



The Autobiography  
Of  
**Luang Por Akaradej Thiracitto Bhikkhu**  
**(Ajahn Dtun)**  
Wat Boonyawad, Bo Thong, Chonburi

Chandakaranusorn Dhamma Museum Wat Pah Amparopanyawanaram  
Under the auspices of His Holiness  
Somdej Phra Ariyavaṅsāgatañāṇa (Ambaramahāthera)  
Somdej Phra Saṅgharāj Sakalamahāsaṅghapariṇāyaka  
The Supreme Patriarch of Thailand  
999 M.9 Baan Nongglaangdorn, Klong Kiw, Baan Beung, Chonburi



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# The Autobiography and Dhamma Teachings Of Luang Por Akaradej Thiracitto Bhikkhu

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# Foreword (to the Thai)



The publishing of this collection of books provides the quintessential teachings of thirty-four wise monks from the Rattanakosin era<sup>1</sup>, from 1917-2011, that will serve as a Dhamma heritage. They are the best of teachings from Visuddhipuggala (Pure Ones) that have been given pure heartedly and are complete in essence. These teachings will enable anyone who is committed to practising accordingly, regardless of age or era, to transcend all suffering, just as their hearts desire. The Pasādasaddha group thought it appropriate to print this series for preservation for the sake of later generations at the Chandakaranusorn Dhamma Museum, Wat Pah Amparopanyawanaram Baan Nongglaangdorn, Klong Kiw, Baan Beung, Chonburi. Anyone interested is welcome to study as opportunity and time permits.

An intelligent person holds to principles taught by wise people as their guide in life.

**The Pasādasaddha group**

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<sup>1</sup> The current era of Thai history, beginning with the founding of Bangkok as the capital city.

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# Translator's Preface



On the evenings of the twenty-second and twenty-third of November, 2017, a large number of monks, novices and laypeople gathered to participate in the official opening of a new monastery built under the auspices of His Holiness Somdej Phra Ariyavaṅsāgatañāṇa, the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand. The monastery is called Wat Pah Amparopanyawanaram (more commonly referred to as Wat Pah Amparo). Also being inaugurated was the Chandakaranusorn Dhamma Museum. His Holiness entrusted Luang Por Tui (Preeda) Chandakaro, who is presently one of the most respected senior elders in the Thai Forest Tradition, to take responsibility for the monastery's construction.

Luang Por Tui personally selected the biographies of thirty-four monks of the Rattanakosin era from the early 1900s up to the present to be housed in the Dhamma Museum. Sometime in the month of July, 2017, Luang Por Tui had a lay person who was also a disciple of Luang Por Akaradej<sup>1</sup> Thiracitto request his autobiography for inclusion in the museum. Luang Por Akaradej had always felt he would wait until he was at least seventy before writing one. On being requested, he said initially he couldn't be bothered to write it himself, so he allowed this lay person to draft a brief biography. When it was brought to him for checking, he thought some things they had written weren't quite correct or necessary, some parts had been embellished, and important details had been omitted. He felt if he allowed this version to be printed it would later prove to be at variance with his own version. Recognizing that this might confuse readers as to which version is most reliable, he chose to compile it himself. However, by this

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<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Akara-date. The name 'Dtun' is his nickname. It is a common Thai tradition for parents to give such names to their children at birth. Most people are called by their nickname and remain to be so for their entire life.

time there remained just over three weeks in which to write the autobiography and it give it to Luang Por Tui for checking before the printer's deadline. He was aided by notes he had made in the early years of his practice which could jog his memory and help him expand on details.

Due to his many commitments as abbot of Wat Boonyawad and the time constraint placed on him, he feels that his autobiography is only seventy percent complete. During the three to four weeks given to him, he had to work late into each night to come up with a draft. The first chapters of this book are detailed, the later ones less so owing to a lack of time, and the autobiography only goes as far as 2003. The final pages, in fact, were still being worked on until 1 a.m. on the night before it was to be given to Luang Por Tui. Fortunately Luang Por Tui expressed his praise on reading the draft copy, and did not have to make any changes.

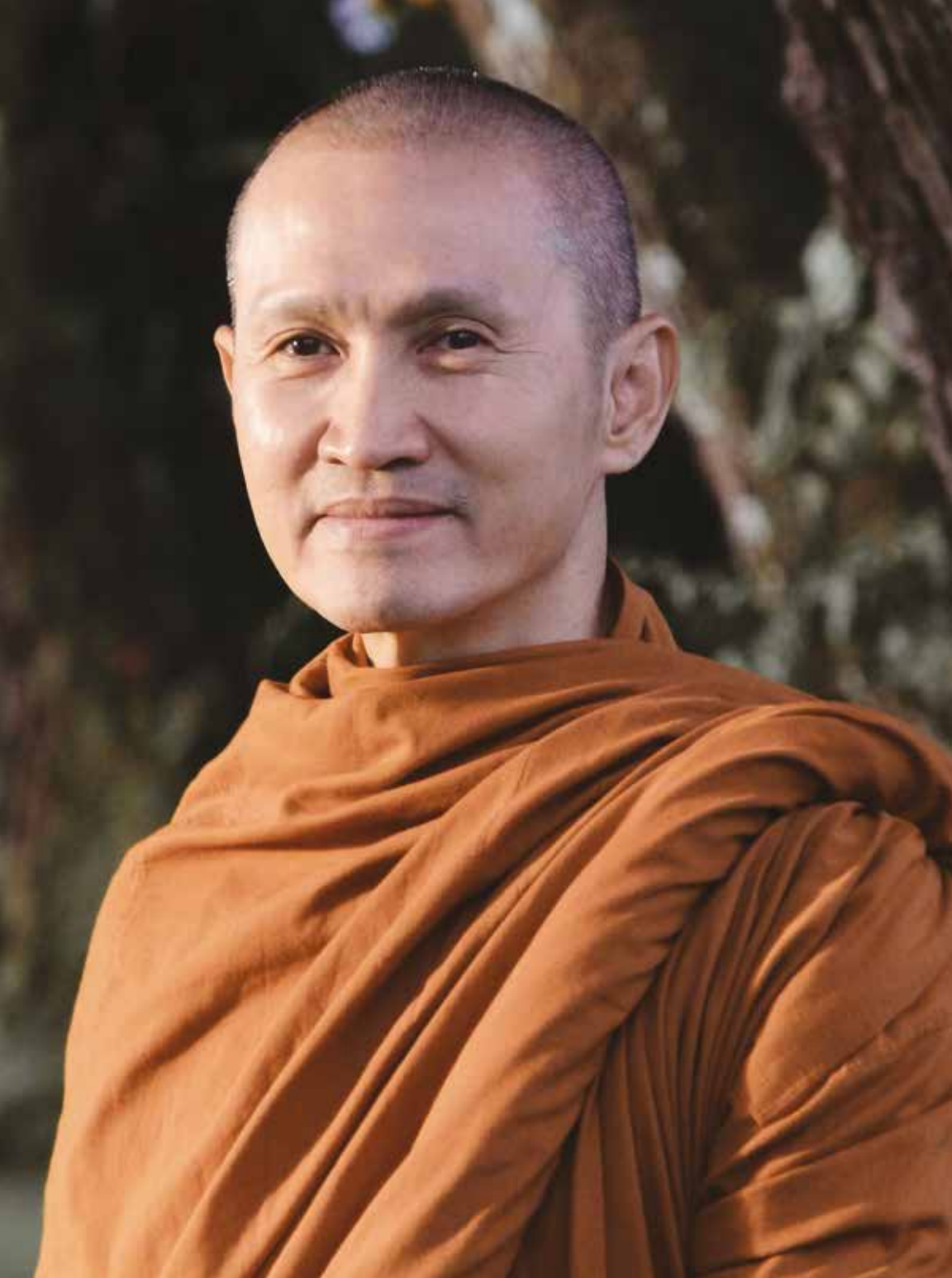
Luang Por Akaradej has said that sometime in the future he might get around to writing a complete version of his autobiography by inserting missing details and incidents that he failed to include. For any reader wishing to know more about his life, you will find the audio version of his biography (recorded in Melbourne, 2007) to be of interest.

Today, his feelings about writing his autobiography remain the same as it did in 1980 when he first started recording some details of his life and practice: If it can be of benefit or provide inspiration to even only a few people, then writing it will have been worthwhile.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to all who have helped in bringing this book to fruition. For any errors that may still remain in either text or translation, the translator accepts full responsibility, and humbly begs both Ajahn Dtun's and the reader's forgiveness.

