

A Righteous King (Dhammaraja): His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Buddhism



Ven. Mokesh Barua

*Linguistics Humanities Departemnt
Mahachulalongkornrajavidyala University (MCU)
mokesh.barua81@gmail.com*

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ABSTRACT

His Majesty king Bhumibol Adulyadej has been respected as the nation's great monarch over the more than five decades of his rule. He has sacrificed himself to work and all sorts of activities that aim at providing benefit to his people and his nation. He has continued the tradition of the Great Dhamma King, which all previous monarchs of the Royal house of Chakri have followed by observing and applying the Buddhist virtues to the administration of the country.

He has firm believes, respect and good knowledge on Buddhism. His admirable manner, benevolence and kindness, wisdom and sincerity have been evident in all the activities he has been involved with. And has become the perfect example of a leader endowed with goodness and virtues. He has been acclaimed as *"the Developer king who has worked the hardest in the world."* His activities that aim at helping the people and nation as well as to develop the economy and raise the people's quality of life by following the Buddhist principles.

Keywords: Bhumibol Adulyadej, Dhamma King, Buddhism

Introduction

His Majesty the King (Rama IX) was born on Monday the 5th of December 1927, at Mount

Auburn Hospital, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A. He was the youngest son of HRH Prince Mahidol Adulyadej, the Prince of Songkla and his mother name is Princess Srinagarindra. His uncle king Rama VII (Prajadhipok), gave him name Bhumibol Adulyadej, meaning “*strength of the land, incomparable power*. Bhumibol ascended the throne following the mysterious death of his brother King Ananda Mahidol, on 9 June 1946. King Bhumibol Adulyadej completed his study University of Lausanne in Switzerland: degree in law and political science. After the end of world war II and the family was able to return to Thailand. He got married on 28 April 1950. King Bhumibol and his Queen Sirikit have four children: Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya, Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, Chulabhorn Walailak. However, from the childhood King Bhumibol interested to study Buddhism and he traditionally was ordained for 15 days at Wat Bovornivet. During the Monkhood, performed monastic life as other monks. His Majesty the king suffers different kind of diseases and got surgery several times and died at the age of 88 on 13 October 2015, after long illness at Siriraj Hospital, Bangkok.

Buddhist Thoughts of the King Bhumibol Adulyadej

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej interests to study Buddhism from his childhood. According to him, “*Education can be divided into two kinds one is academic education, which will be useful to the country after graduate. The other is the knowledge of dharma (Buddhist ethics). That is how to think and behave in order to benefit oneself. One who has both academic and dharma education will have wisdom. But those who have only knowledge but lack dharma cannot be called intellectuals.*”¹

King Bhumibol when became monk spent only 15 days as a monk at Wat Bovornivet Vihara, the royal temple where his great grandfather, King Mongkut, had once been abbot, the experience had a lasting effect. The king continued to meet with *Phra Yanasangworn*, the abbot who had guided him, for dharma studies. The venerable monk to extended kings

¹Royal Speech, December 18, 1970 (translated by the author).

Buddhist knowledge introduced him to vipassanā after that, king regular practice vipassanā meditation.

A protector of Buddhism

As we know his Majesty has firm believe and respect to Buddhism from his childhood. He has done numerous works to propagate Buddhism throughout the country as well as in world. As a protector of Buddhism he or king family patronize many Buddhist universities and schools in the country and build numerous temples in country and the aboard. To propagate Buddhism in the world the king supports every year to arrange International *vesak* conference at the *Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University*. Every year, many people come to join conference from different countries, through the conference people are able to know about Buddhism as well as Thai-culture. Vipassanā meditation immensely influenced and captivated king's entire life this is why he propagates meditation and dharma studies throughout his reign.

King Bhumibol opened a window on the insights Buddhist practice offers, when he addressed the 30th General Assembly of Buddhist Associations Nationwide in 1982:

“The accomplished way of studying dharma comprises theoretical and practical studies, properly conducted so that insight is attained -- that is getting the result and seeing the result of dharma oneself. Therefore, no matter how much one learns, if insight is not attained, learning is not accomplished, with no real result realized. To study dharma at any level, one needs to become well-versed in the teaching, and put it into practice in action, in speech, and in thought. Only then can insight be achieved.”²

Therefore, it is obvious that the king is the real protector of Buddhism in the country as well as in the world.

²Royal Speech to the 30th General Assembly of Buddhist Associations Nationwide on 25 December 1982

Applying the Dhamma in Ruling the Country

His Majesty the king has adhered to the 10 royal rules (*Dhosapit Raja Dhamma*) since his accession to the throne on June 9, 1950. He declared during his coronation ceremony on May 5, 1950, that: “I will rule the land righteously for the benefit and happiness of the Siamese people.” By the word, “righteously” the king referred to the 10 guiding principles and virtues in Buddhism. The ten virtues are:

1) *Dāna*, or giving both tangible and intangible:

His Majesty the king has always been ready to give wherever he goes in all regions of the country. His gifts are both *tangible and intangible*. His intangible gift comes from his speech. His Majesty speeches and advice given to government officials and people from all works of life on different occasions benefit their way of life. When put into practice, these speeches and advice help to remove their suffering and overcome obstacles. Besides giving advice, His Majesty the king also makes donations in the form of gift and money to Buddhist monks, clergymen from other religious sects. He also gives the necessities of life and financial support to the poor.

