

24 BENEFITS

YOU SHOULD GET FROM COMING TO

SUAN MOKKH

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

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Translated from the Thai by Mongkol Dejnakarindra

“ประโยชน์ที่ท่านควรจะได้รับจากการมาสวนโมกข์” จากหนังสือ *สวนโมกข์อยู่ที่ไหน*

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Anumodanā

To all Dhamma comrades, those helping to spread Dhamma:

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

Buddha dāsa

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

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*A talk given by Tan Ajahn Buddhādāsa on December 17, 1988
at the request of Tan Dusadee Bhikkhu.*

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #1

ANSWERS TO LIFE'S PROBLEMS



1.

If you have any problem in your life, go see Ajahn Sawai at the Sculpture Studio in the southwest area of this Suan Mokkh. The Studio was where we sculpted the stone carvings displayed on the outside walls of the Spiritual Theater. Ajahn Sawai has a lot of worldly experience. He used to be a marketing salesman for the Singer Company, so he knows the art of talking and can answer questions, especially those of small children or young people. He wholeheartedly devotes his life to this activity, doing the work with persistence and great patience. I myself cannot do such work because I can get bored with it, but Ajahn Sawai is never tired of working for the young. This is a special characteristic which is praiseworthy. He can answer questions of the young, the teenagers, up to adults. If you cannot figure something out or have some disturbing problems, you can ask for his help. He will give you answers or suggestions to solve your life problems. You don't have to believe me, but you can try and ask him for help. Those who have much life experience can give good answers because they have observed, seen, and fought a lot. They have much wisdom, being able to pass on their knowledge to others, and can be consultants for all kinds and all levels of life's problems. So try to talk with him.

Ajahn Sawai has done the most for children, which are the most important part of humanity and the future of the world. The world is dictated by humanity. Whatever the children grow up to be describes the future of the world. Ajahn Sawai has done what he could do without showing off or overstating his ability. I can say that even though he did not have a perfect score, he has achieved quite a lot. Some children changed their habits or had a good safe concept to hold on to, making their parents happy. If anybody comes to ask me questions about life, I would have him or her see Ajahn Sawai. They can ask him any question, even if it is a personal or a rather secret one. So this is the first benefit of Suan Mokkh, namely, receiving answers to life's questions.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #2

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SCRIPTURES



2.

Where can you find answers to questions about the Scriptures? At the library, from certain monks, or from myself – we will be glad to answer questions about the Scriptures. We have been familiar with them for decades and know well about what is said and where to look for answers in them.

In another instance, we can help explain or interpret the meaning of the associated text. Don't think that you can understand every word in the Tipiṭaka. There are some obscure points that require right interpretation. If one read the Tipiṭaka and understood it right away, there would be a lot of arahants (perfected ones) around. You need to know the right meaning of the text before you can take it and use it for practice. Remember this as the general principle. There are many parts of the Tipiṭaka that were wrongly interpreted and thus useless. You need to have the right interpretation, which will be useful in practice, so that the Tipiṭaka will be beneficial.

As a matter of fact, the Tipiṭaka is in the people's mind. The real Tipiṭaka is in life, in events, in human life. The one in the form of the Scriptures is just a record of what has been said, thought about, and taught so that people can profoundly understand the Tipiṭaka of life. What is passed down to us needs to be studied and interpreted for the right profound meanings and for the benefit of our lives. If it's about the Scriptures and time allows, we will try our best to help or answer the questions.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #3

STUDY OF DHAMMA FROM PICTURES



3.

You have to know that the pictures and carvings contain riddles, that is, there are meanings hidden in them. That's why they are called "Dhamma-riddle pictures." This is very good because they are a collection of the wisdom of the ancient people. It's convenient for us to study them without first having to invent them, a shortcut to learning and accumulating wisdom. If we were to invent them ourselves, we would never be able to do the job our ancestors have done, even if we spent ten lifetimes on it. Try to make use of these pictures. If you understand the meaning behind one of them, you will surely gain insight into one aspect of Dhamma, or maybe more, because a picture can have many meanings.

Among the pictures, there are both those originally developed by the ancient people and those by later generations of Buddhists or non-Buddhists. There are pictures drawn by the Chinese and the Japanese, both being our main source of the most beneficial Dhamma-riddle pictures. Pictures and paintings from the West are mostly eccentric, sexually oriented, or about miracles – they don't have Dhamma-riddle pictures. Those by the Chinese and the Japanese – especially from Zen Buddhism – are all Dhamma-riddle pictures, which are very good for Dhamma study. So try to make use of them.

In our Thai heritage, we have a set of pictures called "*The Body City*" and another set called "*Tortoise's Moustache and Hare's Horn*." Only these two sets happen to have been passed down to us, and we have preserved them in drawings. *The Tortoise's Moustache and Hare's Horn* was obtained through a great effort. We had to look for it at the National Library. The book was fragmentary, its bark-fiber pages being in shreds, when we got it all photocopied. We are indebted to Mr. Rabin Bunnak, who helped us until we successfully acquired the pictures for study and pieced them together into a complete story. We can say, as a challenge to the officials at the National Library, that they don't know how to interpret the pictures and don't even know what they are all about. We interpreted them and published them first. The officials still

doubt whether we correctly interpreted the pictures – they examined whether Buddhādāsa gave the right explanation. As of now, they still have not published the book. The National Library and the National Museum have never advertised or published the book, but we deem it best to show it to Westerners to demonstrate our ancestors' ideas in Dhamma that were expressed by pictures. We want to show off to them that no other nations could do so well as our ancestors. The picture set illustrates Dhamma riddles that are so profound as to outdo all other sets. It is truly worth showing off, but I don't know who would be able to help do this.

Those sets by the Chinese and the Japanese are also marvelous. They are from the ancient past. New Dhamma-riddle pictures also exist, for example those drawn by Emanuel Sherman, a Jewish American. While he was ordained as a monk, he described his thoughts in wood carvings and transferred the pictures on to coarse paper. They are most valuable, and it's a miracle that they did not get lost. Mr. Sherman died on Pha-ngan Island and left them in a cardboard box, which I found full of cockroach excrements when someone brought it to me. If the box had been carelessly thrown away or burned up, it would have been lost and never brought here. Venerable Pradoem (Komalo) of Phleng Wipatsana Monastery happened to get it and brought it here without knowing what the pictures were all about. We knew what they meant, and we selected some of them to be drawn on the wall of the Spiritual Theater to preserve them. It is fortunate that they were not lost with their painter's death. They are all here as new, or modern, Dhamma-riddle pictures.

We also have the old ones, dated back to a thousand years ago. Some are the Chinese Zen pictures, others are our own Thai pictures. I have tried my best to find all of them and had them painted here. Even those Tibetan pictures that are considered best painted were also copied here as the subjects for visual Dhamma study.

I wanted to remark that we are ignorant about this kind of study, whereas the prehistoric ancient people were so knowledgeable about it as to have painted the pictures on cave walls.

What some explorers found to be prehistoric paintings – whose meanings are not well understood – are something I believe they used to educate their children and grandchildren. There were no books in those days, so they used pictures instead. I guess this was how they taught their younger generations. For example, there is a picture of an ox attached to a rope. This should be a lesson on how to catch an ox. Don't underestimate the ancient people – they could make a fool out of modern men. It's wonderful that, even though they were illiterate, they could still pass down their knowledge, being able to teach others even when they did not have a written language or a book.

As far back as the Sukhothai Period only a few hundred years ago, the people did not have books either. But they had these kinds of pictures. They drew pictures to teach Dhamma to illiterate fellow people. In the Ayutthaya Period, temple walls were full of Dhamma-riddle pictures. However, in the Bangkok Period, they did not draw such pictures, but drew those showing the story of the Buddha, some literary figures such as the Ramayana characters, and the like. I don't know what they thought about.

The profound Dhamma-riddle pictures, such as those found in *samut kloi* (bark-fiber books) that depict a tale of an elephant and three ponds or a tale about defilements, could still be found in some monasteries originally built in the Ayutthaya Period, for example, Wat Pho in Bang Pho. When I went to see them the other day, I found them in the most pitiable state. The temple was nearly completely deserted. Rainwater was allowed to leak down the walls, and nobody cared about the algae that grew on the pictures.

Pictures like these taught us the absolute truth. Our ancestors drew them in *samut kloi* and left them inside a temple. The laymen and laywomen who came to the temple took up the book, looked at the pictures, discussed the meaning, and soon understood the hidden Dhamma. They learned Dhamma from a temple's *samut kloi*. At Wat Chaloem Phra Kiat, an old monastery, I saw such books left in its temple so that the almsgivers on uposatha (Buddhist sabbath) days could look at the pictures and

could learn Dhamma without reading. Later on, temple boys sold most of them to farangs (Westerners), and it was very difficult for me to find one.