**The Translator**  
**Wat Boonyawad**  
**June, 2020**





**Luang Por Akaradej Thiracitto Bhikkhu (Ajahn Dtun)**  
Wat Boonyawad, Bo Thong, Chonburi



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# Introduction



A number of events, both internal and external, have happened in my life that caused me to see the benefit of writing this record, even though I had previously decided never to do so. However, during my third Rains Retreat<sup>1</sup> while residing at Samnak Vipassanā-chuan-puang-put in the district of Baan Mee, Lopburi, my heart<sup>2</sup> felt imbued with *mettā*<sup>3</sup> for all beings, a feeling that I cannot accurately describe.

Before the end of the Rains that year my younger brother came to visit me bringing a couple of books that my father wanted me to read. He was concerned that I wouldn't have any knowledge or understanding of Dhamma<sup>4</sup> and so wanted me to know the things that he had come across in his own reading. My own feelings differed. I felt that in my own practice I had been able to secure a certain amount of understanding which, however much I can, I wish to offer him in return. He did not understand that the acquisition of knowledge from studying books, even if one were to read all the books in the world, can never come to a completion — this is for certain. I feel that my father and family, and others who have known me since being a small child will always be

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<sup>1</sup> The annual compulsory three month rains retreat (*Pāli*: *vāssa*) when monks are required to remain in a single residence and not wander freely about. A monk's seniority, or years of ordination, is generally counted by the number of retreats he has completed.

<sup>2</sup> As is common in translations of Thai Dhamma, the words heart and mind are used interchangeably. It also refers to the *Pāli* word *citta*, that which knows or feels.

<sup>3</sup> *Mettā*: good-will, warm-heartedness, loving kindness.

<sup>4</sup> In the text that follows Dhamma refers to the Buddha's teachings, while dhamma refers to a phenomenon in and of itself, or a mental state.

inclined to look upon me as their son, their grandson or their nephew because it's natural for everyone to feel attachment. In seeking to go beyond suffering by way of studying, if one doesn't delve into one's own body and mind, then I can see no end to it. The study of books can only serve as a guideline. It's just something that can be memorized and used to boast that one knows a great deal, which is merely a vain display of *kilesa*<sup>1</sup>. It's not that the formal studying of books is always a bad thing, because sometimes it can provide one with some good ideas and perspectives. Sometimes reading can cause faith and the desire to practise to arise. Nevertheless, one must know how to read: having read something, don't hold tightly to it. The Buddha instructs us not to be led by the authority of religious texts. Instead, we should reflect in a well-reasoned way in accordance with the principle of cause and effect, and trust in this.

Another reason for writing this record is because it might be of use to my younger brother. Having discussed the topic of meditation with him I sensed his practice to be rather good. For these reasons I therefore feel that even if my writings are of no benefit to anyone else, but my father or family find them useful, then they will not be worthless. If they are of some benefit to other people, then I am pleased and consider my writing of it to have been most worthwhile.

In writing the following account, if I don't give some mention to certain parts of my lay life you might not be able to make sense of what you are reading, so I will make some reference to those parts relevant.

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<sup>1</sup> The mental defilements based upon greed, aversion and delusion. Their manifestations are many and varied, including: passion, jealousy, conceit, pride, arrogance, stinginess, anger, resentment, sceptical doubt, laziness etcetera.

This record was written while comfortably practising alone mind-  
ing the monastery.

**Thiracitto Bhikkhu**  
Samnaksong<sup>1</sup> Cittabhavanaraam  
(Wat Nong Pah Pong branch monastery)  
Lamluka  
Pathumthani province  
Seventh of November, 1980

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<sup>1</sup> Samnaksong is often translated as ‘*Sangha* residence’. It shows that a place has yet to receive official recognition as a monastery or ‘Wat’.

# My Lay life



I was born on the eleventh of June, 1955 (B.E. 2498), at house number 506, at the Thaa Luang factory in the sub-district of Thaa Luang, Thaa Reu-uh district, in the province of Phra Nakhon SiAyutthaya. My father's name was Tiap Tirawat, and my mother's, Jamnianpan Tirawat; her maiden name was Fueng-tong. Somneuk Srisuk served as midwife.

My parents were from the north-eastern province of Ubon Ratchatani<sup>1</sup>. My father once related to me that shortly before I was conceived my mother dreamt that a star fell from the sky and landed in our yard. She went and picked it up and placed it on a piece of white cloth. The star transformed into a lustrous diamond which caused her to feel completely overjoyed. She took the diamond and placed it on a raised shelf-altar. Not long after this dream she became pregnant.

My father worked at the Thai Steel Company Limited, a subsidiary of The Siam Cement Group, in Thaa Laan, Ayutthaya. My mother worked at the Government Savings Bank (Ubon branch). She resigned from her job when they started a family and moved to Ayutthaya to be with my father. There she chose to remain a housewife so that she could take care of her children. After giving birth to her fifth child my mother caught malaria and needed to be hospitalized at Siriraj Hospital (Bangkok). After three days she passed away on the thirteenth of

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to by its shorter name, Ubon.

April, 1958, at the age of thirty-three. It wasn't until after she had died that the doctors discovered her illness had been complicated with typhoid, which became known from the seriously ill condition of the five children. The youngest child died soon after at the age of three months. The doctors ordered the burning of all of our bedding and clothing, while many other household articles had to be replaced with new ones. From that time on for the duration of our sickness, all of our towels and personal items had to be washed in boiling water. The remaining four sick children lay together in a row like corpses. For three or four days a doctor had to give daily injections to us before we finally began to show any signs of life. Even after one month had passed we were still totally bedridden, soiling our sleeping space with excreta. Two months were to pass before we were able to sit up and talk. Our full recovery took three months with all four boys surviving. The whole time that we were sick we were nursed by my maternal grandmother, Pai, and my mother's two sisters, Jitwichian and Suranee.

For the whole three months they frequently had to go without sleep in order to care for the four young children, who at first lay completely unconscious with diarrhoea, the stench of which pervaded the entire house. Aunt Suranee constantly had to alternately hold each one of us, and hold us while we were bathed with warm water. She was left with little time for sleep while she went about caring for us and washing all our nappies. When she did take rest it would be under a mosquito net, set up closely beside us so as to watch over her four nephews. My grandmother related how Aunt Suranee would sometimes be in the kitchen boiling our clothing while crying over the death of her elder sister, and the fact that her nephews lay there like corpses. At that time I was only two years and ten months old. After my mother's death it was my father and close relatives who helped to raise my siblings and I throughout our childhood. The whole time that we were sick, every Friday evening my father would take the



express train to Ubon to visit his sons<sup>1</sup>. Come Sunday evening he would catch a return train to Ayutthaya to be in time for work on Monday morning. He made this trip every weekend until 1959 when he decided to take his children to live with him in Thaa Laan (Ayutthaya). Grandmother Pai also joined us together with two domestic helpers.

When I was four years old my father enrolled me and my brothers at Saeng kosiknusorn School in Thaa Luang, Ayutthaya, which I attended until I finished nursery school. By that time my father had decided to enrol us as boarding students at Amnuay-withayaa School in Dusit district, Bangkok. After boarding for a period of time he bought a house nearby to the school so we could stop boarding and move into our new home. My paternal uncle, Tiam, and his wife Bua-rad also moved into the house to assist in looking after their four nephews. My father would come home every Friday evening and return to his work place each Sunday night. This was his routine throughout all my school and university years.

In 1961, my brothers and I moved to St. John's School in Lad Phrao, Bangkok. I studied there for twelve years until completing the school's commerce course (my class being the school's first intake of students to study this course)<sup>2</sup>.

My father was a disciple of Ajahn Tongrat (a senior disciple of Ajahn Mun Bhūridatta) and would frequently teach his sons the importance of maintaining one's moral precepts and integrity. My nature is to have kindness and goodwill towards others, while also having a dislike for lying. This made me quite different in

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<sup>1</sup> The travel time from his place of work in Ayutthaya to Ubon is approximately 495 km taking eight to nine hours.

