

**My Recollections**  
**His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand**  
**By SGI President Ikeda**

Some say that His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand speaks with a country accent. The king admits that might be so, citing his repeated travels to tiny farming villages throughout his realm. “I think it comes from the many conversations I’ve had with citizens all over Thailand. I’ve listened to so many of our people speaking in their regional accents, talked with them and, in the process, perhaps, picked up a bit of an accent myself,” he says.

King Bhumibol Adulyadej goes out among his subjects so frequently that, sitting side by side with them in rural hamlets, discussing their needs, problems and opinions, he has absorbed the rhythms of their speech. He spends seven months of the year traveling throughout Thailand, and he covers some 30,000 miles in the process. He makes his way by helicopter, by jeep, by train, by boat and even on foot.

Throw away the reports and really meet the people, insists the king: “In working out a program to help people, it is necessary that you know the people you intend to help.... There is no shortcut. One does not know a people by merely memorizing some research papers prepared by research centers. You must meet them and like them” (from *Thailand: King Bhumibol Adulyadej — The Golden Jubilee 1946–96*). He urges his staff to do so, and he sets an example for them to follow. He has visited all the provinces in his kingdom, traveling to remote places where no other member of the Thai royal family had ever set foot before.

King Bhumibol cuts a familiar and much-loved figure as he slogs through the mud in his high rubber boots, a camera slung around his neck and a map and eraser-tipped pencil in hand. Some say he behaves just like a father taking care of his children.

These are not ceremonial visits. They are practical planning and problem-solving sessions. First, the king puts the people at ease and listens to their wishes and hopes. Then he discusses with them what can be done to realize those aims. The number of royal projects that King Bhumibol has initiated in this manner is well over a thousand.

The people of Thailand are deeply moved by this very human, and humane, figure of their king, with beads of sweat on his brow as he devotes himself heart and soul to their welfare. People who felt they were a matter of indifference to those in power have experienced a profound change of heart when they met King Bhumibol. A soldier wounded by a land mine expressed his appreciation: “I lost one of my legs, but our king sacrifices his entire life for the sake of the country.”

“This is the photo,” I said as, on the occasion of my second audience [in 1992], I handed King Bhumibol a photograph I had taken in Boston the year before. I had visited Harvard University to deliver a lecture. In a square on the corner of the street in front of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, I came across a plaque commemorating the birth of King Bhumibol in that city on Dec. 5, 1927. The king smiled as he thanked me for the photo.

King Bhumibol’s father, Prince Mahidol of Songkhla, is known as the Father of Thai Medical Science. At the time of King Bhumibol’s birth, he was in his final year at the Harvard School of Medicine. Though of weak constitution himself — or perhaps precisely because of that — Prince Mahidol dedicated himself to improving the state of Thai medicine. He devoted himself day and night as a physician to treating the poor, and was so busy he rarely had time to spend with his family. He would unhesitatingly donate blood when a patient needed it. His achievements included instituting solid programs of medical, nursing and scientific education and the improvement of public health. King Bhumibol’s elder sister, Princess Galyani Vadhana, once told me how their father continued with his superhuman labors even after the doctors told him he had only two years, and later only half a year, to live.

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Prince Mahidol passed away in 1929 at the young age of 37; King Bhumibol was not yet 2 and Princess Galyani Vadhana was only 6.

The prince's credo had been to live with dignity and integrity. It was his belief that nothing could be accomplished if protecting one's name and position were all that mattered; one would be forced to remain silent. In taking action, he said, there is always the risk of casting aspersions upon one's honor.

Prince Mahidol founded a scholarship program for Thai students. Desiring to offer opportunities to individuals who were not merely academically outstanding but also earnest and hardworking, he stipulated that the selection criteria focus primarily on the applicant's character. Those who are bright but lack commitment tend to use their intelligence to be lazy, he said. Often you'll find this kind of person issuing orders from behind a desk. Those who are sincere and diligent are frequently more dependable. They are less likely to betray their friends or act dishonestly. This was the sort of person Prince Mahidol wished to assist financially.

His wife, the princess mother, passed on to their children his compassionate spirit to help the poor and suffering.

I have had the honor of an audience with King Bhumibol on three occasions, and I have always been impressed with his unfailing warmth of character as well as his radiant intelligence. When any topic comes up for discussion, he immediately focuses on the core of the issue. This is a feature of all people of first-class caliber. When I asked him what message he would give to young people, he said that he would remind them of time's incessant flow. Everything is changing; nothing remains the same. Instead of worrying about the future, he continued, young people should do their very best in the present moment.

When our conversation turned to culture, King Bhumibol declared that science and other advances were meaningless in a society without artistic achievement. We also discussed his belief that it is vital to devote more energy to nurturing good people, so that society is not dominated and controlled by unscrupulous and ill-intentioned individuals.

As the father of four children, he also has definite opinions about education. He believes that children are born eager to absorb and learn, and that it is the task of parents and teachers to guide that energy in the best direction.

When his second youngest daughter, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, lost interest in the mathematics she studied in school, complaining that it wasn't useful, he created some practical math problems for her to solve. For example: A certain man borrowed money; he kept borrowing and borrowing, increasing his debt. What was his total cumulative debt? Or: A certain place was suffering a drought. Which will be cheaper, to repair the water reservoir or to bring in water from another place? The king's math problems emphasized not only calculation but logical thought and practical problem solving. By working with such problems, he hoped the princess would learn how to think on her feet, so that if she went to a village and the farmers asked her how they might start growing a certain new crop, she'd have the ability to work out a practical plan with them.

King Bhumibol is a firm believer in the "snowball effect" — that fully mastering one subject leads to proficiency in many others. He himself excels in a diverse variety of activities, including music, painting, photography and sports, and he is renowned worldwide as a cultivated ruler of the highest order. He has kindly responded to my request that we be allowed to make his artistic achievements even more widely known. We have sponsored exhibitions of his photographs in Tokyo, Los Angeles and London. The London venue of the exhibit was Taplow Court, the main culture center of the SGI-UK, and also where King Bhumibol's grandfather King Chulalongkorn (1853–1910) once resided for two months.

A special performance of King Bhumibol's musical compositions was also held at Soka University in Tokyo. It was an enchanting musical evening. The king's compositions have

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brilliance, serenity, power, depth, sophistication and ethereal beauty.

Last year, in commemoration of the 50th year of the Thai monarch's reign, we held a special exhibition of paintings by King Bhumibol and other members of the Thai royal family as well as many royal treasures, including the Royal Seal of his majesty the king, at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum.

I will never forget the warm support shown by Princess Galyani Vadhana and Princess Chulabhorn, the king's youngest daughter, who respectively visited Japan for these events to promote cultural exchange and deepen the ties of friendship between our two countries.

I have always regretted that the main links between Thailand and Japan have been economic. I hoped to begin to build a friendship between our peoples, based on heart-to-heart ties.

Like the mighty Chao Praya River that winds through the golden land of Thailand to the sea, time flows, time rushes on. Nothing stays the same. Except for one thing: the existence of the people. That is why anything that is to last, to withstand the waves of drastic change that wash over all things, must be firmly rooted in the earth of the people. King Bhumibol's decision to devote himself to his people, I'm sure, is based on that belief as well. With a consuming passion for their welfare, he goes among the people and reaches into their hearts.

King Bhumibol shared his hope for world peace. Though we speak of peace and the world, he said, it all comes down to the individual. If we solve the problems of individuals, we will have solved the problems of the world.

This is a philosopher king, a humanist king speaking. The people of Thailand have universally agreed to honor him with the title Great King.

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