

► From page 28

the Buddha's actual discourse on The Law of Dependant Origination, Buddhadasa corrected what he saw as a fundamental inconsistency between what the Buddha taught and what many Thai people believe about birth and rebirth.

Again, adhering to the Buddha's own words from the Tripikata, Buddhadasa concluded that the Buddha did not at all imply that one's actions are dependent on this idea of karma from past lives, nor will one's actions necessarily affect a future life.

Rather, explained Buddhadasa, the Buddha merely employed the terms "birth" and "rebirth" as metaphors to illustrate how suffering is born and reborn in our minds constantly throughout our waking hours.

"The Buddha's teachings, as explained by Ajarn Buddhadasa, are to help us here and now, in this life," said Ob Baramee, a dhamma teacher at Suan Mokkh. "There is no discussion of next life, and indeed that cannot be proved. Therefore, we teach Dependent Origination to allow people to learn how to put an end to suffering."

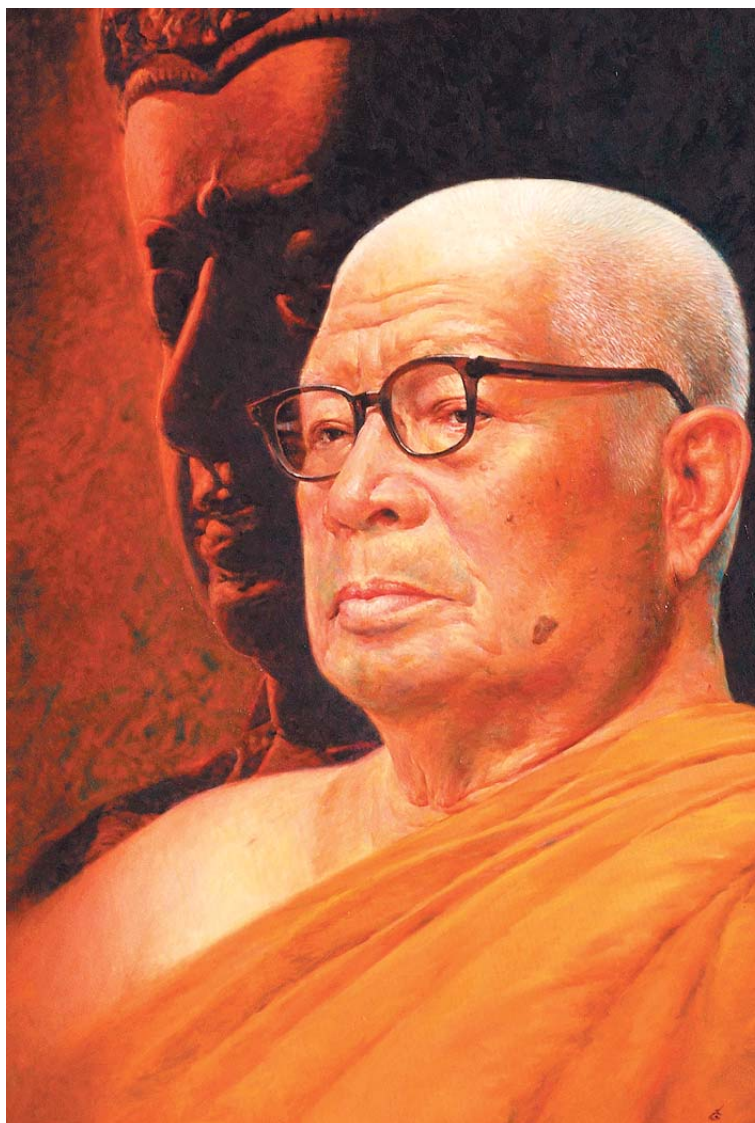
Delivering the Buddha's message to the people was another Buddhadasa hallmark.

He was the first Thai monk to seriously challenge the age-old practice that restricted access to the scriptures, and thus the Buddha's core teachings, to monks and scholars.

Buddhadasa himself stated that his interpretation was not necessarily unique, as the words of the Buddha were always there, but as Phra Sripariyatmoli asserts, "It was Buddhadasa who was willing to speak and write about this, to endure the extensive criticism from conservative Buddhist groups, and later, make it available for all to see."

Although largely rejected by the religious establishment, Buddhadasa's views nonetheless resonated with a growing number of monks and intellectuals. In time, Suan Mokkh became a centre for study, publication and practice.

An international hermitage was established to enable foreigners to discover the fruits of Buddhism, and



“ If man could eliminate suffering by making offerings, paying homage and praying, there would be no one subject to suffering left in the world, because anyone can pay homage and pray, but since people are still subject to suffering while in the very process of making obeisance, paying homage and performing rites, this is clearly not the way to liberation. ”

his teachings have been made available in ten languages. In the 1970s and 80s, social activists saw the suffering as taught by Buddhadasa as inherent in the problems of environmental decline, social injustice and political corruption, which was caused by an increasingly materialistic society.

"To Buddhadasa, Buddhism without social engagement was confined to escapism for the individual," said former monk Pracha Huthanuwat, who left Suan Mokkh to run Wongshnit Ashram as a centre for religious training for social activism. While never directly engaged in political activities himself, Buddhadasa saw the lack of a strong moral code as advanced by the Buddha as problematic, whether under capitalism or communism, democracy or a dictatorship.

The Buddhadasa legacy also included demonstrating the complementary aspects of Buddhism with other religions including Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, and practitioners of these other faiths frequently visit Suan Mokkh.

However, as illustrated by this year's commemoration of the 100th anniversary of his birth, most Thai people continue to cling more to some vague image about the man, rather than the ideas that made him famous.

At his death and funeral 13 years ago, the country went against Buddhadasa's wishes and teachings, turning the event into a national spectacle full of the ritualistic atmosphere Buddhadasa so opposed. Even Unesco's recognition of the occasion to honour him as one of the world's "great personalities" seemed to fan his image as a national hero more than the Buddhist crusader he was.

"Buddhadasa would have laughed with bitterness seeing people recognising only his fame and neglecting his teachings," suggested Phra Sripariyatmoli.

"We cannot expect people to follow Buddhadasa's teachings overnight because rights and rituals have always been a part of Thai Buddhism, but if Buddhism is to survive, it will be because of the teachings and efforts of people who become Buddhadasa number two, number three, number four..." ■