In learning Dhamma from pictures, we are trained at the same time to think very wisely without realizing the process. It is better than skillfully giving a lecture on a raised platform. The latter does not sharpen our view as does scrutinizing Dhamma-riddle pictures. We saw their benefits like this, so we redrew them here as a tool to sharpen people's brains. But the fools do not like them.

Let me talk about Emanuel Sherman a little bit more. He was a smart man, at first working as a scene setter for movie studios in America. Being an innately intelligent man, he became interested in Buddhism and went to study the religion in China, Japan, and Tibet. After all those places, he intended to come to Suan Mokkh, but he was brought to Pha-ngan Island by Ven. Pradoem and got stuck at Khao Tham Monastery. Not long after he died without ever having come to Suan Mokkh. If you take a look at Sherman's drawings, you will see that all of them are very profound to the extent that the foolish would say they are meaningless. Profound pictures are usually viewed as eccentric or meaningless by the foolish, but we should not belittle such pictures.

The first of Sherman's pictures is on the left of the entrance to the Spiritual Theater. It's called "*Buddha behind the Curtain.*" If you slightly push aside your curtain of ignorance, you will see a Buddha sitting there. You don't have to waste time or money going to look for a Buddha at a monastery or in India. Just push aside the curtain of ignorance. Try to think about it. The foolish nowadays never know where their curtain of ignorance is. As they are so dumb, how can they unveil the curtain? But if they are wise, they will know their curtain of ignorance, and upon pushing it aside, they will see Buddha there. This picture can be considered invaluable. Looking at it as a means of teaching, we can see that it teaches us extremely profoundly. People walk past the pictures tens of times each day, and they never benefit from them. I have to call those who ignore them "eternal fools" because they don't gain anything from the educational pictures, which I would say are silently scolding

them. Teaching the fools brings little or obscure benefit, except when they are cured of ignorance and understand all the pictures. So, in a way, Sherman drew the pictures as a means to scold the fools.

There are good pictures from Zen Buddhism and pre-Zen China. One is the *Crooked River and Straight Water*, which the foolish don't understand but try to show off their view just the same. Children won't accept that the river is crooked but the water in it is not. This is because they know neither what water is nor what river is. Some grown-ups may also be as stupid as children if they consider water to be crooked like the river. Try to study it yourselves. The painter did good work and put in an invisible scolding word for the foolish. You should know that, however crooked a river can be, the water in it is never crooked.

I think these pictures are invaluable. But people benefit very little from them because of their ignorance. They look down upon the pictures and are not interested in studying them earnestly. Doing so takes time because the pictures have profound meanings. If one gets to know them, then it's worth the time spent. Therefore, whoever comes to Suan Mokkh should try to benefit the most from the Dhamma-riddle pictures.

Another good picture of Sherman's is the one showing a man striking a bell, with the caption *from infinity to infinity*. This picture implies the cause and characteristics of conditioning – conditioned things come from some other conditioned things and will cause the like in an unending succession. It characterizes the absolute truth. I don't know whether the guide would correctly explain it, but I have to confess that I have not tutored the guide with the right meaning. There could certainly be a wrong explanation because the meaning is profound. I have thought about reviewing explanations for the Dhamma-riddle pictures so that they are correct, but so far I have not done this. Anyway, the Spiritual Theater is where you can study the Dhamma-riddle pictures.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #4

STUDY OF DHAMMA FROM OBJECTS OF ANALOGY



4.

We have tried to make something that would promote profound Dhamma. An example is the Nalikae Pond, in the middle of which there is an island planted with a lone coconut tree. It is in the southern part of Suan Mokkh. Our intention is for the pond to represent a sea of wax. We used a monstrous D-7 tractor, which could work most productively, for a full month to create the pond.

We want to preserve the notion of the Nalikae Island in the middle of a wax sea because it is sung as an old lullaby in Chaiya. The people of this town believe that Buddhism came here more than a thousand years ago, and that the people of that time profoundly understood Dhamma and that nibbāna (deliverance from suffering) is within the *saṃsāra* (life process), or nibbāna can be found within *saṃsāra*. This means that cessation of dukkha (suffering) can be found in dukkha itself, or extinction of a fire can be found in the fire itself. So they composed a lullaby so profound as to mention nibbāna. There are many good lullaby compositions, the most heart-warming of them being that which goes like this:

A lone nalikae coconut tree
In the middle of the wax sea
Never hit by rains
Nor by thunders
In the middle of the wax sea
Only reached by the transcendent of virtue

You may not understand what this lullaby means. The meaning of “never getting hit by rains nor by thunders” is never having suffering. And what is meant by a nalikae coconut tree in the middle of the wax sea? The coconut tree is nibbāna and the wax sea is *saṃsāra*, which can be good or positive at one time and can be bad or negative at another. In the middle of the wax sea, *saṃsāra*, suffering, there is nibbāna, cessation of suffering. However, the foolish nowadays try to think their brains off for ten lifetimes but never figure out that the ancestors said this. We built Nalikae Pond as an object for Dhamma study.

To speak well about nibbāna, we should all go discuss it near the Nalikaē Pond. In fact, I used to do this. I once did it with Mr. Sanya Thammasak and some other intelligent people like him. When we went to the Pond, I explained every aspect of nibbāna, making good use of the coconut tree and the metaphorical sea of wax as supplements. It was fun, and at the same time fruitful and unforgettable. When people try to study such objects with an able guide and with an on-site discussion, we can get the benefit in many ways.

Other lullaby compositions, such as those about the cashew fruit or a certain kind of orange, all aim at nibbāna. This shows that our ancestors knew what nibbāna is all about, and they put scolding and teasing words in the compositions too. We wanted to preserve this particular lullaby about the nalikaē coconut tree, so we spent some money making Nalikaē Pond.

The pond we made represents the sea of wax, which is a liquid when hot and a solid when cold. This means merit and demerit, respectively. They are two different states of the same thing, depending on whether it's hot or it's cold. We should neither grasp at nor hold on to them because they are conditioned things just the same. I can spend an hour talking about merit and demerit, but let's consider the meaning of the sea of wax. Nibbāna is in the middle of the sea of wax, but it is not the wax; they are not the same thing. Dukkha caused by the sea of wax denies one's access to the coconut tree, that is, nibbāna. As we know this, we should go to the pond and meditate there so that we don't have to tire ourselves running around or getting into unworthy trouble.

This is called "Dhamma analogy" as a supplement for study, or study from objects as used in modern education. You can learn from reading books too, but learning from an object is profoundly useful. So we should have an adequate number of such objects of study.

A building of ours was built to appear as a sea-going ship. It's the building for visitors who stop over. We intend it to mean the ferry that carries people from *tīraṃ* (this side) to *pāraṃ* (the

other side). “This side” means the mundane side, and “the other side” means the supra-mundane side, namely nibbāna.

When I saw a picture from an archeological excavation of a prehistoric tomb, it caught my attention. Some of the bodies were found to have at their sides a small stone carving in the form of a ship. I guessed those prehistoric people knew that a ship was for going across a river or a sea, and to enable the deceased to do so, they provided one for him in the tomb. That’s how smart the ancient people were about their funeral. The ship is for going from this side to the other side of the sea of suffering, not for carrying cargoes as normally assumed. We tried to make as many objects of study as we could, but so far we could make only a few things. We had a lot of trouble making them. Nonetheless, we are content with our ability to make one or two. At the stern of the ship, there are pictures of a black swan and a white one. The black one comes from one side, the white one comes from the opposite side, and in the middle there is a circle with nothing inside. The analogy is that when merit and demerit reach the point of voidness, they are equally void. This shows a profound dhamma – a teaching of liberation or a teaching on the ultimate level.

After I had made such objects for Dhamma study, I felt sorry for myself because nobody was interested in looking at them, let alone studying them. It was like playing a flute to an audience of rhinoceroses, even though we tried our best to teach people with as many objects as possible. If we could have done as we had planned, there would have been many more objects than the few that we have now. But with as few objects as we have made, we hope they will be beneficial. Particularly, the Nalikae Pond is what pleases me – myself alone – very much. Other people are not quite pleased with it, and they do not make use of it. Let’s try to make use of the objects that we have made or are present at Suan Mokkh, and get the most benefits from them.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #5

STUDY OF DHAMMA FROM SKELETONS



5.

For the skeletons on display at the Dhamma Hall, I have to thank Dr. Praphan Arimit, who sent them here. He bought them with his own money and arranged for their delivery one by one until we had the complete set: skeletons of a male adult, a female adult, and a child, constituting the likeness of a family. Actually, these skeletons represent much of a traditional, straight-forward way of teaching Dhamma. They are good for those who are not taken aback by unpleasant things, good for the study of loathsomeness, but having nothing to do with voidness. True liberation comes from *anupādāna* (non-attachment), not from *upādāna* (attachment). Unpleasantness or loathsomeness is an aspect of the latter, but it's good as a starting point to the former.