2) *Sīla*, or observing the Buddhist precepts:

To achieve true peace and tranquility, the country’s administration cannot base only on temporal law also needed religious rules. This is why His majesty made the country’s administration based on both law and religious rules in order to ensure that the people are well behaved and lead their lives according to rules in order to create a peaceful society. His majesty realizes the need to apply religious rules as the guidance for life; he has therefore set himself as an example to his subjects by observing and practicing the precepts of *Dhamma teaching*. He encourages his people to follow his path. For those who are not Buddhist, he also encourages to follow the rules of their religious faith.

3) *Pariccāga*, or Sacrificing:

The soul of the nation his majesty not only sacrificed himself for the nation and also teaches his people how to sacrifice for the well-beings. He dedicates his whole life to benefits for others. His Majesty’s self-sacrifice has boosted the moral of government officials and has inspired them to follow his royal path.

4) *Ajjava*, or Honesty:

Honesty is the extremely important and another religious rule that His Majesty the king has fully observed from the first day of the accession to the throne to the present time. His Majesty delivered his speech on his Birthday at Dusidalai Hall on December 4th, 1998:

*“If one is moderate in one desires, one will have less carving. If one has less carving, one will take less advantage of others. If all nations hold this concept – this concept of moderation, without extreme or insatiable in one’s desires, the world will be a happier place.”*³

5) *Maddava*, or gentleness in manners and spirit:

Maddava, or gentleness is the most important to established peace in the world. His Majesty the king wherever he goes, his politeness and gentleness can be illustrated by his manner. He shows respect and worship to the people who are senior in term of age, qualification and background.

6) *Tapa*, or austerity:

Tapa, which means diligence in performing the royal duties. His Majesty always diligence in performing the royal duties. His conversation with the people in his circle deals with little else but his people- why they suffer and how to stop their suffering, what can be done to make them happy and even happier.

7) *Akkodha*, or freedom from anger:

His Majesty is practicing the Dhamma for free from the anger. He cultivates his mind kindness and generosity and suggests his people to practicing Dhamma for free from the anger.

8) *Avihimsā*, or non-violence:

To established the peace in the world *Avihhimsā* or non-violence is the extremely important. *Avihhimsā* typically means the non-exploitation of others, shown through

³Bhumibol Adulyadej, His Majesty king, translated from the revised transcript from the revised transcript of the royal speech, “Royal Speech given to the audience of well-wishers on the occasion of the Royal Birthday Anniversary at the Dusidalai Hall, Chitralada villa, Dusit Palace, on December 4th, 1998, Royal Addresses and speeches, Bangkok: office of his Majesty’s principal Secretary, 1998.

kindness, good will, altruistic joy and equanimity. All these quality can be clearly seen in his Majesty and in his people.

9) *Khanti*, or patience:

In Buddhism *Kanti* is the most important to get the liberation. His majesty the king has shown patience through his performing duties. His Majesty has given speech to a royal audience at Dusidalai Hall on his birthday on December 4th, 1992. He referred to the “disco hall” when he visited his subjects in Khao Wong District in Kalasin Province:

“We turned right into a road that was, to say the least, rather like a cross country trail. It was a trail where they do the “disco”. The “disco” because the car swayed from side to side like doing the “disco”. Thus the name of the “disco trail”. We went along this trail rather far, about two kilometers until we arrived at place where our guide said, “we stop here”. The place was dark and we could see only paddy land. Our guide said, “I thought you wanted to come here.” I said, “No I want to see the stream where it would be appropriate to build an irrigation project. That place is like a rapids”. So we turned back. two kilometers more of “discoing”. We arrived at the village bifurcation, the time we went straight on. Then, after walking 200 meters more, we arrived at the right place. And the irrigation officer concurred that it seemed to be suitable for an irrigation project.”⁴

10) *Avirodhana*, or non-deviation:

Avirodhana which means being steadfast in righteousness. *Avirodhana* is to be firm in the rules of the Dhamma. His Majesty the king observed the traditional rules for monarchs, the code of behavior, the law, disciplines and the Dhamma appropriate to a king.

⁴Bhumibol Adulyadej, His Majesty king, translated from the revised transcript from the revised transcript of the royal speech, “Royal Speech given to the audience of well-wishers on the occasion of the Royal Birthday Anniversary at the Dusidalai Hall, Chitralada villa, Dusit Palace, on December 4th, 1992, Royal Addresses and speeches, Bangkok: office of his Majesty’s principal Secretary, 1992,P.14.

Conclusion

His Majesty king Bhumibol Adulyadej had firm believe, respect and was a true Buddhist. He always inspired the youth and the Thai people to practice the dharma. His ordination as a monk inspired many Buddhist parents who chose to follow in his footsteps and also led to great happiness amongst the Buddhist community. When he ordained then he said,

“From the training which I have received, as well as out of my own personal belief, it is my view that Buddhism is one of the great religions of the world. Buddhism comprises teachings to lead men to good conduct and is rich in veritable precepts that are logical, highly impressive, and inspiring. I have always entertained the idea of being ordained as a monk, in accordance with Royal custom, which would also be the traditional way of expressing gratitude to my august ancestors.”⁵

He continuously supported Buddhism rest of his life. He established various non-government organizations such as Buhmibol Bhikkhu foundation, the young Buddhist Association of Thailand, and Phaendin Dhamma phaendin Thong foundation for studying and promoting dhamma studies and Buddhism as well as helping develop all aspects of the country. It is obvious that, His Majesty great patronage significantly supporting the role and importance of Buddhism in Thai society.

⁵In 1956, he donned the saffron robes and entered Bangkok’s Wat Bovornives to study Buddhist principles under the tutelage of the Supreme Patriarch. Like other monks in the kingdom, he rose before dawn each day and walked barefoot through the streets of Bangkok to receive alms (bintabaht) presented by the faithful lining the roads.

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