<sup>2</sup> In the Venerable Ajahn's generations of schooling the last two years of high school (years eleven and twelve) were divided into three divisions: commerce, science and arts.

character and outlook from other children my age. Something I clearly remember from my childhood is my father teaching me, ‘When you go to play at a friend’s house, do not take anything—not even something as small as a needle.’ As a boy I liked to take my father’s tools to play with and would leave them lying about the house. He taught me, ‘When you take something from somewhere, you should return it to its original place so that somebody else needing it can find it.’ Another teaching which made a strong impression on my heart was my grandfather telling me, ‘If you ever think to take advantage of someone, it’s better to let them take advantage of you.’



At this point I would like to pay tribute to my paternal grandfather, Date, my father, Tiap, and my mother, Jamnianpan Tirawat, by giving a brief account of their lives. The following details have been taken from a record written by my father.

Date Tirawat was born on the twenty-third of May, 1884, in Ubon. He married Pai Thani and together they had five children. As a child he was educated at Patummalai Monastery, where he learned to read and write – the writing was done on palm leaves. His teacher was Phra Sema Dhammarakit, the first abbot of the monastery, and former Chief of the Ecclesiastical District of Udorn, in the province of Ubon. Later he ordained as a monk at Patummalai Monastery and remained in the monkhood for four years. At the age of twenty-five he disrobed and entered the civil service working as a secretary in the Ubon District Attorney Office, receiving an income of thirty baht per month. He was good at his job, never being held to fault either at work or in his personal life. His personal integrity thus made him well-esteemed by all the other staff at the Court of Justice. He suffered from a chronic stomach-ache, which caused him to leave the civil service and find work transporting goods by oxcart to other districts aided

by his son Tiap (aged 8-12 years). When he had saved enough money he bought a small thirty-two-acre farm to grow rice and vegetables. He taught Tiap and his siblings to be hardworking and have fortitude in going about their working the land and selling the produce. All of his children had to experience hardship, though he would tell them that if you develop the qualities of being hardworking and forbearing when young, one will experience comfort and ease later in life.

In 1973 he donated approximately fifteen acres of land to the Ministry of Education for the building of Nareenukoon Provincial girls' School in the city of Ubon. Throughout his life he performed many good deeds, including his continual support of the Buddhist religion. His virtuous life was given recognition by being awarded a royal medal. He passed away in 1976 at the age of ninety-two. At his time of passing he was lying down with hands in *añjali*<sup>1</sup> while listening to the Bojjhanga Paritta<sup>2</sup>.

Some moral lessons that he would teach his children and grandchildren were:

If you ever think of take advantage of someone, it's better to let them take advantage of you.

If somebody asking for money makes añjali to you, you should at least give them a little.

In living your life and going about your work, always hold firmly to the Buddha's teaching and your life will go smoothly.

If you wish to be a leader or a manager, you must first set a good example in both your behaviour and work.

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<sup>1</sup> *Añjali*: the palms of one's hands held together at the chest as a gesture of respect.

<sup>2</sup> A protection verse often chanted to sick or dying people.

My father, Tiap Tirawat, was born on the twenty-ninth of February, 1923. At high school he was an outstanding student. In tenth grade he was awarded a gold medal from the Ministry of Education for his diligence at school, in eleventh grade he won a silver medal, and in grade twelve, the final year of high school, he was again awarded with a gold medal. For his scholastic achievements in these last three years he was given an exemption from paying school fees.

In 1941 he passed the entrance examination to study engineering at Pathumwan Mechanical School. As a result of his high entrance score he was awarded with a scholarship, which he maintained for the whole three years of his studies. Whilst studying at Pathumwan his father put him under the care of *Chao Khun*<sup>1</sup> Tepwetee, deputy abbot of Pathumwanaraam Monastery. The venerable Chao Khun was very strict and would make him chant and sit in meditation, and from that time on it served to incline his mind towards the Buddha's teaching. In 1944 he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Industrial Engineering.

After graduating, his first job was in a tannery affiliated with the Thai Army's Department of the Quartermaster, working as the Head of Machine Installations. In 1947 he resigned from his position to take on the role of Chief of Special Vehicle Maintenance, in the Army's Department of Transportation (located in the Department of Armoury). In 1951 he was given orders to repair twenty-five vehicles for towing artillery. On completing the task he received a salary increase and was promoted five ranks in one year, from being a grade three civil servant to being a second-lieutenant, the first person ever to do so in such a short period. In 1952, a friend invited him to work at The Thai Steel Company in Thaa Reu-uh, Ayutthaya, a subsidiary of the Siam Cement Group,

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<sup>1</sup> *Chao Khun*: a royal title conferred by the King of Thailand to honour monks who have offered exemplary service to Buddhism.

where he remained until retiring. In 1952 he married Jamniampan Feuang-tong and together they had five sons.

In 1961, the Thaa Luang factory of the Siam Cement Group sent him overseas to study metallurgy and founding in six European countries. It was intended that on his return he could assist with the establishment of a new pressed steel factory at Thaa Luang, Ayutthaya. Included in the trip was a period of work-study at the Fiat car production and assembly factory in Italy. The trip lasted approximately eleven months and he was given 300,000 baht to cover his expenses. When he returned to Thailand he still had 60,000 baht remaining which he tried to return to the company. The general manager asked him why he wanted to return the money, and Tiap told him the company was like his parents, and when parents give their children money to study, they return any money left over. The manager told him he was the only person to have ever thought to return money, and praised him as being a man of fine character. The chief accountant said there is no way to return money, so he arranged for Tiap to purchase 60,000 baht in company shares valued at one-hundred baht each. Three years later (1965) the shares were valued at 1000 baht each, which he then sold to The Bureau of the Crown Properties for 600,000 baht.

On the sixteenth of June, 1988, Tiap Tirawat took bhikkhu ordination<sup>1</sup> at Wat Nong Pah Pong<sup>2</sup>, in the province of Ubon. Venerable Mongkolkititada officiated as the preceptor (*upaj-jhāya*), Phra Khru Banphotworakit was the announcing teacher (*kammavācāriya*) and Phra Liam Thitadhammo was his instructing teacher (*anusāsanacāriya*). Luang Por Tiap, Thiradhammo, passed away at the Chonburi Hospital on the twenty-first of November, 2003, at the age of eighty, having been a monk for sixteen years.

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<sup>1</sup> Full ordination as a monk.

<sup>2</sup> Henceforth, it will be referred to by its common name Wat Pah Pong.

My mother Jamnianpan Tirawat was born on the nineteenth of December, 1925, one of three children, all girls. At school she truly excelled in her studies, always being the top of her year. In those days she was the first and only student ever to finish the six-year high school curriculum in only four years. On graduation from high school she was employed in the Government Savings Bank, Ubon branch. She held the position of assistant to the manager, the youngest person in the country (at age sixteen) to hold this position.

With regards to merit making and alms-giving, she and her mother Pai routinely offered support and assistance to the *Sangha*<sup>1</sup> of Wat Liap (a monastery where Luang Pu Sao had once been abbot), which was close to their home. Every day they would boil bael fruit tea and other drinks to offer to the *Sangha* of Wat Liap. If ever the monks or novices were in need of anything they would always faithfully try to meet their needs. By nature, my mother was courteous, with a willingness to perform good deeds.

My parents were married on the fourteenth of March, 1952. Once married, my mother resigned from her job and moved to Thaa Luang, Saraburi to be with my father. At Thaa Luang she would frequently invite my father to join her in offering food and requisites at a monastery near my father's work. She would often buy all of the live catfish, snakehead fish, turtles and eels that the fishmongers had and released them at a pier in front of the monastery. The fish vendors would carry the fish from the local market to the pier for her. Lines of children would follow her from the market place to watch as she released the fish. They had never seen such a kind person releasing so many fish before. After having made a silent solemn aspiration and releasing the

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<sup>1</sup> The community of Buddhist monks and nuns. It can refer to the institution of Buddhist monasticism in general or to individual monastic communities. On an ideal level, it refers to those of the Buddha's followers, whether lay or ordained, who have attained at least the first of the four transcendent paths culminating in *Arahantship* or *nibbāna*.

fish, she would pay the vendors. On receiving the money the vendors would sometimes bow at her feet and say, ‘Madam, you are so extremely kind. From now on I will stop selling fish and sell vegetables instead.’ She would reply, ‘That’s good; by selling vegetables you won’t be doing wrong by killing fish.’ All the children stood and listened in complete silence.

