

Challenge of Modern Age to Thai Buddhism: In the View of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Piyadee Prasertsom

In the modern world, most people completely lose touch with the purification of life and reality because of their unsatiated desire. To liberate humanity from the sense of continuous and endless desire and attachment to material wealth in modern culture, this article proposes Buddhism in the view of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, the most famous Thai monk as a means to overcome such defilement which is permeating the contemporary world.

The paper offers a practical transformation of intellectual capacity and spirituality from ignorance to wisdom for humanity based on the realistic aspects of Buddhism and Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's reinterpretation of Buddhadhamma. The writing focuses on the means to understanding truth and cessation of misery based on the Four Noble Truths "Ariyasacca." The content aims to fulfill the mental quality of humanity and to scrutinize the nobility of human achievement and possibility. The different modes of life of both a householder and a recluse are able to purify the mind at every moment of life.

It is hoped that this paper may serve as a motivation for real understanding of Buddhism through the application of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's teaching and encourage all mankind in the modern world to attain the best end of human being in this life.

Key words: Ignorance, Vimutti, Paññāvimutti, Cetovimutti, Nibbāna.

Piyadee Prasertsom is Principal of Thai-Itoh Technology College (Pattaya), Thailand.

International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture September 2007, Vol.9, pp.87-109.

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I. Introduction

In the modern age, from the late nineteenth century to the present time, the world is changing rapidly in terms of values and morality. Most people live under capitalism, consumerism, egoism and materialism—the attitude that physical well being and worldly possessions constitute the greatest good and highest value of life. The modern education means only cleverness and earning lots of money. All families and schools neglect the most important knowledge, that is how to achieve the true happiness of man—a man free of suffering. People today become stuck in the happiness based on the satisfaction of hunger which is continuous and endless. In *The Art of Happiness: A Hand Book for Living*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama said that:

Although it is possible to achieve happiness, happiness is not a simple thing. There are many levels. In Buddhism, for instance, there is a reference to the four factors of fulfillment, or happiness: wealth, worldly satisfaction, spirituality, and enlightenment. Together they embrace the totality of an individual's quest for happiness (2001: 24).

Nowadays, people become slaves to their created world such as money, objects, fame, power, culture, and society. People create time but then they are ruled by time. They have to keep watching the clock because at a certain time they are obliged to do their duties. People are faced with numerous decisions and choices. They pant through the endless series of appointments, competing responsibilities, and duties. The more they become attached to the worldly elements, the more they see their unsatisfied selves. The excessive anxiety and tension can affect on their body and mind which the modern physical and psychological therapy provides only temporary relief. These are real problems which cause suffering in contemporary culture.

To liberate humanity from these oppressed lives, and to achieve true happiness without suffering, the genuine study of Thai Buddhism in the view of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu is recommended. His *dhamma* teaching, walking in the footsteps of the Buddha, is advisable as a solution and possible practice

for humanity to overcome all problems which are permeating the contemporary world. In this paper I discuss the problems and issues of modern man to Thai Buddhism in the view of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. The content discusses the general background of Buddhism in Thailand, the life of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, Buddhism: reinterpretation by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, the challenge of modern age to Thai Buddhism in the view of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, and ends with a conclusion.

II. Buddhism in Thailand

Buddhism, founded by Gotama the Buddha, had completed its 2500 years of existence and was introduced to Thailand during the reign of *Asoka*, the great Indian emperor who sent Buddhist missionaries to various countries. In the long history of existence, Buddhism is a dominant force in the Thai way of life, relating with culture, arts, literature, ethics, philosophy, morality, folkways, and festivals. It is shown in this quotation that:

According to the national census taken in 2000, the population of Thailand numbers 61,878,746. Out of this number 94 percents are Buddhist (Kusalasaya 2001: 22).