Rumor has it that the female skeleton came from a beauty. That's good just the same because whoever wants to see a 'beauty' can go see her at the Dhamma Hall.

There was an anecdote about a man who jokingly said that he would marry the Dhamma Hall 'beauty' if she helped him win an underground lottery. He did win it but has not married the 'beauty' as promised.

One use of the skeletons was to teach children not to be afraid of ghosts. If ghosts leave behind nothing but skeletons, which are just like fish bones, then we don't have to fear them. As we ourselves have flesh, skin, blood, and bones – everything in the whole body – there is no reason to fear ghosts who have only skeletons and have no way to harm us. But children are not yet convinced. They believe that, even with skeletons only, ghosts can be as dangerous as if they had the whole body.

When the skeletons were put on display for the first time at the Dhamma Hall, groups of schoolchildren under the guidance of their teachers came to see them. We ourselves got to know something from their visits. Some boys were showing off their bravery, rather than knowledge, by boldly touching or stroking

the bones or by putting one of the skeletons on themselves. There were a few boys who did this. Some other children were watching them closely. Some were so afraid as to watch from the back row, and a few other children dared not go inside the Dhamma Hall but stayed downstairs. These last few children got ill with a high fever the night they went back home. Think about it, and you will see that ghosts can really – and effectively – haunt children. You should learn from this incident and get ready for the problems arising from ignorance. Fear is an aspect of foolishness, and a fool is punished for his foolishness. The lessons from the skeletons are that they are loathsome objects and they can make a fool out of us if we and our vigorous whole bodies are afraid of mere dry bones.

The cause can be traced to *upādāna*, attachment. The wise taught us to know this and to smarten up. If any of you have never seen the skeletons, go take a look. Be aware that it's your preconceived *upādāna* that makes you afraid, terrified, nauseated, or feel whatever. When you eat spareribs, you enjoy them very much. They too are bones, but why don't you feel nauseated? You are able to eat chicken or pig bones without fear, then how come you almost die of fright of human bones at a monastery?

Actually, skeletons can be used as objects of meditation. In the *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification), they are described as objects for the development of tranquility. Although this is not in the Buddha's own words, the practice is useful just the same. We should often feel the bones in our own bodies, doing so every day to see what they can do, whether they are fearsome, and what meaning they have. On the other hand, occultists or witch doctors also use bones and skeletons, but for purposes other than Dhamma study. You can see that people can have many different concepts about human bones.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #6

COMMENTS OR DISCOURSES BY THE MONKS



6.

You can ask for comments and instructions from me at my hut or from some other monks. Every preacher here is knowledgeable in some aspects of Dhamma, and you can ask them about such aspects. There is always someone at Suan Mokkh who can answer your questions. If you need some advice or a lecture, just talk to them on any occasion as others usually do. I don't think I have much to elaborate on this.

But most of those who do come for advice or help have already gone halfway into a psychiatric problem – they are no longer normal. Some come for holy water, a blow of spray on the head or the like, but not for Dhamma, knowledge, advice, or discourse. Mostly they ask for what we don't offer. They also don't believe that we cannot do such things as sprinkling holy water and blowing it out on their heads. As for what we can offer, they don't want it.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #7

A COLLECTION OF ALL DHAMMA-RIDDLE PICTURES



7.

This includes not only paintings but also all kinds of pictures or images that have riddles or hidden meanings inside. Each picture of interest needs some time to be studied, particularly that of the Tibetan demon in the *paṭīccasamuppāda* (dependent origination) cycle, which needs hours to be studied well. We discussed this a little while ago. From another viewpoint, what I mean by all kinds of pictures and images includes paintings, drawings, arranged artifacts, and even nature itself.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #8

STONE CARVINGS DEPICTING THE STORY OF
THE BUDDHA



8.

These carvings are installed on the outside wall of the Spiritual Theater. It's a shame and rather disappointing that we invested much but have gained little. This is because people are not interested in them, and the guides are not knowledgeable about them. What they know about the Buddha story is normal, because the story is well-known. But what is extremely unusual is why there isn't a picture of the Buddha – why these carvings do not explicitly show the Buddha, Prince Siddhartha, or even the child who would become the Buddha. This was how they told the Buddha story in the pre-Buddha image era. They used a vacant space or some other symbols to represent the Buddha. The Buddha story told without his picture is marvelous, but it's regrettable that people don't know about it.

In those days, they had a general principle that the real Buddha could not be shown by a picture. Neither could the real Dhamma, nor the real Sangha. So, in the beginning of the Sanchi Era or the Bharhut Era, neither were there pictures of the Buddha nor of the monks. They both were considered unrepresentable by pictures. Looking beyond the physical realm, we should see that the body of the Buddha is not the real Buddha. The Buddha said that those who saw his physical body or were holding on to his robe were not really seeing him, but those who see Dhamma really see him. That's why the real Buddha cannot be shown by a picture. In the early Sanchi pictures, they didn't even show the *pañcavaggiyā* (five bhikkhus) in human form. In later eras, human pictures were used to represent the Sangha and then the Buddha, gradually at first and without restraint eventually.

In India, two or three thousand years before the Buddha's time, people strongly held on to images of very many gods. In the Sindhu (Indus) River basin, where the ancient culture had been heavily laden with god worship, archeologists dug up a lot – tens or hundreds of thousands of god images. They now keep such images as the Sun god, the Moon god, and many others in a museum where a visitor to India can take a look. In later times, people got

smarter and smarter so as to give up worshipping the images. Finally, in the Buddha's time, they came to realize that a real god could not be represented by an image, and all of the religions in India discontinued image worship. So, not very long before the Buddha's time and in the Buddha's time, there were no images for worship in any religion.

Later on, the notion of worshipping no images became obscure – people became foolish and returned to image adulation once again. Some claim that the Greeks brought images of gods into India. In reality, foolishness had returned to people, who then made images of gods again. This kind of activity has since escalated, and the most intense is in none other than Thailand.

The real Dhamma and Buddha cannot be represented by pictures or images. So why in the world should we step back two or three thousand years before the Buddha's time filling every corner with images for adulation? The Buddha's time was when the guiding light was brightest, and there were no such images. Do you know that we are on again off again about our foolishness in image adulation? If we regard an image as a Buddha, then we are no better than a child. But if we see Dhamma, or in other words, see the real Buddha, then things will improve. I want the stone carvings on the Spiritual Theater wall to tell you this fact, but so far I have not successfully got what I want. It's difficult to find guides who can clearly explain this fact. I myself hardly have time to observe them explaining to the visitors, so I don't know what they say. The meaning that the real Buddha cannot be represented by an image has not gotten across to people.

This is the usefulness of the stone carvings, which tell us that people in the enlightened Buddha's time did not take material objects as representations for the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. What they took as the real Dhamma are the meanings of cessation of *kilesa* (defilements), quenching of *dukkha* (suffering), knowledge of the cause of *dukkha*, and knowledge for the quenching of *dukkha*. Nowadays, people step back to foolishness, taking a Buddha image for the real Buddha, the scriptures for the real Dhamma, and common ordained men for the real Sangha. They really do

so. I was strongly determined to teach people the real meaning of Buddha through the stone carvings as described, but so far I have not been successful, and things have become complicated. I have lost some physical strength, and hardly have time to describe the carvings by myself. I used to do it a few times, then I had to stop.

Actually, you can also study the carvings in other aspects, such as the artistic and historical ones. For example, the way Prince Siddhartha stays on his mount, with angels supporting its hoofs to eliminate noise, was derived from the Amaravati arts line. In the Bharhut line, the angels did not bear the horse but they scattered flowers on the road so thickly that the horse could gallop noiselessly. A close look at the curved design patterns on Thai art objects shows that we adopted the Amaravati style. This is a study in history and arts, which is also useful if we are knowledgeable enough.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #9

NOAH'S ARK-LIKE SHIPS AS
A METAPHOR FOR MEANS OF LIBERATION



9.

The word 'ship' is a metaphor for Dhamma. Dhamma is compared to a ship or a raft which carries people across a river or a sea. Please carefully take note that we must not grasp at and hold onto the ship or raft. We should consider it as just a means for us to cross a river or a sea. If we hold onto it, then we cannot leave it. Neither can we do anything else.

This means that we must 'ferry' our lives. In everyday language, this is to say that we must cross the *saṃsāra*. In the Dhamma or spiritual language, our mind has to be raised above suffering. The ferry is in our mind – we don't have to look for it anywhere else. Dhamma is like a ferry. When you study Dhamma, you study about the spiritual ferry, which will carry you away from suffering to non-suffering. In everyday words, you cross over *saṃsāra* to nibbāna. In Dhammic words, you get away from ignorance to enlightenment.