After moving to be with her husband she would sometimes get her younger sister to bring their mother for a visit. She would often take them to pay respects to the Lord Buddha’s footprint at Saraburi, or she would take them to offer *dāna*<sup>1</sup> and pay respects to different monasteries in Ayutthaya and Lopburi.

Every time before such trips she would inform her husband a week in advance, so that they could prepare themselves. She was always cheerful and smiling, never seen in a bad mood, sulking, or angry at anyone. She felt nothing but kindness and compassion for her children without showing any signs of displeasure over anything at all. The market folk of Thaa Laan all knew her well, and together with the staff at Thaa Luang factory, were always respectful to her, because fine manners made her quite different from other people. She was of fine complexion and graceful figure with a slow and deliberate manner of walking, and had a smile that would charm people. She was kind-hearted to her neighbours, and much loved and respected by her husband’s workers. The workers would say they had never seen a married couple that was so kind and generous; surely they must be *devatās*<sup>2</sup> incarnate. She would simply smile with kindness and tell them that any person keeping the Five Precepts<sup>3</sup> is a *devatā* incarnate, and any family that keeps the Five Precepts is a heavenly family.

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<sup>1</sup> *Dāna* is the act of giving or being generous. In this context it could refer to offering food, requisites, or money; or possibly all three.

<sup>2</sup> *Devatā* or *Devā*: celestial or heavenly being.

<sup>3</sup> To refrain from killing living creatures; to refrain from taking that which is not given; to refrain from sexual misconduct; to refrain from wrong speech; to refrain from intoxicating drink and drugs which lead to carelessness.

My mother died on the thirteenth of April, 1958, at Siriraj Hospital. She was admitted to hospital suffering from malaria and typhoid. The medical staff however, was unaware of the presence of typhoid and treated her only for malaria. After only three days in hospital she died of typhoid, at the age of thirty-three.

This is a partial biography of the lives of my grandfather, Date, my father, Tiap, and my mother Jamnianpan, taken from a record written by my father. I ask to include this in memory of their kindness to me.



As a child, when studying in grade three or four, I would normally go to school with my oldest brother. When walking home we would chat about all kinds of things, often teasing one another. My brother kept telling fibs and speaking evasively, which I didn't like because whenever I asked him anything I would never get a truthful answer, and so whenever he asked me anything I would play him along and do the same thing in turn. I found playing around not telling the truth to be quite displeasing, so I told my brother that we should vow not to lie to each other. No more lying, because having told a lie, the other person can make no sense of it. We therefore agreed that from then on we wouldn't lie to each other – when asked anything one must answer truthfully.

When I was twelve years old, during the term break after completing year seven, my father asked my brothers and I if any of us wanted to ordain as a novice, so as to dedicate the merit to our mother. My elder brother and I agreed and spent one month as novices at Wat Liap in the city of Ubon. Every evening my maternal grandmother boiled fresh bael fruit tea to offer to the monks and novices.



Once, in my first year studying commerce at St. John's School, I was with two friends and they started arguing with each other. One was a close friend with whom I had studied in the same class for nine years, while the other was a new friend. I was able to step in and stop them from arguing, but I could see the anger within each of them. I personally felt a loathing for the anger that was in their hearts, but I was unable to do anything about it. I said to myself, 'I'm going to completely eliminate all anger and aversion from my mind.'

One day after school, I was at a bus stop waiting to catch a bus home. A bus pulled in that was so crammed full of passengers that I couldn't get on. Whilst some people were trying to get off the bus and others get on, I noticed an older woman who was sitting at one of the bus' window seats. She was looking at a schoolboy and girl who were also waiting. It was as if I could hear her silently complaining, 'These two playing about flirting with each other like this, they don't think to concentrate on their studies. If their parents knew they would be so disappointed.' Seeing this I thought I'm so glad it isn't me, for if it were I would feel so ashamed in front of this woman. Consequently, I swore to myself that I will only associate with females as friends and not have a girlfriend until I've finished my studies and am working so that I can support myself.

About a month after that I saw a girl whom I found to be very attractive. This caused the mental defilements to manifest, creating feelings that I found to be rather oppressive. When I returned home, I quickly sought the advice of my eldest brother. I asked him, 'There's a girl that I like, what should I do?'

'Try to get to know her, start talking to her.'

The next day after school my brother asked me, 'Did you get to know her yet?'

‘I didn’t dare’ I replied.

He gave me some more advice, telling me that tomorrow I should invite her out for a meal and then walk her home. I’m very shy by nature and didn’t dare do so. The next evening he advised me to invite her out to see a movie during the weekend. Once again, as soon as I returned home from school he asked, ‘Did you do as I said?’ ‘I dare not talk to her’ I replied. Hearing this he stopped giving me advice.

For some days afterwards I remained feeling very frustrated from secretly liking her. When I thought of her my heart felt stifled. One evening a memory arose asking me, ‘Did you not promise yourself that you wouldn’t have a girlfriend, but instead have just friends until you finish your studies and are working?’ ‘But I like her, what am I to do’ I thought to myself. An answer sprang up telling me, ‘In that case don’t like her!’ Hearing this caused my feelings of attraction to her to immediately disappear. It had completely vanished, leaving me to feel so relieved and at ease. The next morning when I went to school I saw the same girl, but felt completely indifferent towards her. Sometime afterwards I ended up talking to her but we remained merely friends. I also thought that I’m still young and at school, I’m not yet working and so I’m dependent on my father to pay for my studies. I thought therefore, that while I’m still studying it’s not yet appropriate for me to have a girlfriend. To be mature enough to have a partner I should first finish my studies and be working.

One day when I was about the age of sixteen or eighteen my father brought home a Dhamma periodical called *Buddha-Dhamma*<sup>1</sup> and left it for me to read. Normally when he read a book and came across something important, he would always make a mark on that page for others to read. By coincidence, when I

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<sup>1</sup> By *Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu*

picked the book up to read, my eyes went to three words, each one being explained in a short sentence. The three words were greed, aversion and delusion. Once I had finished reading the explanations of these three words, a feeling shot up in my heart telling me, ‘Greed, aversion and delusion are awful mental states which create the suffering in people’s hearts. From now on I must to try to refrain from these states and rid my mind of them, weakening their presence as much as I can.’ Even to this day I can still recall the image of that page with those three words on it. With regards to greed, I thought to myself that I will be content with only what is mine. As for aversion, I thought I will be one who acts kindly, having goodwill and compassion towards others. I further reflected that I will not tolerate such states when they arise, because they are bad states of mind. Since that day I’ve always tried to abandon these unwholesome mental states.

In my last two years of high school I frequently heard mention of monks who had ordained for five or even ten years only to disrobe, hence causing a decline in the faith of some laypeople. Some monks had even attained the title of *Mahā*<sup>1</sup>, but then disrobed. Hearing this, I thought if ever I ordain I definitely won’t disrobe as they have done and cause people to look upon Buddhism unfavourably. This was just a thought I had, even though at that time I still hadn’t thought of ordaining.



On the seventh of December, 1973, during the term break after finishing high school, before starting an Economics degree at the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, I went on holiday for my third time to Phuket with my younger brother and his friend. We stayed in the house of his friend’s older sister in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Mahā*: a title given to monks who have studied *Pāli* and completed the third year or higher.

village of Sabam. Around the eighth or ninth his sister took us and about nine or ten of our friends (all boys aged sixteen to eighteen) to Sai Kaew beach, close to the Sarasin bridge, where you can watch turtles lay their eggs. She drove us there in a pickup and we arrived at around 7.30 p.m. and went for a walk along the beach. Many of our friends were the sons of fishermen and led us in their usual pastime of catching crabs coming up onto the shoreline. The crabs were put into a pot, intending that they would be our supper that evening. After quite some time I returned to where our vehicle was parked and sat chatting with some friends, while several others went about lighting a campfire close by. By 9 p.m. everyone had returned and we sat around the fire talking.

