

In Memory of King Rama IX

October 13, 2018

Tonight we're commemorating the passing of King Rama IX of Thailand, and we're doing it the Buddhist way: doing something meritorious and then dedicating the merit to him.

Those of us here in the States sometimes have trouble appreciating how much he meant to the Thai people while he was alive. He pulled the country together, kept it together for many years. Whenever there was any conflict, he was the person who pulled the country together, gave everyone a sense that there was someone good in charge, someone who had the well-being of everyone in mind. As a result, they had a basis for negotiating their differences and living together in relative stability and peace.

So he was a good example, and when someone who is a good example passes away, the best way to commemorate them is to think about their example, remember the good things they said, the good things they recommended, and the good things they did, and see to what extent we can carry those out in our lives.

Years back when I was working on a history of Buddhism, Ajaan Suwat made the point, saying, "Make sure that people understand how large the role the Chakri dynasty has played in keeping Buddhism alive in Thailand." It started with Rama I, who—after the sack of Ayutthaya, the earlier capital—had decided that the reason Ayutthaya fell was because people had strayed away from the true Dhamma. So he took monks as advisors, monks who told him that it was time to clean up the Thai versions of the Tipitaka and to support good practice among the monks. This tradition carried on throughout the entire dynasty.

Rama IV actually had been a monk for many years before he became king. And even after he became king, every Buddhist Sabbath he would dress up in white and give a sermon to the people in the palace. Rama VI, who started the scout organization in Thailand—in those days it was the adult scouts—would also give sermons to the scouts. And Rama the IX, on his sixtieth birthday, gave a talk to the Thai nation in which he outlined four basic principles of Dhamma from the Canon that people should follow. And it's good on an occasion like this to stop and ask yourself: To what extent have you been able to develop these four qualities in your own life?

The first quality is truthfulness, that when you set out to do something you

are true to your good intentions. You make a promise to yourself to do something good and you don't let the promise fall away. In other words, truthfulness is not just a matter of telling the truth, it's also *being* true.

Now, in the Buddha's teachings, there are many ways of being true. One, of course, is to tell the truth. Another is to awaken to the truth. In other words, you make up your mind that you're going to practice in a way that's going to put an end to suffering. You do your best to find a good teacher. You test your teacher against the Buddha's standards: Does this person have the kind of greed, aversion, and delusion that would make him or her claim knowledge of things that he or she did not know? Or would this person try to get someone else to do things that were not in that other person's best interest?

So you watch carefully. As the Buddha said, it takes time and sensitivity, powers of observation to see who's a good teacher. Once you find someone who passes the test, then you lend ear, listen carefully, try to remember the Dhamma, weigh your own actions against the Dhamma, and give rise to a desire to practice until you finally reach the goal of that Dhamma. That's when you're really true. That's the highest level of truth.

But even in day-to-day life, once you've made up your mind to do something good, truthfulness means that you stick with it. You see it all the way through. This, as the Buddha said, is a quality that leads to true happiness for laypeople.

The second quality is self-control, the ability to keep your emotions under wraps, not to let them flare out at other people. And notice that when something unskillful has come up in the mind, you do your best to, at the very least, keep it in bounds. You may not be able to get rid of it, but at least don't let it show, and don't let it take over your thoughts. If something in the mind says, "Okay, this is worthy of anger," learn how to say, "No. Maybe there's another side to it." Or if something says, "This is worthy of lust, this is worthy of greed," well, look for the other side. As Ajaan Lee used to say, be a person with two eyes, not just one. Have that part of the mind that can keep control over the other part of the mind, so you don't say or do things that you're later going to regret.

The third quality is patience, endurance. This doesn't mean just gritting your teeth and putting up with things. You realize that patience is an important part of goodwill. In other words, you put up with people's misbehavior and don't get upset, so that you can look carefully at what would be the appropriate way to respond. What would be best both for them and for you? If you have goodwill for everyone, then it's a lot easier to be patient, to have some endurance. That doesn't mean you just let people misbehave, because that's not really goodwill for them either. But you try to figure out, if they've done something wrong, what's

the best way to get them to change? And sometimes it requires being very patient to find the right time and the right place to say something to them.

The fourth quality is generosity, which, as the Buddha points out many, many times, is a form of wealth. You find that you have more than enough of something and you're happy to share. And this doesn't have to be just material things. You can share your energy. You can share your knowledge. You can share your forgiveness. Be fair to other people. All of this is a gift, a way of being generous. It's because of generosity that we can live together. If people in human society are all just looking for their own immediate interest, things quickly deteriorate. We see this all around us. As people get more and more concerned about having material wealth, not thinking about what they can share with others, it gets harder and harder to live with one another.

We look for happiness in material wealth, material gain, status, praise, sensual pleasures, but those kinds of happiness create divisions. One person gains, somebody else loses. The person who loses is not going to be happy, and the person who gains is not going to be safe. Whereas if your happiness depends on generosity, nobody loses, nobody's resentful. It's a safe form of happiness. And you don't have to wait until the next lifetime to see the benefits of generosity. It comes immediately in the sense of spaciousness in your own mind—that you're happy to live in a society where you can share, and there's a sense that the whole world is your home. The people you've been generous with are like members of your family.

So these are four good qualities to think about as you go through life. People often ask: How do you bring the practice into daily life? Well, these four qualities help: truthfulness, self-control, powers of endurance or patience, and generosity. They require a lot out of us, but at the same time, they give a lot in return. This is one of the basic principles of the teaching: that you learn to give first and then you gain. We're not born into the world entitled. We're actually born into the world with a lot of debts to all the people who've come before us who've done good things to make this a good place to live.

And so how do we repay those debts? Well, we carry on whatever goodness we receive, and make sure that it gets passed on to the next generation, and then the next. At the very least, in our own actions we set a good example, so that some day when people are coming to our funerals, they'll remember, "This person said good things and did good things, traditions that are good to carry on, to pass on." This is the way in which goodness stays alive in the world.