Within our mind, there is already something similar to a great sea – one which is even greater than any real sea in the world. Let's pay attention to how we can cross it. If we have Dhamma as the ferry, then we will be able to do so. If you see a ship, always think about ferrying, but don't be deluded by the ship, don't hold onto it or stay comfortably in it. Try to flee the shore of suffering to the shore of non-suffering. Any time you see a ship or its picture, think about it this way.

Death is just like a sea or an ocean. Don't get killed by physical death or spiritual death. Speaking in either a mundane or Dhammic way, we should not get killed by a sea or an ocean. We should be able to cross it, thereby making our lives worthwhile.

I would like to say that it's extremely funny that what I took a lot of trouble to construct does not benefit those who see it as much as I had hoped, but it benefits me a great deal. It's laughable that the merit does not get to those whom I intended, but it comes back to me all the time. Whenever I see the things I have created, I

always collect the merit. But the visitors rarely do so. I don't know who to blame. Maybe I have not tried hard enough to explain it to them. I cannot blame the visitors. Anyway, the ships we built are not so useful for the target people, but they are very useful – extremely useful – for myself.

The ships were built to collect rain water. I asked myself about what shape a rainwater tank should have and came up with that of a thought-provoking ship. This is why the tanks were built as ships. But some fools who came to see them asked why on earth the ships here contained water rather than being surrounded by it. They thought we were out of our minds. As they see the ships this way, they do not get the benefit that we intend for them. They don't know the reason why we built the ships to contain water. I thought of telling them, "Hey! These are people-catching ships, not fish-catching ones. Your dirty fishing vessels are in water, but our ships catch people. That's why ours have water in them."

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #10

THE DHAMMAGHOSANA HALL
(Buddhadāsa's Literary Works over the Past Fifty Years)



10.

I hardly see anybody who is interested in seeing that the works collected in the Dhammaghosana Hall have been done by just one person. Few people believe that a person could single-handedly create all those books. Why don't they try to realize that it took me fifty years of hard work and dedication? I work eighteen hours every day, whereas people can ordinarily work for only eight hours before they are exhausted or bored with working. I can work so hard, and a lot of work gets done.

The Dhammaghosana Hall is intended to show people that each human being can achieve more than what they ordinarily think they can. How much you think you can do is not accurate because you can do much more than that. All the books there have been created by just one person. This means that the creator of the works has to do much more than you think or would do. I work practically all the time, maybe more than eighteen hours a day. My thinking never stops. Even while I am asleep, I sometimes dream about work. In the past, when I was still able to walk well, I used to go on alms rounds near Nam Phut Village. While walking for two hours for the round trip, I also worked mentally and figured out a lot of things. I usually brought with me a pencil or a ball-point pen so that when I figured out anything, I could immediately jot it down. And you know what I wrote on? On the palms of my hands, of course. But I wrote only the headings or topics of what popped up in my mind. A lot of these – ten or even twenty headings – can be written on the palm of a hand. When I returned to the monastery, I immediately converted them into full writings for long discourses before I forgot them.

You can see that I also worked while I was walking on alms rounds. My thinking is my work, therefore I work more than eighteen hours a day, and all the works accumulate into a big lot. So you should believe that we can work harder than people think we can. Most people get tired after an eight-hour period of work. But if you like your work, you are satisfied with it or resolute about it, you can continue to do it all the time, especially mentally. In my

case, I could figure out more plans than I could handle. Among the hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of plans I made in my mind, I could achieve in practice only a few. Even so, they appear to be a lot.

Don't limit yourselves to what you can do comfortably. When you go for a meal, a bath, or a similar thing, you can still work while you are at it. Even when you go to the toilet, you can work. I would say that there are many ideas you can conceive of while you are sitting on the toilet bowl. In this way, I could get a lot of ideas, which I always wrote down and accumulated. When I accumulated enough material, I turned it into a discourse. For me, no matter what posture I am in and whatever I am doing, I can always get a new idea. If you visit the Dhammaghosana Hall, please realize that the volumes of works have been done by just one person. This is the benefit from going to visit it.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #11

THE MAP OF THE MONASTERY



11.

As for this map, I would like to say only that, if you travel by car along every road of our monastery, you will see many things that stimulate your thinking. But if you travel along only some of the roads, you would not get the idea. We don't have a direct intention behind our construction of the roads, just an indirect one or an additional afterthought. You may wonder why we cut one particular road, why we cut another, and why the combination is as seen. Do they match the natural surroundings, yielding the greatest benefit? If you know how to travel around and all over the monastery, you may become a little bit more knowledgeable.

Pay attention to everything from the top of the hill to down below, and note where the roads lead. They will give you some ideas that will improve your understanding and intelligence. See the map of the monastery and travel around. Try it and you will gain some knowledge.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #12

A GRAVEYARD FOR NARCOTICS AND CAUSES OF RUIN

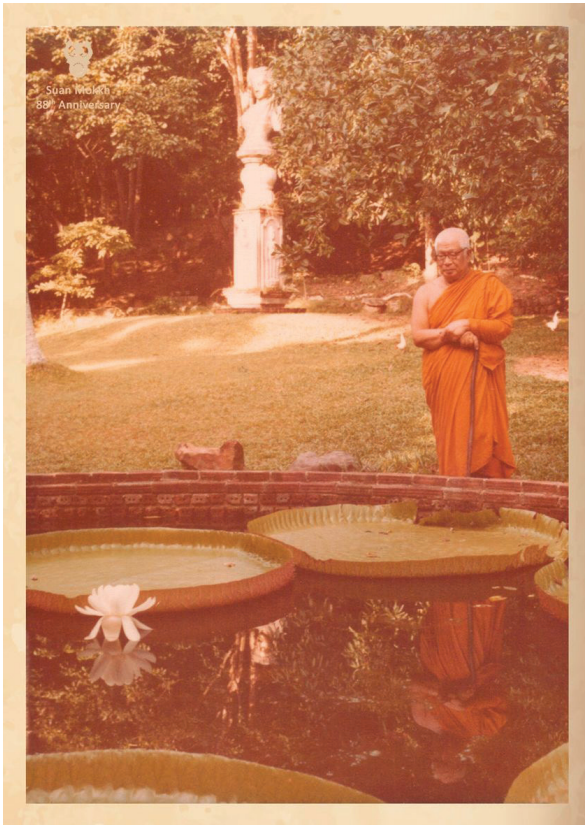


12.

This is actually the Sculpture Studio, where Venerable Sawai conducts his activities. Narcotics to be abandoned here include those drugs taken into the body through smoking, eating, or rubbing – the ruin-causing habits. We consider liquors, cigarettes, and all instruments of gambling as narcotics. The studio is a department of Suan Mokkh – it is a graveyard for the narcotics. We do have some success with no less than eighty percent of those habitual users of narcotics who come to Ven. Sawai. There are some renegades, of course, but there really are many winners who drop the habit and go straight. Some consider the Studio as a sacred place. They tried in vain elsewhere to abandon drinking, smoking, or the like but got success here. This is because of Ven. Sawai's ability to explain to them until they clearly see the harm of narcotics. At the 'graveyard,' you will see a mountain of cigarette packets, a collection of liquor bottles, some betel-nut trays, betel-nut pulverizers, decks of cards, dice, and other instruments of gambling.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #13

RARE, EXOTIC THINGS TO SEE



13.

This aspect has almost nothing to do with Dhamma. Among the exotic things we have here are the sālā (sal) trees, which are grown in front of the Spiritual Theater. Try to study them. You may take one of their leaves back home as a memento. The sālā was closely related to the story of the Buddha – he was born and later died under a sālā. There were incidents in his life that frequently involved the sālā, and in some of his sermons he liked to compare things to a sālā tree. If you read the Tipiṭaka, you will find the word ‘sālā’ most frequently mentioned. It is in the same family as the rang tree, which grows in the northeast and the north of Thailand, but the two plants are not exactly the same. Some people notice that the so-called paochang tree is identical to the sālā.

The sālā trees planted here were directly adopted from India. You may take one of their leaves, press it under a piece of paper or cloth, or use an iron to press it dry, then frame it and keep it as a souvenir. Some people look at the sālā trees and think of the Buddha. If you have not seen them or noticed where they are, you may go to take a look at them in front of the Spiritual Theater. We also planted one on the island in the Nalikae Pond.

Apart from being importantly related to the story of the Buddha, sālā trees are very economically beneficial to India. The Indian people grow the trees commercially. They give hard wood, which is extremely good for making railroad ties. Their barks give tannin, which is good for the tanning industry. Oil pressed from their seeds is very expensive, and above all, they can be used for firewood. When I went to India, I saw some uprooted sālā trees sold in the market. Every part of them, even the root, was sold as firewood.