An incident occurred at about that time which made me see the light of some simple truths and encouraged me to further develop goodness in my life. A being from a different realm came to this human realm – it called itself ‘The Guardian Spirit of the Oceans’. It said to me, ‘Beneath the ocean are things of great beauty and things that are most fearsome. Many people who come to play in the ocean are lacking in both caution and a sense of their own physical strength. Waves that sweep up onto the beach are then drawn back into the ocean. In some spots where this happens the ocean floor quickly falls away, becoming deep in an instant. Subsequently, many will lose their life. For some, when they swim out to deep water, they will get dragged out to even deeper water and do not have the necessary strength to resist the current. It’s all because of heedlessness that many people lose their life in the ocean.’ It then asked me, ‘Do you love your father?’ ‘Yes’ I replied. ‘Would you like it if someone were to harm him?’ ‘No’ I answered. It then went on to ask, ‘Do you love your younger brother?’ ‘Yes’ I replied again. ‘Would you like it if someone were to harm him?’ ‘No’ I answered. Finally, it asked ‘And you, do you love yourself?’ Again I answered, ‘Yes.’ ‘Would you like it if someone were to come and harm you?’ ‘No.’ It said, ‘All animals have fathers, mothers, and siblings. It’s just that they

don't speak your language. You already have a comfortable life, why do you think to harm or take the life of other creatures?' Having said just that much I instantly knew I had unwittingly done wrong and behaved improperly. Deep in my heart I knew straight away that henceforth I would never intentionally harm or take the life of another creature. It taught me many things which not only led to my refraining from taking life, but also caused some of my other friends who were present that night to also do the same. Afterwards I told my friends to take the pot of crabs and release them at the shoreline.

Even though seven years had already passed before writing about this in my journal, I could still remember the incident so clearly, and I frequently recollect the compassion and kindness of this being, for it enabled me to see the light and endeavour to do only good. It made me clearly aware that there are numerous realms of existence outside of this human one. Further, it spoke on dhammas that come in pairs: where there is water, there are fish; there are cars and there are roads; there are men and there are women; there is darkness and there is light. It taught me to have a heart of kindness towards other beings. It also gave me the opportunity to ask about certain points which I had doubts. My conversation with this being lasted for three to four hours. Some time after the incident I further recollected on the theme of dhammas that come in pairs and realized that there is good and there is evil. Since then I've always tried to do what is good and refrain from what is not. One time, not long after that day the thought arose, 'Whatever is reckoned as good in this world, that is what I wish to possess.' Even to this day I still recollect this being's great act of kindness.

It was always my intention to return to Phuket when I felt sufficiently endowed with goodness or at the very least was keeping the Five Precepts. However, there has yet to be an opportunity, and now it's already 1980. The family that I stayed

with there took good care of me. I often think of their kindness, it's something I've never forgotten.<sup>1</sup>

I would always be reminding myself to act in ways which are good, and to refrain from everything which is bad. Within two years of that visit to Phuket I had discerned clearly the harmfulness of immoral actions, enabling me to keep all of the Five Precepts. I didn't have to force myself to observe the precepts, I was able to do so willingly. Keeping them made me feel good and at ease.

I was inclined to often think of the poor and needy. During winter, when I was warm and comfortable, I would think of those people in rural areas who had no blankets, and in the rainy season I would think, if their roofs are leaky they probably can't sleep. I would feel so sorry for them, thinking to myself that if I were wealthy I would help those people. My heart really went out to them, but I was in no position to help them all, so I had to assume an equanimous attitude.

One day I was riding on a bus returning home from university. As the bus approached nearer to my house it stopped to let some passengers off. Not far away were a group of teenagers who were hanging around at the top of a road going into a neighbourhood. When they saw that this particular bus had stopped they started running towards it, the bus conductor shouted to the driver to quickly get going. As the bus began to speed off, one of the teenagers threw a fist-sized stone at the bus. The stone came in, shooting through one of the bus' windows and came right to where I was sitting on the back seat. The stone had been thrown at full strength and, when combined with the speed of bus which was travelling in the opposite direction to the stone's trajectory, it hit my forehead with such force that the stone bounced off and went

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the details of this incident in Phuket were not included in the Thai edition.

down into the bus' stairwell. I was aware of the stone's impact as it struck, but it was as if there were a protective barrier between my forehead and the stone causing me to feel no pain. Not even my skin was affected. I don't know why this was, though at that time I was wearing around my neck an amulet of Luang Por Kop (Wat Khao<sup>1</sup> Tham Sarika). Sometime afterwards I found out that the group of teenagers had previously had an argument with that particular bus conductor.



If I remember correctly, it was probably during my second year at university that there was a time when I was riding on a bus and gazed at the people outside. As I looked, I began to feel quite peculiar because I started to think, 'We humans are just one kind of animal – that's all. It's merely a convention of the world that we call ourselves human, yet in truth we are no different from pigs, cows or buffalo. When they die, they decompose, and so do we. The mind takes up residence in our body, but the body is no different from that of an animal or robot. Our mind gives orders and the body acts accordingly, but at the time of death, all that remains is a body that is in no way different from that of an animal.' At that time there were many occasions that I viewed humans in strange ways, quite different from before. When I saw people at bus stops, either standing, walking, talking or going about other activities such as combing their hair, smiling, laughing, or frowning, I would think that humans and animals are in no way different, except for humans possessing greater intelligence and a superior mind – that's all. Each person's bodily gestures and movements were being dictated merely by the power of their minds. These thoughts made me feel a bit weary with the human condition.

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<sup>1</sup> Khao: a mountain or hill.

During my third year at university, whenever I was feeling ill, say, with a stomach ache, diarrhoea or even the urge to urinate, I would always ask myself, 'Hey, what's going on? Here I am feeling unwell and yet I can't tell my body to be free from these pains and discomfort? I thought this body is mine, why then is it outside of my control? This certainly shows the body does not belong to me'. At about that time I began to regularly contemplate things in this way, reflecting that if the body was truly mine, then I should be able to command it to be free of illness; or when the urge to urinate or defecate occurs while travelling I should be able to tell the body, 'Please, wait, don't allow the urge to come on before I get home!' Why is it that the body is completely outside of my control? These reflections caused me to begin seeing the true nature of the body – seeing that it's not mine, as it is totally outside of my control.

One day at university I was sitting talking with some friends when I noticed a university bus pull in to let its passengers off. As some girls got off the bus and walked passed where I was sitting, one girl caught my attention because I thought she was attractive. I thought to myself, 'If she remains beautiful for more than three months I will try to get to know her.' But upon seeing her again on another day she didn't look the same as before, on this day she no longer looked beautiful because she had changed her hair style, and so I never did get to know her. On another occasion I saw a different girl whom I felt attracted to because she was also good looking, and again I thought if she is still beautiful after three months I will try to get to know her, but on a later day upon seeing her again she no longer looked attractive because she dressed differently. As it turned out there wasn't one girl in the entire university who could remain attractive for more than three months, and so I never did get to know any of them. I thought to myself that I will associate with females only platonically and wait until I've finished my studies and have a job before considering starting a relationship. Every girl that I thought was



beautiful would, on seeing them only a few times, quickly appear not to be so. As a result I no longer felt interested in females. It wasn't until I ordained that I understood that my feelings and way of viewing things whilst being a student was based on insight (*vipassanā*) – that is, seeing the mutable nature of human beings or physical phenomena.

Not long after this I saw a friend of mine arguing with his girlfriend. Whilst arguing the girl's face didn't look at all attractive. I asked myself, 'Where exactly should I find attraction in a woman?' An answer sprung up telling me, 'Be attracted to their heart's innate qualities'.

Sometimes when I looked at buildings, temples, *uposatha* halls, or went to beautiful places, my mind would always contemplate the decline and deterioration of these things or places. I would see things degenerate until they crumbled apart, then reflect and bring them back to their original condition. I would see the disintegration and ultimate dissolution of everything – seeing that their nature is to come into existence, remain for a time, and finally break apart.



During my fourth year at university, there were some days I felt that my head was completely filled with thoughts, my mind thinking continuously without any respite until ten or eleven at night. Once, when my mind was thinking endlessly, the thought arose, 'Hey, why can't I stop my mind from thinking? This shows that the mind is not mine, I'm not its owner.' Fortunately I could remember having read some parts of the biography of Venerable Ajahn Mun where he taught the mountain folk to search for *Buddho* by sitting in meditation for five or ten minutes a day. At that time a feeling arose that I wanted to do the same, so late that night I went up and sat in the shrine room, and in no time at

all the thoughts stopped and I began to feel peaceful and at ease. I focused my awareness on the breath together with the recitation of the meditation word *Buddho*. On the inhalation mentally reciting ‘*Bud*’ and on the exhalation ‘*dho.*’ My mind stopped thinking and held to its awareness of the breath, feeling content and relaxed. After that, whenever I was continuously thinking, I would go to the shrine room and sit in meditation.

