, *nibbāna*, and the *sīladhamma* that is the basis of religion.

People say that Buddhism is flourishing in Thailand, but who actually wants a *sīladhamma* such as we have been speaking of? Certainly not the general public or the government. People cannot even practice *sīladhamma* on the most basic level, that is, living contentedly together in their homes. Their desire for artificial surroundings keeps growing, and their kind of morality even encourages this. It is the opposite of *sīladhamma* because it causes *kilesa* to arise and even makes people turn to crime. It is not criminals themselves who are to blame, but rather all of us who create a morality that condones desire for beautiful things that tempt us.

Let us consider what it is that we really want from *sīladhamma*. Given that we favor some kind of *sīladhamma*, what level of *sīladhamma* do we actually want? It is not difficult to practice the *sīladhamma* of living in simplicity, in a *prakati* way. The kind of morality that feeds our desires for luxurious living, however, makes living in a *prakati* way difficult, because it gives rise to *kilesa*. It costs much less – or nothing at all – to practice the kind of morality that leads to *nibbāna*, because it can solve the problems that lie within. It

does not require billions for development projects. Solving the problem at its source, leads to living in a contented, *prakati* way and gives rise to an awareness of how to become increasingly free of *kilesa*. When we practice *sīladhamma* in such a way, we are not anxious or troubled, and we trouble no one else. We can live together in happiness. This highest *sīladhamma* is called *ariyasīladhamma*.

*Ariyasīladhamma* is the morality that can bring peace and happiness without investing a great deal of money or going to considerable trouble. Is this not the kind of morality we should want? What then, holds us back from wanting it? In the first and most fundamental sense, we do not realize what we are doing: we want what we should not want, and we do not want what we should want. We go blindly along seeking satisfaction in physical or material pleasures. We even desire things that will bring us trouble and anxiety. We say we want *sīladhamma*, but in our hearts we long for the satisfactions of eating well and living well.

A villager was once asked whether he wanted to go to heaven or to *nibbāna*. He replied that he wanted to go to *nibbāna*. When it was explained to him that in *nibbana* one feels neither pleasure nor displeasure, love nor hate, amusement nor sadness, he changed his mind. What he actually wanted was bigger and better worldly pleasures. He said he wanted *nibbāna* because that is what one is supposed to say, but in fact, he did not want it at all. In the same way, we all say we want *sīladhamma*, but we do not realize what it means—and if we were to find out what it does mean, we might well decide that we do not really want it after all.

A second thing that keeps us from wanting morality is that we do not realize that all the problems in the world - past, present and future - are caused by the lack of morality. For example, it is the cause of Communism; it is the reason we cannot fight effectively against Communism. Because we do not fully comprehend that all of our complex problems, all *dukkha* (suffering), arises from lack of morality, we do not make a sincere attempt to live in a fundamentally moral way. Governments everywhere blindly go about applying hundreds and thousands of fixes to symptoms of the problem but never address the basic problem itself. No government in the world talks about morality or considers the lack of it a problem worth attending to. For example, when laborers stage a strike, a government gets involved with the strike itself or perhaps imposes a fine on the employers instead of dealing with the lack of morality on the part of the capitalists who have been bullying the laborers. Corrupt government officials may be punished, but their lack of morality is not addressed as the cause of the corruption. Most people lack morality to such an extent that they bring troubles upon themselves, but then they usually put the blame elsewhere. The alarming depletion of the earth's natural resources is yet another example of the same problem. If people were to live truly moral lives, there would be no more unrest, no more waste or shortages, and there would be plenty for everyone for a long time to come.

We ignorantly blame the economy for our problems without realizing that lack of morality has caused the economic problems everywhere - in our homes, in our country, and even in the entire world. We mistakenly think



that if we live according to principles of morality we will be at a disadvantage and others will get ahead of us. We misunderstand and misjudge the value of morality, and our defilements cause us to actually hate it. We view morality superficially, and, therefore, unjustly. We think of it as something we are supposed to pay attention to, but we do not really want to be bothered with it, not realizing that morality alone can bring peace and happiness to the world.

Suppose a country had the best leaders possible but the people themselves lacked morality. Could the country still be *prakati*? Some might say that if the leaders were truly exceptional, then they would be able to get the people to become moral. People can have peace and happiness only when they, themselves, live in a moral way; peace and happiness do not come about simply from having a certain kind of leader.

If we allow ourselves to be taken in by the value of material things, then we will be deceived into loving and hating things, and can not be fundamentally moral. We will still be under the influence of love and hate; we will worship things we should not and hate things we should hold in the highest regard.

The notion of value (*khā*) is very deceiving, indeed. *Khā*, the need to evaluate, is the source of all our problems. *Arahants* renounce that need so that it has no influence on their minds. We must recognize the idea of *kha*, or worth, for what it is and control it accordingly in order to have *sīladhamma*, to be truly moral. When we can exercise complete control over *khā*, or our attachment to distinctions of worth, value, or quality, then we will have the highest

form of morality.

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