Sālā trees should absolutely be planted in every monastery. They are not only good economically but also meaningful for Buddhism because they are associated with the Buddha. To speak frankly, they are better than the bodhi trees, which are considered sacred but worthless economically. The

bodhi trees have no good use. People dislike them for their destruction of buildings – the trees grow on pagodas and uposatha (ordination hall) roofs. But sāla trees do not cause such a problem. Anyway, we planted a bodhi tree together with the sāla tree and the coconut tree on the Nalika Pond's island. The bodhi tree reminds us of the Buddha's enlightenment, the coconut tree means nibbāna, and the sāla tree is identified with the Buddha's birth and death. The biggest sāla tree in Suan Mokkh is in front of the Spiritual Theater.

In addition, we raise large-ped Victoria lilies, which are native to South America. And we have a red samet forest, which is brightly red and beautiful. Walking in it gives you unusual feelings. All of these are exotic plants which you can see in Suan Mokkh.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #14

A MINIATURE INDIA



14.

We intended to build a miniature India, but only the parts that involve the Buddha – the places of his birth, enlightenment, first sermon, and death. Bringing India here can facilitate study. The site has been provided, but the construction has not been done yet, so I don't have much to talk about. Upon completion, it will help in studying the life of the Buddha. From the bird's-eye view, we will be able to see where he was born, grew up, reached enlightenment, and walked all over India. But since the project has not been done, you still can't see anything at the site. We thought of setting up an outdoor museum by laying stone carvings around there, depicting the life of the Buddha, but we haven't done that either.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #15

DHAMMA STUDY AND
MEDITATION TRAINING FOR FOREIGNERS



15.

There are two kinds of training offered here, one for general Dhamma principles and the other for meditation. They are two different things, but deserve being studied just the same. This is because, if you don't know Dhamma principles, you will not know what direction you should travel along. It's like when you don't have a map and don't know where to go. Those who practice meditation are just like others who are walking, but the meditators are walking spiritually. The training activity we have continually done is only that for farangs (Westerners). They come here to study both Dhamma and meditation. The first ten days of each month are set aside for farangs, who come in a number of a few tens – sometimes more than a hundred – or maybe more in the future.

We are satisfied that the farangs take the training seriously because they really want to study. I may offend you if I speak frankly that the farangs take it more seriously than the Thais. Some of them – but not all – are more intelligent, having studied much, and are quick to learn. They also want to know themselves, to know what life is, to know the New Life that is beyond suffering. They all intend to do so. We Thais should do the same, too.

Most people who have studied Dhamma or religions usually have done so as a tradition or a ritual – they have hardly reached the real Dhamma. Therefore, we teach them what the true life is and what kind of life they have not yet attained but should do so. We summarize the teaching for them so that they can easily remember that they should have the life that is beyond both positiveness and negativeness – as modern science should say.

Positiveness makes us joyful and laugh like a maniac. Negativeness, on the other hand, makes us depressed and cry. In the Dhamma language, these states of the mind are called 'satisfaction' and 'dissatisfaction.' But since these terms are not so clear and are superficially understood, we prefer using the terms 'positiveness' and 'negativeness.' One state makes us feel

like we are in heaven then and there, while the other makes us feel like we are in hell.

To go one more step further, we may say that we should stay beyond merit and demerit – being neither good nor bad. But people may not understand this, and some may argue that they are taught every day to do good and may ask us why we teach them to stay beyond goodness. Actually, it is absolutely right to be above and beyond goodness before one can be peaceful. If one is still associated with merit and demerit alternately, then he cannot be peaceful, untarnished, unoccupied, or free. The Pāli Canon also says that we should go beyond *abhijjhā* (covetousness) and *domanassa* (sad mindedness), feeling no need to take or reject anything. Or, to use modern terms, we should transcend both positiveness and negativeness.

Pay a little attention to this. Having a life in positiveness means that you adore merit, you are intoxicated and deluded by it. Having a life in negativeness means that you are afraid, depressed, and unhappy. The former kind of life makes you maniacal, while the latter makes you depressed. So reject both of them. Staying beyond both is actually the New Life to be attained. You should consider that pleasure and joy do not give peace of the mind – they are a stir, a chaos, or madness. If you are very pleased, you may not be able to eat or sleep. If you are pleased with winning a grand-prize lottery, you may be an insomniac for many nights. This is how pleasure destroys peace of the mind. But so does displeasure, which causes depression and stress. Being free from both satisfaction and dissatisfaction is peace or unperturbedness. You may call it ‘voidness’ or ‘freedom’ of the mind, that is, when the mind does not fall slave to anything. When you are pleased with something, you fall slave to that pleasant thing, and when you are depressed, you fall slave to an unpleasant thing. Being neither pleased nor displeased with anything means you are free from being enslaved. This is what we call the ‘New Life,’ which we try to teach to others every day, especially to farangs who want to attain it.

The farang people are materially more advanced than we

are, but they are dissatisfied with the advancement because it is a never-ending chaos. They want to find the state that is peaceful, free, or liberated, or where chaos has ceased. So they come to study Dhamma and are satisfied. Then they tell or teach others and further their study of Dhamma. I think they can become so knowledgeable about Dhamma that they may become Dhamma teachers themselves. If we Thais stay as negligent as we are now, I'm afraid the farangs will be our Dhamma teachers in the future.

So set up a resolution to come here to study Dhamma and to train your mind so that it is most beneficial, allowing you to stay beyond suffering, intelligence, and everything – to stay in the coolness of nibbāna, here and now.

Where there is extinction of the fire of conditioning, there is nibbāna to some degree. This can happen everywhere, at every breath. Birth and death are within our bodies all the time. When birth occurs, there is *saṅkhāra* (conditioned state). When death occurs, there is a little nibbāna (unconditioned state), which most people neither realize nor pay attention to. This is because nibbāna is not as pleasant as sensual feelings. Most are interested in worldly happiness, but not in the peace and quiet of the mind resulting from cessation or suppression of its perturbed state.

True happiness and false happiness are described by the same word, 'happiness.' You should know that there are both kinds of happiness. The one resulting from a conditioning cause or a deluding bait is the false one, whereas the one above and beyond that, or having nothing to do with the false happiness, is the true one, which is supramundane. We can recognize true happiness if we observe the most peaceful state of our mind – when we are void of mental defilements or free from enslavement by sense-objects, neither pleased nor displeased, neither positive nor negative. Some defilements make us feel pleasant, others make us feel unpleasant. Don't remain a fool by believing that the best thing is when you feel pleasant or when you get what you want. It's just conditioning or perturbation of the mind. You have to transcend that, staying beyond pleasure and displeasure, being void of conditioning.

This is what we greatly intend, attempt, and make an effort to teach as one of the Buddha's principles. We teach meditation to the trainees so that they can be ultimately liberated. The mindfulness with breathing method we practice here is what the Buddha taught. It's not a special one invented by Suan Mokkh or any teacher, but one that the Buddha taught, recommended, and praised for its benefit which he himself had experienced. Through mindfulness with breathing, we can reach enlightenment.

That's all about the training we regularly offer the farangs during the first ten days of each month. Whoever is really interested will benefit from it. If they could see the true usefulness, they could become interested in Dhamma study and practice, and we will always help them.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #16

THE DRY REMAINS OF A BROOK



16.

The remains of a brook are on Suan Mokkh's boundary line beyond the women's residential area. They start on top of a hill and then disappear below. During the dry season, it's bone dry. Its remains show that it once had a lot of water because the brook bed cuts a deep channel. But deforestation has made it dry – not a drop of water remains. That brook is named 'Huai Chin Tai' (Brook Where a Chinese Died), and it has already died. On this side of Suan Mokkh, we have another brook named 'Huai Than Nam Lai' (Flowing-Water Brook), which is dying. When I first came here forty years ago, it had a lot of water. Now it has useless muddy water during the dry season. It will surely be dead because the forest at its origin is continually being destroyed. Nobody can do anything about this, which is the case with every major problem in the south of Thailand. Destruction of the source of a river or a brook is devastating, as you can see. I used to fight against deforestation but had to back down. The encroachers said that they needed land for their livelihood. After they destroyed the forest, the brooks became dry.

We should remember that this is a problem of man, who destroys what nature or God has created. The farangs believe in God, so they say that "God creates but man destroys." We Buddhists do not have God, therefore we say that "nature creates but man destroys." It has been thousands of years of continual destruction by man, and no one knows how much has been destroyed. Nowadays, the destruction is extremely intense, so intense that rivers and seas are polluted. Do you know that the Chao Phraya River will be completely polluted within a few decades? The seas will be the next victims. This is a result of man's destruction of what nature or God has created. Now come back to the remains of the two brooks. They have been destroyed. This matter is associated with government and politics. Although it is not directly associated with Dhamma, we can talk about it in Dhammic terms – man's foolishness and selfishness are the cause of this destruction.