In Thailand, indeed the Thai nation as a whole has been predominantly *Theravāda* Buddhists—follows the rules and procedures of the original Buddha's teaching and attempts to attain one's own nirvana (*nibbāna*)—enlightenment or freedom of suffering. There are two parts of Buddhists namely the *Bhikkhu Sangha* or the holy order, and the laity. The *Bhikkhu Sangha* or the holy order is divided into two *Nikāyas* or sects of the Buddhist order in Thailand. One is the *Mahānikāya*, and the other is the *Dhammayuttika Nikāya*. The monks of the two sects differ very little from one another. The entire monk population in 1988 is as quoted: "In the whole kingdom of Thailand there are 265,956 monks, 87,695 novices and 30,678 monasteries or temples" (Kusalasaya 2001: 24).

Education of monks and novices in Thailand centers mainly on the studies of *Dhamma* or the Buddhist doctrine *Tiṭṭaka* and *Pāli*, the language in which *Theravāda* scriptures are written. There are two main institutes of learning exclusively for monks and novices. One is the *Mahā Chulālongkorn Rājvidyālaya*, and the other is the *Mahā Mongkut Rājvidyālaya*. Both are located in Bangkok and organized on a modern university footing and also the secular curriculum is added to them. Both aim to give broad education to monks in order to enable them to be of better service to the cause of Buddhism amidst modern conditions.

Throughout its over 2,500 years of existence, Buddhism has been closely connected with the lay community and become the prerequisite religious observances related to various fields of Thai way of life. Co-operation between the laity and the monks in Thailand is close and spontaneous. The monks are expected to live exemplary lives for the benefit of themselves as well as of those who look to them as teacher and moral guides. They try to demonstrate that Buddhism can contribute to harmonious and peaceful living.

III. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (1906-1993)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu has been widely regarded as one of the most influential *Theravāda* Buddhist monks of the 20th century. He was born on May 21, 1906 in Surathani province, southern Thailand. He was the son of a Chinese merchant, *Siang Phanit* and *Khluen*. He was given the name *Ngueam Phanit*. He was ordained into the *Mahanikai* Order at *Wat Nok by Phrakhru Sophanaceta-sikaram*, who gave him the *Pāli* name of *Indapañño* in 1926. He wrote the following vow in a notebook on August 28, 1932:

I commit this life and body as a dedication to the Lord Buddha.
I am a servant of the Buddha, the Buddha is my lord. For this reason I am named "Buddhadāsa" (Jackson 2003: 13).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu had a studious characteristic and got the *Parian*

Sam Prayok (III) *Pāli* examination in 1930. During his formal education, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu felt that there were significant differences between the commentaries upon which his clerical examinations were based and the actual canonical scripture; as a consequence, he regarded further formal education as useless for him. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu said that “In studying the *pariyattidhamma* in this period we don’t truly study the *Tipiṭaka* itself, we study only the commentaries” (Jackson 2003: 11).

Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu established a forest monastery, *Suan Mokkhabalārāma* or The Garden of Empowering Liberation in Chaiya, Surathani province. He set the three vows of duties for serving the world’s benefit. The first vow was that all people could genuinely understand the principles of their religion to fulfill their spiritual liberation. The second vow, he intended to create a mutual understanding among various religions. The third vow, he wanted to drag human beings away from the tyranny of materialism, and as a result the world would be cleansed and calmed. In *Suan Mokkhabalārāma*, he had worked on extensive research of the *Pāli* texts in canon and commentary and taught both Thai and foreigners about the pure Buddhism. He strove to show how to use Buddhism beneficially in the modern world. He emphasized the idea of man’s selflessness and the idea of man’s liberation from the bondage of world by harmonizing traditional Buddhist teaching and by reinterpreting some concepts.

His teaching focused on the concept of *nibbāna* or nirvana that could be attained here and now. It sounded rather scientific, straight-forward, and practical for the daily life. He worked painstakingly to reinterpret the essential principles of original Buddhism. His teaching was received with increasing public recognition around the world. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu died in 1993 after a series of heart attacks and strokes, at the age of 87.

In his life time, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu received eight honorary doctorates from Thai universities and an honorary doctorate of Buddhism in *Mahachulalongkorn* Buddhist University, by the Supreme Patriarch of the Thai *Sangha*. He also received the honorary clerical title of *Phra Ratchawisutthimethi*. In the year 2005, the UNESCO reached the decision to

honor Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. His centennial birthday anniversary was recognized and commemorated in UNESCO's Calendar of Anniversaries of Great Personalities and Historic Events, 2006-2007.