Once while in meditation one of my legs felt sore and I reflected that this body doesn’t belong to me, it’s merely made up of the four elements<sup>1</sup>. I reflected only for a brief moment, but my mind acknowledged the truth of the reflection and then unified in concentration, plummeting downwards three times. All perception of the breath, body and meditation word *Buddho* completely disappeared, and I was left feeling perfectly contented. I thought to myself that if I could, I would gladly remain in this state of bliss and not return to the normal human state again. I felt so sublimely happy, happiness of a kind that I cannot explain. I even thought that all the happiness that can possibly be derived from the world, can’t be compared to the happiness experienced when the mind is in this state. The instant that I had this thought, awareness arose asking, ‘Where has the body disappeared to? Where has the breath gone? Where has *Buddho* disappeared to?’ Having noticed that all perception of my breath and body had completely disappeared, I tried to move my body, and eventually my awareness of the breath gradually returned, the breath becoming coarser until returning to normal. The whole experience left me feeling most surprised.

During the final term of my fourth year there was a day when I was standing on the bus travelling to university. As I rode, a vision of the Chinaraat Buddha Statue<sup>2</sup> appeared just in front of my forehead. The statue was golden with a silver aura framing it.

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<sup>1</sup> Earth, water, air, and fire.

<sup>2</sup> One of Thailand’s most venerated Buddha statues located in the city of Phitsanuloke.

I saw this same vision over several days, each time lasting for about five minutes. Just standing there and having a vision like this arise before me made me wonder if I was going crazy, but I was able to keep my senses and mindfully watch what was going on.

Not long after this, whenever I travelled between home and university<sup>1</sup>, I would view the other people on the bus in accordance with the characteristics of birth, aging and sickness. My mind would reflect in this way by itself and then turn the reflection inwards onto myself. When looking at a young baby I would think, 'To be born is really suffering. How much suffering and happiness must this child experience before it grows to the age I am?' I would then turn the reflection onto myself, thinking, 'I too was once a baby like this young child. To reach the age I am now I've had to experience alternating happiness and unhappiness. Life is so tedious.' When this thought had finished I looked at another person and could tell by his face and eyes that he was sick, experiencing a lot of pain and suffering due to some kind of health problem. After contemplating the condition of this person I further reflected that I too experience sickness, and could clearly see that sickness is likewise a source of suffering for myself. Once this thought had finished I looked about on the bus and my eyes caught sight of an elderly person, about the age of sixty to seventy years old. I reflected that everyone must grow old like this person; we must all surely meet with old age in the future whereby our hair greys, the skin withers, and teeth deteriorate. Looking at it, it's not nice at all, yet I too will be like that in the future. Aging was seen to be suffering. My mind then contemplated that at some time not too far off, everyone on this bus must die, with not one of us remaining. I saw that death was also a cause of suffering.

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<sup>1</sup> The bus route to the university was also on the same route as a hospital, hence seeing so many old and sick people.

After reflecting in this way I thought this body that I depend on isn't mine, because in times of sickness, or as the body ages, or when it's about to die, I have no power to control or forbid the changes from taking place. This thought left me with a great feeling of disenchantment and weariness with the human condition. Awareness arose within me that birth is the cause of suffering. I thought to myself, 'I don't want to take birth again, I will look for a way to avoid future rebirth.' Back then my mind would reflect like this almost every day. Every time I travelled by bus to university I would always see babies, sick people, and elderly people and my mind would naturally reflect like this for ten or twenty minutes, each time giving rise to a feeling of being soberly saddened and disenchanted, not wanting to take birth again.

After that I would always think that whenever I'm ready I will ordain and not disrobe. I thought that this would happen in no more than five years' time, after having spent two years studying a Master's degree and a period of three years working to offer some financial assistance to my father. However, until that time I will attempt to be a good, virtuous person and try to frequently reflect on greed, aversion and delusion so as to gradually abandon these states. Eventually when the time comes, I should then be ready to ordain without ever disrobing.

By this time keeping the Five Precepts became normal for me, and my mind was no longer the same as before. If I was going anywhere and I saw a Buddha statue in a temple or a footprint of the Buddha, I would bow to it, and with my hands in añjali I would make the following aspiration, 'If the true Dhamma of the Buddha is still surviving — being the most excellent and purest of all teachings that will lead one beyond suffering — then may I meet this path and proceed in the most correct and direct manner.' I would make an aspiration like this every time; nobody had ever told me to do so, my heart did so of its own will.

During my remaining time at university I would try to think only good, wholesome thoughts that were beneficial and endeavour to not let my mind think about whatever wasn't good or beneficial. Whenever unwholesome thoughts arose I would make the effort to bring my awareness to my breathing, in coordination with the meditation word *Buddho*. By doing this the unwholesome thoughts would disappear.

At the time when I deeply perceived that birth, aging, sickness and death were bound up with suffering, my heart had no wish to take a rebirth of any kind whatsoever. It made me think of how the Lord Buddha had clearly seen these four conditions before I ever had. He saw the inherent suffering in these four conditions, causing him to renounce his royal status and wealth to become a *samaṇa*,<sup>1</sup> until finally attaining full enlightenment<sup>2</sup> to become the Buddha. I understood why he renounced the lay life to become a seeker. I thought that I probably have a sufficient store of merit that enables my heart to perceive birth, aging, sickness and death as suffering as well. Everybody should be able to see things in line with the truth as the Buddha did, but very few people do. They merely know that all beings once born must die, but they don't see this deeply within their hearts.



By 1977, during my fourth and final year at university, I wasn't going out very much because I was keeping the Five Precepts. When I went to the university library I would sometimes see Dhamma books and read a few pages. Around that time I was

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<sup>1</sup> *Pālī* and Thai. A recluse or contemplative who abandons the conventional obligations of social life, in order to follow a life of spiritual striving for the realization of the Truth.

<sup>2</sup> In Buddhism there are four progressive stages of enlightenment, the first stage of stream-entry (*sotāpanna*), the second stage of once returning to the human world (*sakāḍāgāmī*), the third stage of non-returning to the human world (*anāgāmī*), and the fourth and final stage of full enlightenment (*arahant*).

aware that my heart was beginning to turn towards the Dhamma. At one time when I was feeling comfortable and at ease, and my mind was completely free of thoughts and emotions, a thought arose telling me, ‘If I ordain in this lifetime, this birth will be my last.’ I thought it was strange that those words came up in my mind, because at that time I wasn’t yet ready to ordain. Back then I was always thinking that I will keep on developing goodness until I die. If ever I’m ready to ordain, then I will, but if not, I will continue on with my Dhamma practice.

Sometimes when travelling to university I would look at other people and be overcome by feelings of disenchantment. One time while travelling to another province on holiday, I fell asleep on the bus, and when I awoke I saw everything as *asubha*<sup>1</sup>. Everybody on the bus appeared to be corpses which were beginning to decay. Even the driver was decomposing, and the bus appeared to be falling to pieces. It really seemed like everyone riding on the bus was dead and that no one was able to know where the bus was taking them to. At that time I couldn’t figure out where we were all going to, it merely appeared that everyone was dead except for me. I could only but think that the bus was taking us towards death waiting up ahead. In my mind I was picturing an image of the bus taking us into an abyss which was certainly going to be our death. It was saddening to realize that nobody on the bus was going to escape death. This thought did however bring the mind back to normality, and I was able to evaluate the thoughts that had just passed. As always it made me think that I shouldn’t be heedless in how I live my life, encouraging me to develop only goodness while refraining from all that is unwholesome. I was able to see images as vivid as this and yet I still couldn’t ordain. The defilements in the hearts of human beings are truly dense.

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<sup>1</sup> Loathsomeness or unattractiveness. As a contemplation, *asubha* is seeing the inherent unattractiveness or loathsomeness of the body.

In about April, 1978, I began to observe the Eight Precepts<sup>1</sup>. After keeping them for about three weeks, I contemplated what reasons were preventing me from ordaining at that time. I could think of just two: firstly, I was concerned about the welfare of my father and brothers; secondly, I still had the natural urges and desires of a human being. My character is that I prefer to do things when I feel ready and see there is a good reason to be doing so, without needing to force myself. When my mind feels ready, that is when I act, but if it doesn't feel so, then I have to give it a reasonable amount of time. I thought whenever I can put aside these two reasons I would ordain, giving myself at most five years to take care of this. Soon after I reflected on the first reason, my concern for my father and brothers. I considered how all beings are the owners of their *kamma*<sup>2</sup>, heirs to their *kamma*, they originate from their *kamma*, are bound to their *kamma*, and have their *kamma* as their refuge. Whatever *kamma* they do, for good or for ill, of that they will be the heir. I was preoccupied with my concerns for others but surely they must be capable of helping themselves. As I reflected on this I saw just how true it is; how could I possibly help them, they were all mature adults, possessing competent mental faculties, with each having their own responsibilities in life fairing according to their *kamma*. Having seen this to be true I gave up this concern.