Let me step aside a little from the present context. The great flood that occurred the other year resulted from man's selfishness. The people involved knew that the sources of rivers were very important, but their selfishness – the thought of taking this and staking a claim for that – shut their brains off. There was selfishness behind the permission given by the government authority to logging companies. They knew that the sites were where rivers originated, but they still allowed logging there. The logging companies who were commissioned also selfishly destroyed the forest by overlogging. The result of this selfishness was a flood, as you all know. After it occurred, the people affected were not adequately helped. When help did come, selfishness accompanied it. It's improper to talk about this, but one can say that help was given selfishly. There was fraud and embezzlement of donated provisions, and even unwillingness to help. This was due to selfishness. The incident began and ended with selfishness. Anyway, it teaches us Dhamma and tells us what we should remember.

Selfishness destroys everything, whatever it is. Buddhism, through the principle of voidness of self, teaches us not to be selfish. If we really see the state of not-self, we will not be selfish because there will be no self to be selfish about. Thanks to Dhamma and the religion, which teach us not-self, we can be selfless and cause no problems.

Selfishness destroys peace and everything in the world. I can challenge you to see that you can find it in everything evil. If one is selfish by himself, he suffers alone. But if his or her selfishness also involves other people, then many people – probably the entire world – will suffer. The world is getting closer to doom because of the ever-increasing selfishness of people.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #17

THE BEST BUDDHA-TIME STYLED UPOSATHA



17.

You have to see this on the top of Golden Buddha Hill before you can understand what it is. I say again that this is ultimately in compliance with the Buddha's wish, and it is constructed in the best possible way to follow the style of what was built in the Buddha's time. It is inexpensive, never harming the national economy. An uposatha (ordination hall) built nowadays costs fifteen to twenty million baht. But we have one as you can see, which is the best because it is economical and best corresponds to the Dhamma-Vinaya (the Doctrine and the Discipline) and the Buddha's wish. But no one follows our example. Their facial expressions show their dissatisfaction with it.

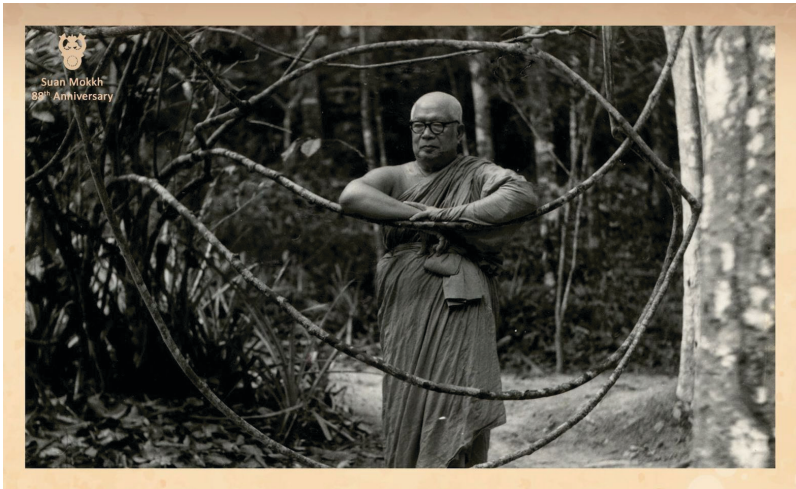
As you have come here, you should go up the hill to see the uposatha. Maybe you could get some idea about what the Buddha did. It doesn't endanger the economy. It causes neither difficulty nor chaos – which usually occurs when we do something un-Buddhist. Actually, religious rites can be conducted on the ground. The Pali Canon says that, if we conduct a rite outdoors, and it happens to rain, we can call off the rite. But if there is a shed, a building, or a dwelling, it can be used as the uposatha without having to build another one just for that purpose. But monasteries today still build a separate building for the rites. The real story is that an accepted place for monks to assemble to perform religious rites or to exercise their voting rights by themselves or through their representatives can be an uposatha by itself.

I would like to leave it with you that, after you have seen our uposatha, try comparing it to others that commonly exist all over the country. I still insist that ours is in line with the Buddha's wish and the Dhamma-Vinaya in the Buddha's time. It does not undermine the economy. This is because it does not cost tens of millions of baht as is the case of other ordination halls, which have no other use than being a place for a talk – which does not necessarily need such a place. This is strange. I don't know what kind of a joke people are playing.

What is commonly known now as an uposatha never existed in the Buddha's time, but it appears at present as the ultimate building in every monastery. Please remember that such an uposatha did not exist in the Buddha's time.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #18

CHARACTERISTICS AND BENEFITS OF A FOREST MONASTERY



18.

A forest monastery has to have characteristics like these here, then people can benefit from the arrangement. As a matter of fact, the terms ‘village monastery’ and ‘forest monastery’ have just appeared recently. In the old days, there were only forest monasteries, and all of them were beyond a village or town boundary. During the Buddha’s time, towns were enclosed by walls. At nightfall, the gates on the walls were closed. The ārāmas (monasteries) for the Buddha and the dwellings for other ascetics were all out of town, that is, forest-based. When people live in a forest, surrounded by trees and nature, their thoughts are different from those occurring when they are in a town. The forest is more peaceful and quiet. That’s why ascetics and monks in the Buddha’s time lived out of town, or in forests. Nowadays, monasteries are situated in towns or villages. Some are difficult to distinguish from the compactly surrounding houses of lay-people. But they are still called ‘monasteries.’

When you come to a forest, or a forest monastery, you think about how the Buddha lived and befriended nature in those days, and you can meditate better than when you are in a city. Of course you can meditate in a city, or in a theater, too, but with more difficulty. You are considered very proficient if you can meditate well in either place. Anyway, meditating in a forest is supported by a better environment and is easier than in a theater.

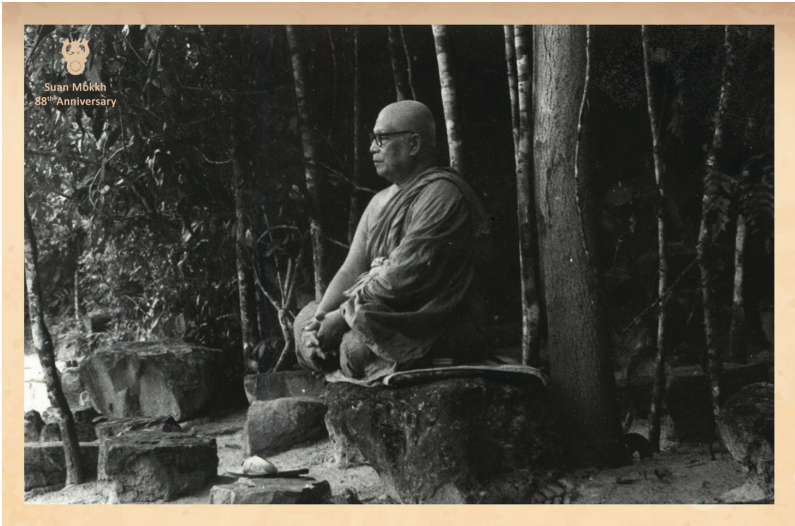
That’s a benefit of a forest. It tells why we try to preserve nature – or the characteristics of a forest – as best as we can. We hoped our monastery would be one similar to those which commonly existed in the Buddha’s time. They were simply called ‘monasteries,’ while they actually were forest monasteries for monks who behaved like forest dwellers. They facilitated the training of mind. You can meditate at home, but the environment may not be so supportive. If you’re really smart, you can mentally turn your home into a forest by just closing your eyes and assuming that you are sitting among trees. However, households are usually full of noise from cars outside and other sources, which may not be controllable. If that’s the case, you may have difficulty meditating, and then you realize that households are not so good for meditation as forests.

On the other hand, I would like to ask that you not feel sorry if you cannot come to a forest. Try to shut off your ears, close your eyes, and tune out your other sensory perceptions while at the same time assuming that you are sitting in a forest. You can meditate like this in your bedroom. If you already have had a chance to come to a forest, try to remember how you felt and bring this feeling back home with you, and you can mentally turn your home into a forest without much difficulty. That will be useful, and you can be a proficient meditator. A person with a well-trained mind can mentally turn daytime into nighttime and vice versa. Even when he sits in the bright sunlight, he can feel like he is sitting in the dark. If your mind is well trained, you too can mentally turn a town into a forest or vice versa, so don't give up your practice. Most people hold on to the idea that they cannot meditate in a household or in a town. They stop practicing and end up learning nothing. As for you, don't give up – try as best as you can. Take that experience of staying in a forest and bring that feeling back home. Turn the town into a forest. Staying in a forest is good for meditating, but it may not be too easy for you, and you may not seem so smart. To be really smart, you have to be able to mentally turn wherever you are into a forest and meditate there.