IV. Buddhism: Reinterpretation by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu is one of the most important reformers in the history of *Theravāda* Buddhism in Thailand. He has rationalized *Theravāda* Buddhist doctrines and the Thai Buddhist tradition in response to modern scientific empiricism and the growing Thai middle class of professionals and intellectuals. He encourages people to look within *Dhamma* moments observation, and experiment by living. His work emphasizes “all insight experience of mankind” not on “the literal books.” Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu said that “The real Buddhism is the practice by way of body, speech, and mind that will destroy the defilement, in part or completely” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu 1956: 25).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu has reinterpreted the term of Buddhism as:

Buddhism means the Teaching of the Enlightened One. A Buddha is an enlightened individual, one who knows the true about all things, one who knows just what is what and so is capable of behaving appropriately with respect to all things (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu 1956: 12).

In the process, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu lays a theoretical framework for the study of *Pāli Suttas* and on *sammāditthi* or “right understanding.” His idea has identified him as a representative of the Buddhist emphasis on the centrality of *paññā* or wisdom in Buddhist praxis. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu follows the actual path of Buddha and reinterprets the Buddhist scripture by his own hermeneutic terms based on the demythologizing approach. Traditionally Buddhism taught that salvation from suffering was attained by detachment from the world of impermanence, which was assumed to be

beyond the power of individual human beings to change for the better. In contrast to this traditional view of the world, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu attempted to integrate the renunciation's hope for salvation with the layperson's hope for well-being and fulfillment in this world here and now.

Buddhādāsa's doctrinal innovativeness thus broke with the long conservative tradition in Thai Buddhism which even today remains the dominating influence on the contemporary practice and understanding of the religion (Jackson 2003: 31).

Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's Innovative Method of Scriptural Interpretation is based on

1. *phasa khon* or everyday language and *phasa tham* or *Dhamma* language

2. the demythologization of Buddhist doctrine

In the notions of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, proposed the innovative hermeneutic reinterpretation of *Theravāda* doctrine. He distinguished two hermeneutic levels of Buddha's words in the canonical scriptures calling these two levels *phasa khon* or everyday language and *phasa tham* or *dhamma* language. He said that:

Everyday language is worldly language, the language of people who do not know *dhamma*. *Dhamma* language is the language spoken by people who have gained a deep insight into the truth, *dhamma* (Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu 1974: 1).

Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu proposed the two different modes of speaking related to the two different time and events. First, focusing on the sender of religious message, in the ancient time, there is the everyday language usage to define any physical things that can be understood by the ordinary persons. Whenever the enlightened one experiences the transcendent wisdom, this mental world cannot be found in the ordinary language usage; therefore, he has to use the everyday language for reinterpretation of this spiritual sense in order to explain his ultimate mental knowledge to the ordinary person and

called it the *dhamma* language. Second, focusing on the receiver of religious message, it can be considered through the readers or the listeners of the Buddha's doctrine in the different periods of time. The receivers have to reinterpret the spiritual knowledge correctly, they must truly understand and be able to distinguish both religious and worldly languages for their most beneficial usage. Further the same group of receivers will reversely become the re-sender or re-interpreters who apply the *dhamma* language into the everyday language usage without devaluing the original meaning of scripture. This reinterpretation aims to lead to real mutual understanding in the contemporary society. From this description, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu has mentioned the word "*nibbāna*" which has two different language usages:

In *dhamma* language, the word "*nibbāna*" refers to the complete and absolute extinction of every kind of defilement and misery. Any time there is freedom from *kilesa* and *dukkha*, there is *nibbāna*. If defilements have been eradicated completely, it is permanent *nibbāna*: the total extinguishing and cooling of the fire of *kilesa* and *dukkha*. This is *nibbāna* in *dhamma* language. In everyday language, *nibbāna* is a dream city (Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu 1999: 25-26).

Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu was emphasized on liberation through wisdom or *paññāvimutti* that is appropriate for modern people including monks, laymen, and laywomen to attain nirvana—freedom of suffering that can be verified in every moment of life. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu proposes that "*Nibbāna* is the complete and utter extinction of *dukkha* right here and now" (Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu 1999: 26).