The second reason was taken care of around mid-April, 1978. I thought of three girls that I considered attractive. The instant I thought of the first girl's face her skin started to peel off, and blood and pus began trickling down her face. My mind had witnessed her innate unattractiveness. I then thought of the second

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<sup>1</sup> The sixth precept is to refrain from eating between noon and dawn, the seventh refrains from entertainment, beautification and adornment, the eighth refrains from lying on a high or luxurious sleeping place. The third precept of refraining from sexual misconduct becomes total celibacy.

<sup>2</sup> Volitional actions by body, speech, and mind, which eventually bear fruit corresponding to the moral content (good, bad, neutral) of the action.

girl. As soon as I pictured her face — in a single moment — her skin also began to peel off with blood and pus running down her face. A feeling of dispassion and disenchantment arose in my heart. When I thought of the third girl the same thing happened, and her skin peeled down with her face oozing blood and pus. My heart was affected and filled with an even stronger sense of sobering dispassion and disappointment at the sight of this, and I thought that if women are like this, then I no longer wish to live the household life. Since that day, whenever I look at a female, I feel no desire because my mind has always sustained the feeling of disenchantment. When I look at them there is just looking, just seeing. Once my heart began to perceive women as unattractive, I started to have thoughts of never marrying, instead I just wanted to continue with my practice until the time was right for me to ordain.



One evening at the end of April, 1978, a neighbour<sup>1</sup> informed me that a monk was staying at her house and invited me to go if I wished to talk about the Dhamma with him. That evening I went and had quite a long talk with him. I returned home at about 11 p.m. and went up to the shrine room where I chose a Dhamma book to read. When I opened the book, my eyes met with a sentence that read: Pacchimaovāda, the last words of the Buddha. The Buddha said, ‘Now, monks, I declare to you: all conditioned things are subject to decay. Attain the goal by diligence.’ As I read this sentence three times over, I carefully reflected on its meaning for some time, and in my heart I felt the Buddha’s word to be so true. I reconsidered my original intention of ordaining in five years’ time, asking myself ‘Why do I have to wait? What if I were to die in the meantime? If I died now I still haven’t cultivated much goodness, I would still have nothing!’

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<sup>1</sup> Venerable Ajahn Piak’s aunt.



If I think I'm certainly going to ordain sometime then why wait? My heart is ready now, I do not have to force myself at this point, I have given it sufficient consideration with mindfulness, wisdom and a heart that feels ready.'

That evening my heart clearly fathomed the profound meaning of the Buddha's words. It's a feeling that is difficult to relate to other people. The last words of the Buddha made me resolute about ordaining.

Before going to bed that night I firmly decided that within two months I will request ordination and never disrobe. The reason I allowed myself two months was because I had some unfinished business I wanted to attend to first. I thought I'd probably be ready by no later than the end of June, but I still hadn't given any thought as to where I would ordain, though I did determine four things:

I will ordain and not disrobe.

Ordination must be kept simple with absolutely no parading of the applicant, drinking of alcohol, or staging entertainments within the monastery<sup>1</sup>.

It must be a monastery that doesn't bless amulets, they should believe more in the working of *kamma* rather than the power of amulets and other talismans<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It is a custom in many places for all attending the ordination ceremony to parade the applicant around outside of the *Uposatha Hall*, often being led by someone beating a drum.

<sup>2</sup> This is with particular reference to monasteries that engage in 'Buddha-commerce', the selling of amulets etc. for commercial gain, as opposed to blessing amulets etc. that are given freely to devotees as objects of recollection.

I will ordain in a rural area, in a place that is forested or in the hills and mountains.

I thought that once ordained I would find a forest or cave somewhere and practise by myself until I died. If I didn't transcend suffering, then I wished to die in the forest. At that time my mind was resolute and wholly determined to do this, but actually I didn't quite know the way things worked. I had thought that once ordained I would be free to do and go as I pleased, it was only later that I discovered that having ordained you must live in a monastery with a teacher for the first five years before you can go anywhere unaccompanied.

I asked my neighbour where she thought I should ordain. She recommended two renowned teachers, Luang Ta *Mahā* Boowa and Luang Por Chah. She brought photos of both of these esteemed teachers for me to see, and I thought that both of them had practised well and correctly.<sup>1</sup>

I asked her where their monasteries were, though actually she wanted me to ordain at Wat Pah Pong with Luang Por Chah, because her nephew was already ordained and living there. I asked her whether or not the ordination ceremony at Wat Pah Pong was kept simple, was it located in a rural area, do they bless amulets and talismans there? She replied that the ordination ceremony was simple, the monastery is in a rural area, and there was no blessing of amulets etc. At that time my father was living and doing business in Ubon, and I was afraid that if I ordained with Luang Ta *Mahā* Boowa at Wat Pah Baan Taad in Udorn Thani, my father would be worried about me, and it would be difficult for him to visit me. I thought in any case I'm ordaining and not disrobing, so I therefore chose to ordain at Wat Pah Pong<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'practised well, practised correctly' (*Pālī: supatipanno*) is used frequently in the Thai to refer to noble beings, in particular *Arahants*.

<sup>2</sup> The Wat is approximately ten kilometers from the city of Ubon.

My thinking to ordain and not disrobe was due to my not wanting to take birth again, but I did not know what the most correct path to follow to achieve this was – was it really by ordaining? Is it really the most correct means? What do I have to do to know? The reason that I thought like this was because I had absolutely no knowledge or understanding of ordination, it was something I'd never looked into. All I knew was that I didn't want to take birth again. I thought of how the Lord Buddha went forth and became an ascetic to attain full enlightenment and become the Buddha. This I knew from my school classes in religious studies,<sup>1</sup> but I didn't know how he went about achieving this.



During the month of May, 1978, a question would always keep coming to mind. I would ask myself, 'How I will know that ordaining is the true path to prevent renewed existence?' One day, in the same month, I was riding on a bus returning home from university. The thought, 'How will I know that this is the most correct path?' arose in my mind. The answer came back by means of a mental vision.

I saw two bowls of the same kind of spicy curry. The appearance of the curry in the first bowl looked far more appetizing than the second bowl and so I took a serving from it. It was delicious and so I thought to eat only from the first bowl every day, and showed no interest at all in the less inviting second bowl. After eating every day from the first bowl I began to grow bored of it, so I turned and saw the second bowl and thought to give it a taste. On taking the first mouthful I exclaimed in my heart, 'Oh, Ohh!' The second bowl was even tastier than the first! Every day I've been so foolish in thinking only to eat from the first bowl, without

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<sup>1</sup> The study of '*sīla-dhamma*' in Thai schools based on general Buddhist Studies, with an emphasis on domestic and social ethics.

knowing that it doesn't taste anywhere near as good as the second. From now on I'm no longer going to eat from the first bowl. An explanation subsequently came to mind, seeing the first bowl of curry as being analogous to the lay life that I was currently living, in accordance with worldly ways and values. The second bowl represented the life of a religious seeker, one ordained, who cultivates the mind until no longer taking future rebirth; meaning, living one's life in accordance with the Dhamma.

Initially, I was born and lived my life in the conventional worldly way which is similar to eating from the first curry, until eventually growing tired and disenchanted with it – that is, lay life. My wish to not take birth again was shown by eating from the first bowl until becoming bored of it. Tasting and experiencing the deliciousness of the second curry and seeing how the first bowl absolutely paled in comparison, was like when I had the opportunity to experience the joy and bliss that comes from sitting in meditation. I was therefore able to see that living an ordinary worldly life is in no way comparable to the peace and calm obtained from mediation. By comparing the two it clearly revealed how the second bowl was so much more flavourful; the pleasure and happiness that comes from living the life of a *samaṇa* is greater than that of the lay life, for it enables one to transcend suffering.