We still have a forest and preserve it as a useful facility as mentioned. With it, we don't have to fight or invest much for quietness. We can easily stay in tranquility and solitude without having to invest or make an effort. This shows the characteristics and benefits of a forest monastery.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #19

LISTENING TO TREES AND STONES TALKING



19.

This may seem ridiculous to those who take it literally and do not understand the real meaning. What we mean is that when we associate with trees or stones in solitude, new ideas or feelings can occur to us as though the trees and stones could talk to us.

So, in such an environment, if we listen carefully, we may hear the trees and stones tell us not to be so maniacal or foolish but to settle down in peace and tranquility. Have any of you ever heard trees and stones talk like this? Probably none of you have, because your minds are not so finely tuned to them. But if you walk among trees or stones and feel so ashamed as to talk to yourselves, “Oh, this place is very peaceful, but I am so perturbed,” then you can consider yourselves capable of hearing the trees or stones talk to you. Or they may scold you for not knowing how to become peaceful and tranquil, but hardly anyone understands this. Many people think that trees and stones can talk in numerical terms, so they ask for the three-digit number that will win them an underground lottery. As these people go far off the right path, they do not get any benefit.

Think for yourselves and compare your thinking when you sit among trees or stones with that when you sit at home, in a crowded place, or in a community. When you are in a meeting, you have one kind of thought, but when you sit silently under a tree or on a stone, you have another kind of thought. The latter will be new to you and can be considered as what the tree or the stone says to you.

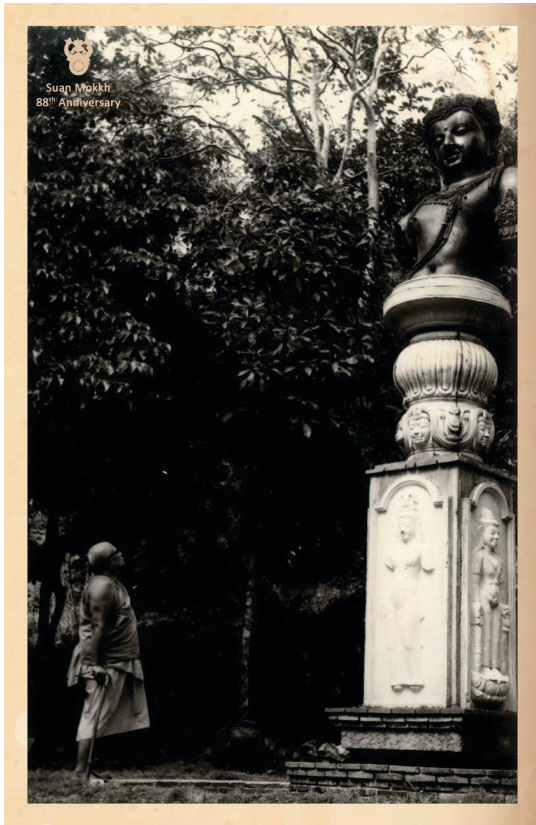
In conclusion, trees and stones tell us not to be so maniacal, but to become peaceful and to stay cool and calm. Yes, they tell us so. It will be very good if you have a thought like this while you are here, and you can consider yourselves as having heard the trees and stones talk to you. So go for a walk where there are trees and stones, then sit down wherever you find it cool and calm. Some thoughts will occur to you as though they were inspired or told by the trees and stones.

I myself have benefited from them. When I went to sit, stand, or walk among them in solitude, I got new ideas, which were different from what occurred to me when I sat at the desk in my room. So I often took an opportunity to go to sit among trees and stones, and when I got some unusual ideas, I immediately wrote them down to guard against forgetfulness. If I happened to have nothing to write on, I would write the topics that had occurred to me on the palm of my hand. Then when I went back to my hut, I would rewrite about the topics in full detail. Most of my prolifically published works originated this way. I can tell you that I got ideas from trees, stones, nature, ants and insects, soil, dry leaves, and even dogs' excrements.

Therefore, try your best to make use of the talking of trees and stones.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #20

STUDY OF THE BODHISATTA-DHAMMAS



20.

The term bodhisatta-dhamma means ‘the good characteristics of a Buddha-to-be.’ We happen to have a statue of the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisatta on the grass lawn next to here. Bodhisatta-dhammas are those dhammas (qualities) of a philanthropist or a selfless person, who, aiming at becoming a Buddha, prepares himself or herself to finish off the ego. With the ego or selfishness destroyed, he or she becomes an arahant (noble one) or a Buddha. Literally, a bodhisatta (Sanskrit: bodhisattva) is a *satta* (an entity) in the process of growing *bodhi* (knowledge). The *bodhi* for one to attain enlightenment is like a seed of a plant innately carried by an individual’s mind. But most people do not have a chance to make it grow into the plant. On the contrary, they let it die away. For those who wish to become a Buddha, in accord with Theravada Buddhism, they sow the seed of *bodhi*.

In Mahayana Buddhism, they go one step further by resolving to help all other people attain enlightenment before they themselves would finally do the same. This sounds rather overbearing, but it may be a strategy to encourage people to become good samaritans. Taking this literally, one may see the resolution as that of an eccentric. Since people are born every day – hence no apparent end of the human race – and a bodhisatta would be the last to realize nibbāna, then he or she would definitely have no chance to accomplish his resolution.

Anyway, try to think that if we still have a ‘self,’ we can never make it to nibbāna. But if we continually reduce selfishness until we can finally destroy it, then we will become arahant and realize nibbāna as arahants do. Just remember that a bodhisatta is a broad-minded, selfless person.

In summary, the bodhisatta-dhammas are *suddhi* (purity), *paññā* (wisdom), *mettā* (friendliness), and *khanti* (tolerance).

A bodhisatta has to have *suddhi*, that is, pure, undefiled

mind. He or she would never be deluded by sensual desires and all the worldly baits.

As for *paññā*, a bodhisatta has to be knowledgeable about everything that is really necessary to be known, but not of what is unnecessary to learn. The religious term for such a wise person is a *sabbaññū* – one who knows all about cessation of dukkha. The Buddha was a *sabbaññū*, but if he were to come back to life today, don't expect him to be able to drive a car, for he has not taken a driving lesson yet. However, concerning cessation of dukkha or how to quench it, he really and profoundly knows all about it. A bodhisatta has adequate wisdom to attain enlightenment.

Mettā is a manifestation of selflessness. It's love for others, seeing others as fellow mortals. *Mettā* means 'friendliness' or, simply, 'friendship.' It makes one see everybody else not as an enemy, but as a friend who commonly suffers through birth, old age, illness, and death. It is inherently accompanied by *karuṇā* (compassion) because, when you are friendly, you are ready to help others. Even if we don't explicitly mention it, *karuṇā* is always included in *mettā*. So are *muditā* (altruistic joy) and *upekkhā* (equipoise), because when you love others, you appreciate them for their success, or else you wait for a chance to help them when they suffer a setback. *Upekkhā* does not mean deserting others when the situation seems hopeless. Actually, it means that even though we cannot help them now, we get ready for a chance to do so. This is the real correct meaning of *upekkhā*, but just using the word *mettā* is enough.

The last characteristic of a bodhisatta is *khanti* (tolerance). This is most important because without *khanti*, you cannot solve a problem – your wisdom is ineffective. You think about helping others, but when you get into trouble doing so, you quit. So you have to have *khanti* with you until you succeed. A literal meaning of this word *khanti* is 'proper' or 'appropriate.' If you do not have it, you are not apt to progress in your spiritual training. Only when you have it are you likely to succeed. Another word, *dama*, similarly means 'tolerance' or 'appropriateness.' For completeness, we should have *khanti* or *dama* in both meanings, righteously being tolerant until appropriately successful.

Suddhi (purity), *paññā* (wisdom), *mettā* (friendliness), and *khanti* (tolerance), are bodhisatta-dhammas, but people in general can practice them too – just like walking after a bodhisatta, so to speak. Try them, and you will benefit from them. Being an amateur bodhisatta will get you closer to nibbāna than not being one. Always have purity and righteousness, accumulate wisdom, give boundless friendship, and have tolerance, waiting as long as it's necessary while incessantly fighting impediments, accumulating experience, and correcting errors. Then you are sure to succeed in higher spiritual training, which will lead you to the ultimate cessation of suffering. This is what bodhisatta-dhammas are all about.

You may go to gaze at the statue of the Avalokiteśvara bodhisatta. The original statue, made of bronze, was found here in Chaiya and was brought to the National Museum in Bangkok, where people can take a look at it. The one here at Suan Mokkh is a copy of the original. Look at the face of the statue, and think carefully. You will be impressed with it, and your mind will be drawn to it. When you go to the grass lawn to stand or sit for a look at the statue, you will sense that such a face shows purity, wisdom, compassion, and tolerance.