His idea followed the Buddha's verse in the *Book of Gradual Sayings* vol.I *Anguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha states that:

Brāhmin, one who is ablaze with lust ... depraved with malice ... bewildered with delusion ... if lust be abandoned ... no longer plans thus, no longer suffers thus. To that extent, *brāhmin*, *Nibbāna* is seen in this life ... it is to be realized for themselves by the wise (*Book of Gradual Sayings* I: 141).

It is advisable to learn how to be a human being without any problems, how to be free from *dukkha* or suffering. Following the Buddha's teaching 'the truth of nature' namely '*Dhamma*,' Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu has reinterpreted it to reveal 'what is what.' He proposed the way to develop one's spirituality and to attain one's liberation. He guided human to understand the true nature and to behave in an appropriate way to that of a true nature. He said that "‘what is what’ signifies to know things as they really are, in *Pāli* ‘*yathābhutanānadassana*’" (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu 1956: Preface).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu suggests the word *tathatā* or thusness which means it is as it is. He observes that truth is not the same thing to different people because they have their own reinterpretation of what is the truth. Each person may change and develop his own truth day by day according to his degree of intellectual stages until he can completely understand the ultimate truth or the true nature of things. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu said about the ultimate truth and the worldly truth as:

Worldly truth, which has nothing to do with *Dhamma*, is a matter of what we see or feel or believe to be true. We are deceived as to the nature of objects and of cause-effect relationships, all of which are subject to change. What is true at one moment may not be true the next.... Truth that is truly truth does not change (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu 1999: 85).

He describes the reality into two categories involving the category of flowing and changing such as existence, being, things in illusive world and the category of not flowing and unchanged such as nirvana, emptiness in true world. Which is the state of changelessness in itself.

Following the notion of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, all members of the Buddhist community monks and laity are required to learn the truth of nature—based on the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths (*Ariyasacca*) of Buddhism, and the Noble Eightfold Path (*Dukkha-nirodha-gāminī*) in order to be free from illusive world. In an insightful analysis of relationship between human and nature, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu emphasized the study of following matters: selfhood and nature (*tathatā*: it is as it is), the self-attachment "I" (*attā*), the

selflessness (*anattā*), the emptiness of selfhood (*suññatā*), the orderliness of nature (*idappaccaytā*), the senses bases (*āyatana-kusalatā*), the law of dependent origination (*paticca-samuppāda-kusalatā*), the mindfulness of breathing meditation (*ānāpānasati bhāvanā*), the foundation of mindfulness (*satipatthāna*), the practical intuition method in both dimensions (a natural dimension, and methodical dimension), the liberation through wisdom (*paññāvimutti*), the theory of how to deal with any doubtful matters (*kālāmasutta*) as the ultimate guidance of mankind to achieve the true happiness. He learnt from the Buddha and spoke in verse as following: “He (Buddha) claimed that he (Buddha) was one of the many human beings and his message to the people was the message of man to man” (Ambedkar 1992: 222).

In addition, according to him the path of the nobility of human achievement and possibility was: “The best of the paths is the path of eight. The best of truths, the four sayings. The best of states, freedom from passions. The best of men, the one who sees” (*Dhammapada*: 75).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu reinterpreted the pure Buddhist doctrine for the modern age and advised that all men needed to understand and act properly with the nature of reality to achieve the serenity and wisdom in this life.

V. Challenge of Modern Age to Thai Buddhism in the View of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

In the modern world, ethical theory treats self-interest, or egoism as the foundation of morality. The confusion and social disorder occur because of the undertaking development with an immoral attitude of craving for material gains. Men and women focus on the accumulation of things and expensiveness—promising the answers to life’s question of meaning and purpose of life. People face many materialistic problems—attachment to materialistic values and possessions. According to Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, he explained that:

The world now aims for material development because of cowardice and the fear of not keeping up with “Them,” of not having the equipment to fight “Them” or to live well.... Consequently, the whole world is in a state of disorganization and confusion. There are complicated problems without end which have arisen from moral degeneration (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu 1982: 75).

When Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu describes the modern world, he feels that throughout this world there is little interest in the matter of *dukkha* or suffering and its end. None of the schools in the world pays any attention to it. In the universities, they don't teach or study it. The only thing taught in all schools and universities is cleverness, the storing up of many facts and the ability to perform mental tricks with them. Students graduate with cleverness and some skills to make a living. This is what modern education means by being clever and earning lots of money. Suffering and the quenching of suffering are totally ignored. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu believes that all education in today's world is incomplete because the most important subjects are forgotten. There is another area of knowledge which the schools and universities don't teach, that is how to be a human being. Why do they ignore what it takes to be a proper human being, that is, a human being free from suffering? A proper human being ought to have no spiritual disease but modern education is insufficient as long as it fails to cure spiritual disease. The following quotation from “*Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World*” also provides similar concept for modern Buddhist education:

Buddhist institutions enjoying luxurious support fell into a kind of indulgence and did not adjust themselves to the changing conditions. Material support and cooperation continues to grow, while the intellectual and spiritual gap widens (Sivaraksa 1990: 115).

Everyday men and women are trying to define the proper role as pleasure should make play in their lives such as a father, mother, child, nurse, teacher, soldier, businessman, and so on. They repeat their usual action within the shadow of ignorance (*avijjā*) making themselves lose touch with the

meaning of life and reality. They do all possible things to satisfy their happiness based on the endless desire (*tanha*) and become slaves to their own created world. The ideas of self-importance, physical well-being constitute an immoral craving attitude of humanity. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu says that it is human nature to desire. It happens to everyone regardless of age, sex, belief, social status, etc. For example, a poor man may desire wealth, a young person may desire success, an invalid may desire health, and an elderly may desire longevity. Desire may vary depending on circumstances of an individual's life. However it is human nature to desire more and more but not all desires can be fulfilled, so people have to face both unsatisfied and satisfied conditions in every moment of life. Their mind and body become unhealthy because of anxiety and tension, and become the source of much emotional suffering and even physical illness such as asthma, heart disease, cancer and so on. In *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*, it is described that:

In studies, such as one conducted by Dr. Larry Scherwitz, examining the risk factors for coronary heart disease, it has been found that people who were most self-focused (those who referred to themselves using the pronouns "I," "me," and "my" most often in an interview) were more likely to develop coronary heart disease (Dalai Lama 2001: 59).

Nowadays, people have devised a vast repertoire of strategies for avoiding suffering. Sometime they use external means such as drug or alcohol to soothe their emotional pain, but with continued use, it will cause physical damage. Sometime they use internal mechanisms such as psychological defense, denial or repression refusing to recognize that a problem exists but suffering can only be avoided temporarily. These are real problems which cause suffering (*dukkha*) in contemporary world. Trying to avoid this unsatisfied condition, the deeper levels of understanding Thai Buddhism in the view of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu is beneficially for all mankind to lead to the path of life fulfillment and to redefine harmonious living in the world.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu reflects the modernized, demythologized, and more rational view of the modern Buddhist of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He presents the essential truth of the *dhamma* for intellect and development of human mind related to the core subject of the Four Noble Truths as the path to the complete extinction of suffering. His *dhamma* reinterpretation is directed to the possible moment transformation from ignorant living (*avijjā*) to wise living and presents an authentic path of self analysis, self development, and true self satisfaction based on the realistic aspects of Buddhism. As a result, a man is able to reject the main root of human's suffering (*dukkha*)—called desire (*tanha*) that leads to attachment of a sense of possession and accumulation of worldly things including egoism, materialism, capitalism, consumerism, and all defilements. If a man succeeds in his rejection of the roots of suffering, then he can achieve the true selfhood liberation (*nibbāna*) in this life. Everyone, religious and non-religious persons can develop their intellect and quality of mind from an ignorant being to a holistic being that is the true path of serene living in the world.

According to the Buddha's doctrine, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu divides the types of human into three groups as follows:

1. *Puggala* or the average persons and *Ariya-Puggala* or the holy persons

The average persons have ten defilements: self belief, doubt, superstition, sensual desire, ill will, desire for the various stages of concentration of forms, desire for the full concentration on objects or other than forms, awareness of superiority or inferiority, agitation, and ignorance. The holy persons are in the process of cutting off the defilements. They are considered as *Sekha* or the learners who try to evolve the intellectual and spiritual growth including *Sotāpanna* or the Stream Enterer, *Sakadāgāmi* or the Once-Returner, and *Anāgāmi* or Non-Returner. When they are completely free of all fetters, they are called *Asekha* or the adept or *Arahanta* or the Worthy One.

2. The persons who have *Micchādītthi* or the wrong view and the persons who have *Sammādītthi* or the right view

The ignorant persons have the wrong view and live in the world at the various levels of relative truth. The wise persons have the right view to live their life following the truth of nature.

3. The persons who understand *Lokiya Dhamma* or the world in mundane states and the persons who understand *Lokuttara Dhamma* or the world in supramundane states.

The worldly human who have their mind in mundane states will live their life clinging to sensuous condition, form condition, and formless condition. Their mind becomes enslaved to things. The persons who understand the truth of life and develop their spirituality to *supramundane* states will go along with *Magga* or the Four Paths, *Phala* or the Four Fruitions, and *Nibbāna* or the Unconditioned State. Their mind becomes master of things and free from them. This path is for all mankind to enhance their mental development.

After studying all three major types of mankind, it can be seen that every group is based on the quality of mind and divided from the state of ignorance (*avijjā*) to the state of wisdom (*nibbāna*). It is possible for all individuals to develop these mentality and intellectual capacity. To be truly human in Buddhism is to be above all problems or unsatisfactory condition. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu suggests that everyone is required to be the master to both worldly and religious problems. The right and true knowledge of all phenomena will transform a person into a highminded one, to further become a holy one (*Ariya*), and to develop ultimately into the worthy one (*Arahant*) or the fully human being. Ariyasacca or The Four Noble Truths from the *Pāli* Text Sources is the highest acquisition knowledge of human being. In reality, there is only one truth which provides the four basic knowledges for the ultimate truth. This absolute knowledge is the ultimate truth which Buddhists call *Nibbāna*. The following principle is the statement that the

Buddha taught how human beings can enter the path of assurance and live the higher quality of life:

The Exalted One said that O *Bhikkhus*, it was concerning things unlearnt before that vision, insight, understanding, wisdom, light arose in me at “*the thought of the Ariyan truth of the nature and fact of Ill,*” and that this Truth was to be understood, and was understood by me. It was concerning things unlearnt before that vision, insight, understanding, wisdom, light arose in me at “*the thought of the Ariyan Truth as to the Cause of Ill,*” and that this Truth was concerning something to be put away, and was put away by me. It was concerning things unlearnt before that vision, insight, understanding, wisdom, light arose in me at “*the thought of the Ariyan Truth as to the Cessation of Ill,*” and that this Truth was concerning something to be realized, and was realized by me. It was concerning things unlearnt before that vision, insight, understanding, wisdom, light arose in me at “*the thought of the Ariyan Truth as to the Course leading to the cessation of Ill,*” and that this truth was to be developed, and was developed by me (*A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics*: 170).

The above mentioned knowledge becomes the ultimate guidance of mankind to the basic nature of reality. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu has reinterpreted the Four Noble Truths as the following.

1. What is the real suffering for human being?

Therein what is the Noble Truth of Suffering? Birth is suffering; ageing is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow - lamentation - pain (physical) - mental pain - despair is suffering; association with the disliked is suffering; separation from the liked is suffering; not to get what one wishes, that also is suffering; in brief the five aggregates (as objects of) the attachments are suffering (*The Book of Analysis*: 130).

The first item of the Four Noble Truths focuses on the term “suffering.” Suffering means the undesirable or unsatisfactory condition. In Buddhism, the emphasis is on human life process which involves birth, old age, illness, and death. The five aggregates and all element of being are impermanent,

suffered, and selfless. From the view of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, he reinterprets that the real suffering of man is the attachment of selfhood or “I” that naturally has the three universal characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfaction, and selflessness. He said that

The thing is to be got are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and nobody’s property. But an individual who doesn’t perceive this will naturally think “I am getting ..., I have ..., I am ...” ... that is the source of distress and misery (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu 1956: 45-46).