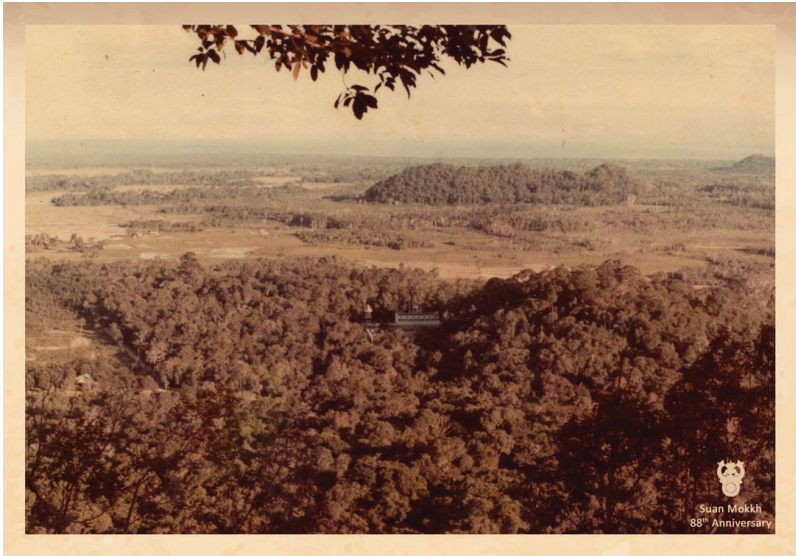
The bodhisatta statue as present here is considered artistically excellent. It is rarely seen in India, where people are not quite keen about bronze statues but are good at making stone carvings. The craftsmanship of the statue here is the best, and most likely created by Indians. It is a high-class art object, classified in the fine-art category, being the pride of Thailand's National Museum. When I went to India, I brought a photograph of the bodhisatta statue and showed it to officials at various museums there. They were stunned by its beauty and admitted that it is a high-class art object. Even though the statue was not found in India, but in Thailand, it is an example of supreme Indian art just the same. The National Museum in Bangkok is very proud of it, and for it to be displayed abroad, they would ask for a three million baht insurance policy.

Try to gaze at the statue, and you will be impressed and pleased with it. For those who have a refined mind, they will

perceive the bodhisatta-dhammas – purity, wisdom, compassion, and tolerance – expressed by it. That kind of perception will take hold of your mind, making you appreciate the four qualities yourselves. This means that the statue has a Dhammic, spiritual effect on you – it’s not just a passive art object. So when the sun is bright, take a good look at it from a corner of the lawn – you will see some beautiful things and benefit from the Avalokiteśvara statue.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #21

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE BAN DON BAY AREA



21.

To get the view, you have to go up the Nang-E Mountain, about a fifteen-minute walk from here. Look at the scenery around the Ban Don Bay area, which was believed to be the site of the ancient Srivijaya culture. There is a mountain called Khao Srivijaya. More than a thousand years ago it was probably an island, but now it has become a mountain because land has grown out into the sea and surrounded the island. There are a lot of things to be studied from the history of the Ban Don Bay area. The town of Chaiya is on this corner, Kanchanadit on another, and Khirirat is far to the west. In the ancient times, the sea would have reached far back to the west, but the area now has become solid land. The Ban Don Bay area was historically important as the location of the Srivijaya empire, when Buddhism was popularly adhered to. The people then knew Dhamma so well as to compose a lullaby describing the essence of nibbāna, as I have mentioned in the topic of the Nalika Coconut Island. Many of the cultural heritages concerning the religion have been handed down to the present. This is because Buddhism has been popular here since about 1,300 or 1,500 years ago. If you are interested in history and geography, then go up the Nang-E Mountain to have the bird's-eye view of the Ban Don Bay area as far as Samui Island.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #22

A DHAMMA DISCOURSE ON SATURDAYS AND
DEMONSTRATIVE ALMS OFFERING



22.

Regarding demonstrative alms offering, this is to show an example of how people in the Buddha's time offered alms to the monks: The offerers took the alms bowls into the kitchen, put enough food into them, and brought them back to the monks. The monks could have a second helping, and when they finished the meal, they washed the alms bowls. That's the how-to of demonstrative alms offering. It neither creates a wasteful surplus nor causes much trouble. It works well even with a few hundred monks. For well-off people or millionaires, this way of offering is child's play. Nowadays, we still have this activity, but it is a little bit adapted from what was in the Buddha's time. Instead of taking the alms bowls into the kitchen to fill with food, we take the food from the kitchen and put it in the alms bowls in front of the sitting monks. We preserve the offering rite this way because it is easy, like giving food to cats: various kinds of food are put together in the same alms bowl. Sometimes we call it 'cat-feeding style offering,' but the real reason is that it's economical, frugal, and less troublesome. However, the rite is limited to Saturdays during the dry season, just like the regular discourse. Now it is the rainy season break. The rite will resume in January and continue until the end of September.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #23

OCCASIONAL SCREENING OF
DHAMMA VIDEO TAPES AND SLIDES



23.

The video tapes are used as an audio-visual aid. As for the slides, I was the first to use them in Dhamma lectures. My first slide projector was made from a car headlamp. I used to make a lot of slides, and others followed my example. Now I have stopped using the slides. We also made some movies for some time, but there was a lot of trouble and the results were not quite worthwhile, so we stopped making them. Now we make some video tapes occasionally. It's convenient to show their contents without much trouble. On proper occasions, when people want to watch one of our video tapes, we show it to them to facilitate their study. The slides and movies, which preceded the videotapes, caused trouble and hence have been discontinued.

Benefit of Suan Mokkh #24

THE INTERNATIONAL SUAN MOKKH



24.

This new Suan Mokkh is two kilometers away on the other side of the Asian Highway. You can go there if you are interested. The idea behind its construction is that we see that the world lacks peace. This is because the religions do not join forces. Instead, they are jealous of one another. Some religions think of undermining other religions so as to gain more adherents. The situation is just like that. The religions have not cooperated, smiled at one another, or showed friendliness among themselves. Thus we have thought of doing something that would cause friendship among all the religions, so that their adherents could smile at one another and help one another in eliminating selfishness in the world. That something was the construction of another Suan Mokkh, which we call 'International Dharma Ashram,' 'International Dharma Hermitage,' or simply 'Suan Mokkh International.' This is where people from different faiths can come together for a friendly talk.

We have done a lot of Dhamma dissemination, showing people what Dhamma is, so much so that we think we have reached the saturation point. Still, there is the world peace problem because the religions do not cooperate. We thought of making our last effort by promoting understanding among the religions so that they would come together to help the world. Many friends of ours agreed with this idea and offered help in accord with their ability. The new Suan Mokkh has been built with an expense of about five or six million baht, far less than the ten or twenty million baht for a big commonly built ordination hall. This place is managed for all the matters that deal with foreigners – Dhamma teaching and meditation training, which are held regularly. An inter-religion conference is organized once in a while. It cannot be held every day, of course, but the more frequent, the better. This is how the International Dharma Hermitage has been built. All of the money donated to Suan Mokkh is spent there. The construction is almost finished, needing a few more weeks or perhaps a month or two, but the place still needs accessories, utility supplies, and the like. So, within the next five or six months, it can be opened for use. If you go there, you will see

something special – a natural hot spring from underground. You can take a bath in it to get its physically therapeutic effect, just as you study Dhamma for a spiritual effect.



About the Author

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

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

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

About the Translator

Professor Emeritus Mongkol Dejnakintra taught Electrical Engineering at the Faculty of Engineering, Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok between 1968 and 2002. He was an outstanding scholar and researcher who had authored and translated academic books and articles. He is also a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Thailand. His interest covers different areas including science and technology, electrical mathematics, and Buddhism.

In the 1980's he was a member of a group of Bangkok academics who studied and worked with Ajahn Runjuan Indarakamhaeng.

Professor Mongkol has co-translated with Dhamma friends various teachings of Ajahn Buddhadasa into English, including these titles:

- *The Buddha's Doctrine of Anatta (translated with others, 1990)*
- *A Buddhist Charter (translated with Somsri Thammasarn sophon, 1990)*
- *Disadhamma – Mankind's Pathway Dhamma (published year unidentified)*
- *The First Ten Years Of Suan Mokkh (1990)*
- *Messages of Truth from Suan Mokkh (translated with others, 1990)*
- *Some Marvellous Aspects of Theravada Buddhism (edited and revised with Samanera Nattakaro, 1991)*

Recommended Reading (Books)

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

Online Resources

www.bia.or.th

www.suanmokkh.org

www.kevalaretreat.org

www.youtube.com/@buddhadasabhikkhu7829

www.soundcloud.com/buddhadasa

Buddhadāsa Foundation

Established in 1994, the Buddhadāsa Foundation aims to promote the study and practice of Buddha-Dhamma according to Ven. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's teachings. It encourages compilation and translation of his works from Thai into foreign languages, as well as supports publication of translated teachings for free distribution.



Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives

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