2. What causes suffering for human being?

Therein what is the Noble Truth of the cause of suffering? That craving which is cause of becoming again, is accompanied by passionate lust, is strong passion for this and that. For example; craving for sense pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming (*The Book of Analysis*: 133).

The Buddha taught that desire was the main root of suffering. It was the thirst which produces re-existence and re-becoming, which was bound up with passionate and greed. In this section, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu explained that the term of “I desire” was the cause of suffering. The process of desire related with the mental birth of “I” and “my” and the four worldly attachments—the sensual clinging, the opinion clinging, the rite and ritual clinging, and the idea of selfhood clinging. A man will live his life based on worldly ideas of possessing while the pure reality cannot be gained at all. He said that “The desires are the cause of suffering. They all desire this, that, and the other, simply because they don’t understand the nature of desire” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu 1956: 202).

3. What is the cessation of suffering for human being?

Therein what is the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering? That which is the entire dispassionate cessation of, the forsake of, the discarding of, the freedom from, the non-attachment to the same craving (*The Book of Analysis*: 135).

It points out the freedom from suffering, called *nibbāna* or nirvana the complete extinguishing of desire. From Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's viewpoint, nirvana is not some sorts of miracle of supernatural or something to be achieved after death. He explains the idea of nirvana as indispensable for all individuals. Its state can be attained at any moment that the mind becomes free from all fetters. When there is no idea of self or "I" consequently there is no idea of desire. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu explains the word nirvana into two states involving a momentary nirvana and the full nirvana. He said that "Permanent cessation of compounding is full nirvana; temporary cessation is just a momentary nirvana" (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu 1956: 177).

4. What is the maintaining path to the state of cessation of suffering for human being?

Therein what is the Noble Truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering? Only this Noble Eight Constituent Path, namely: Right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration (*The Book of Analysis*: 138).

CORE DOCTRINE: THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS (<i>ARIYASACCA</i>)	ANSWER: ORIGINAL BUDDHIST TEACHING	ANSWER: REINTERPRETATION BY BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU FOR THE MODERN MAN	POSSIBLE PRACTICE: DEVELOP FROM IGNORANT LIVING TO WISDOM IN THE MODERN AGE
1. What is the real suffering (<i>Dukkha</i>) for human being?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging, Illness, Death • The Five Aggregates (<i>Pañca-khandha</i>) • They are composed of form, sensation, perception, mental formative, and consciousness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea of self or “I” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the truth of nature and all elements of being. • The Law of Change (<i>Tilakkana</i>—all elements are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless)
2. What is the cause of suffering (<i>Dukkha-Samudaya</i>) for human being?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire/Craving (<i>Tanhā</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea of “I desire,” “my,” “mine,” “possession,” “attachment” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realize the four different kinds of attachment: sensual clinging, opinions, rites and rituals, and the idea of selfhood. • Understand the Law of Conditionality (<i>Idappaccayatā</i>), and the Law of Dependent Origination (<i>Patīccasamuppāda</i>)

Table. 1. Buddhadāsa Bhiikhu’s Buddhist Reinterpretation for all Mankind in the Modern Age

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3. What is the cessation of suffering (<i>Dukkha-Nirodha</i>) for human being?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of desire. • Nirvana: Liberation through wisdom (<i>paññāvimutti</i>), and Liberation by Concentration (<i>cetovimutti</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No idea of self or “I,” “my,” “mine” • emptiness of selfhood (<i>Suññatā</i>). • Focus on Liberation through wisdom (<i>paññāvimutti</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realize the truth of nature and complete any extinction of every kind of defilement and misery. • Be free from desire: “a momentary nirvana” or “a full nirvana” right here and now. • Focus on Liberation by wisdom (<i>paññāvimutti</i>) for all mankind.
4. The path to the cessation of suffering (<i>Dukkha-nirodha-gāmaṇi</i>) for human being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Eightfold Path (<i>Atthangika-Magga</i>): right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Eightfold Path (<i>Atthangika-Magga</i>): right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice Eightfold Path (<i>Atthangika-Magga</i>) with the theory of 10 tenets: how to deal with any doubtful matters (<i>Kālāmasutta</i>), • Practice the foundation of mindfulness (<i>Satipatthāna</i>), the mindfulness of breathing (<i>Ānāpānasati</i>), Intuition in natural / methodical method

Table. 1. (Continued)

It points out the path and the method for extinguishing desire. There are right understanding, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. In his teaching, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu concentrates much on right understanding or right view. He emphasizes the intellectual dimension of man as liberation through wisdom (*Paññāvimutti*). Its method requires the process of thought, observation, experiment, and proof. His guidance is considered as easier and directed path for fulfilling human beings in both religious man and non-religious man in the modern age. He said that “It is possible to step over or overcome all suffering because of the practicing of Right View, that is *Sammā-dīṭṭhi*” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu 2003: 38).

Given the importance of this study, suffering means the undesirable condition such as old age, illness, and death. Everyday people fail to realize causality of existences and the three characteristics of life which are the state of impermanence, the state of suffering, and the state of being not self. They face pain and suffering as universal phenomena because of their ignorant endless desire. Millions of individuals search for the good life with the wrong view of living. Their mentality produces the three unhealthy defilements of greed, anger, and delusion and increases the egoistic desire, the wrong attitude of sensual craving, craving for eternal existence, craving for perpetual youth, for constant good health, for temporal happiness, and so on. The pleasures derived from sensual craving cannot satisfy one’s most heart-felt longing. Craving may lead people to do harm to themselves, and communities. Ignorance and desire are the sources of human suffering and human beings need to rectify this erroneous conception. As a consequence, people become attached to all elements of existence and things that cannot be truly possessed, so they suffer.

To solve this universal human problem, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s work ultimately includes a belief in the possibility of freedom from suffering but starts with accepting suffering as natural fact of human existence, and courageously facing the problems head on. People must cut off from all sorts of fetters: greed, hatred, delusion, conceit, wrong view, doubt, sloth,

restlessness, shamelessness, lack of moral and death. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu focuses on an awareness of the nature of truth and the emptiness of “I” in order to achieve the essence of wisdom in the present life. In *The Good Life: A Guide to Buddhism for the Westerner*, Gerald Roscoe said that:

One should not think I am in pain, but rather there is pain; not that I am angry but rather there is anger; not that I am joyful but rather there is joy. One should realize that whatever arise, i.e. whatever “there is” such as pain, feelings, sensations, thoughts, emotions soon passes away. It is the law of impermanence: what arises passes away. Thus, one should realize that I, although a useful and necessary social-communicative term, cannot be regarded as a permanent self. It should not, and cannot, be clung to (1990: 35).

When people do not cling to the worldly life, they can promote good mental hygiene and help combat negative physical and emotional conditions of human beings. The false idea of a sense of possession and accumulation, egoism, materialism, capitalism, consumerism will be liberated in the present life. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu states that “Nirvana is attained at any moment at the mind becomes free from compounding” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu 1956: 77).

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be assumed that Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s *dhmma* notion is identical to the teachings of Buddha and it is acceptable and practical for all mankind in the modern age. In light of his teachings, no one can postpone paying attention to matters of life fulfillment or enlightenment until the next life; falling into hell or going to heaven is the direct result of proper actions performed from moment to moment. In Thai Buddhism, everyone can develop their intellect and quality of mind from ignorance to wisdom, or from an average man to an *arahant* or worthy one. From Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s teaching of the true happiness of man—a man free of

suffering is relevant for the modern age if a man truly practices as he has taught. The view of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu did not stray from the core teachings of the Buddha, what he did is to show that the teaching of Buddha is still suitable for contemporary living. However, modern people do have limitation in terms of time, education and life circumstances, therefore not all of them can gain true wisdom. The evolution of human being depends on how much a person understands the truth of this world and its illusion. The primary requirement is to realize genuinely the truth of world and all bondages. In the Buddha *Dhamma* and Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's Buddhist reinterpretation, to develop a mind free from all bondages is the core requirement for being a holy one and possible for all humankind in this life.

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