With the mind having both asked itself the question and supplied the answer, I sat there baffled for a short time wondering who it was that answered. It seemed like I didn't answer it myself, it was as if someone else told me. It was quite puzzling, but it did make me feel absolutely confident that this was the right path to take.

My mind was quite strange in that once I'd finally decided to ordain it was completely intent on it, never feeling that it might miss the ways or things of the world. However, before ordaining I tested my resolve by asking myself three questions: Firstly, if

I could have all the wealth in the world for my own, though be forbidden to ordain, would I agree? I thought no, I wish to ordain. Secondly, if I could be the most powerful man alive, free to do as I pleased, yet be forbidden to ordain, would I agree? Again I thought no, I wish to ordain. Thirdly, if I could choose any number of women that I desired, be it hundreds or thousands, though be forbidden to ordain, would I agree? For the final time I thought no, I wish to ordain.



When I met Luang Por Chah for the first time, he'd been informed of my wish to ordain. He turned to me and asked, 'Why do you want to ordain?' 'I don't want to be born again, sir' was my brief reply. He remained quiet for a short time before saying to me 'You're mad, do you know that? There are two kinds of madness, a higher one and a lower one. The lower are those who are insane, the type that ramble on not knowing what they say or do. In the centre are the normal, everyday kind of people. The higher kind of madness refers to the Noble Ones<sup>1</sup>. Your madness is the higher type, do you know that? It's the noble type. Ordaining as a *samaṇa* is of inestimable value, are you aware of that?'

'Yes, sir, I know'

'In what way do you know?'

'There is no amount of wealth or precious objects that are of equal value to being a *samaṇa*. This is why it's of inestimable value.'

'That's correct' said Luang Por.

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<sup>1</sup> Noble One: the eight kinds of noble beings; 1-2 Path to stream-entry (*Sotāpanna*) and fruition; 3-4 Path to once-returning (*Sakadāgāmi*) and fruition; 5-6 Path to non-returning (*Anāgāmi*) and fruition; 7-8 Path to *Arahantship* (full liberation) and fruition.

He then spoke a little more before telling me to go and ask my father for permission first. ‘Don’t be afraid,’ he said, ‘this is your home.’ When he’d finished speaking I felt an indescribable joy. Our meeting had totally bolstered my confidence in everything. Initially, I had some questions that I wanted to ask him, but he had already answered them. All my doubts had been completely removed without my needing to ask anything. When finished I excused myself so that I could return home to my father for his consent to ordain.

The following evening I returned to Wat Pah Pong to pay my respects to Luang Por Chah, before I returned to Bangkok. Luang Por asked me, ‘When are you ordaining?’ ‘I’ll be back in two months, sir. I still have some unfinished business to attend to.’

At the end of May I received notification from the University of Colorado in the United States informing me that I had been accepted to study for a Master’s degree in Town Planning, and that an interview had been scheduled for the ninth of September, 1978. By that time I had already decided that I was definitely ordaining and so I waived my entitlement to study there, because I had already applied to do further studies at a different college; that is, Wat Pah Pong in Ubon, studying in the faculty that belongs to the Lord Buddha himself.

When I came to live at Wat Pah Pong I felt as if I had entered another world. I experienced the well-being that comes from being with the peacefulness of nature. ‘This is it,’ I told myself, ‘this time I’m going to completely uproot and eradicate the mental defilements. This time I have a good chance.’ I felt that all my worldly duties and responsibilities were finished. When I arrived at the monastery all I was thinking was, ‘I now have a good opportunity to gain the final release from suffering, I will keep practising until I’ve gone beyond suffering. However, if I do not transcend suffering in this life time, I will continue on in

my next life. I will keep practising until I die – only then will I stop.’

I shaved my head to become an *anāgārika*<sup>1</sup> on the eighth of June, 1978, my novice ordination was on the twenty-fourth of June, 1978, and my full ordination as a monk was on the ninth of July, 1978.

With regards to my lay life I wish to relate just this much.



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<sup>1</sup> *Anāgārika* (Thai: pa khao): The Thai literally means ‘white cloth’. *Anāgārikas* dress in all white and observe the eight-precepts of a postulant. This stage is normally preliminary to becoming a novice

# My Practice as a Samaṇa



In writing this record I have no great expectations, nor do I hope to be flattered with praise. I know full well that such things are incapable of making me become self-important or prideful. Regardless of whatever anyone says, the truth will always remain the truth, and I know better than anyone else as to what my thoughts and intentions are. This record might not contain any real substance or meaning, or be very detailed. It's just an account of part of my practice that I'm able to recall and write about, memory permitting. It would be impossible to write about it in clear extensive detail anyway, because all things can only be known for oneself.

The dhammas that I still don't know are many.

There are degrees of purity that I have yet to attain.

Nevertheless, this account might be of some benefit to those who are practising with an aim to go beyond all suffering. However, it only relates to the beginning of the path, and will in no way enable anyone to completely transcend suffering. Still, if one practises accordingly it might help to alleviate one's suffering a little. Also, if it serves to be of some benefit to my father, my brothers, or anyone else, even if it only be one person, then I consider my writing this record to not be a waste of time and energy. To anyone who does gain benefit, then for that, I would like to express my appreciation.



I started writing this part of the record on the ninth of December, 1980, starting from my ordination until the end of the year of my third Rains Retreat. I then maintained a continual record up until 1988, and resumed again on the eighteenth of October, 1990. The periods outside of the above time frame are written from what I can still remember, owing to the fact that I stopped keeping a record a long time ago, because everything went still in my mind, and I had no wish to speak or write about things at that time.

May all beings, without exception, be happy and at peace.

**Phra Akaradej Thiracitto**



# Life Under the Protection of the Ochre Robe



My new life began on the fifth of June, 1978, when I travelled to Wat Beunglatthiwan<sup>1</sup> located in the province of Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya to become an *anāgārika*. On the ninth of June, 1978, I set out for Wat Pah Pong in Ubon to attend the annual birthday gathering for Luang Por Chah. Accompanying me on the trip were my younger brother and two or three friends. I didn't inform my other friends that I was going to ordain, because I was afraid they wouldn't understand me. Even if I were to explain, I still didn't think they would understand.

After Luang Por Chah's birthday gathering on the eleventh of June, 1978<sup>2</sup> (on that particular year he observed his birthday according to the traditional lunar calendar which happened to fall on the eleventh of June), the group that accompanied me to the monastery returned home, leaving me behind. When leaving their homes to come and live in the monastery, some people say they feel a kind of lonesomeness that is hard to describe and that it didn't feel at all enjoyable, amongst other things. For myself however, I felt quite the opposite; it seemed as if I'd come to live in a different world. My mind felt completely normal and experienced a sense of well-being from being in the tranquillity of nature inside Wat Pah Pong. A part of me would continually think that this time is it, I'm going to completely uproot and eradicate the mental defilements, this time I have a good chance.

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<sup>1</sup> A branch monastery of Wat Pah Pong.

<sup>2</sup> He was born on the seventh waning day of the seventh moon, 1918. Using the conventional Gregorian calendar he was born on the sixteenth of June 1918.

For my first meal as *anāgārika* at Wat Pah Pong, I had to put all my food into a white enamelled basin. When I had almost finished my meal there still remained a slice of coconut milk jelly that had been covered in curry sauce. As soon as I put the pudding in my mouth and tasted it I found it to be very unpleasant and immediately spat it out into a spittoon. I cautioned myself, asking, ‘Why didn’t you eat it? In the stomach are there different passages for savoury and sweet food?’ My mind replied ‘No, there isn’t. The stomach has only one passage.’ I further asked myself, ‘Why is it that other people can eat this food and yet I can’t?’ I felt down on myself for having lost to the *kilesas* and immediately made a resolution that from then on if any day I eat food with desire, I will stop and not eat more on that day. As I walked to wash my food basin I was still feeling annoyed at myself for having been defeated by the *kilesas*. I said to myself that I’m going to completely eradicate the defilements from my mind. After I had finished washing my basin and had returned to the meeting hall, a lay disciple of Luang Por Chah came to get me, telling me to go and pay respects to Luang Por and submit myself as a disciple. Once I had bowed to him and offered my tray of candles, incense and flowers, he asked me about my background and what I’d been doing before coming to ordain. He then told me, ‘Make a good job of it! Completely eradicate the defilements from your mind.’ I thought it was strange that I’d only just uttered this sentence to myself when walking to wash my food-basin.

Every day afterwards before eating my meal, both as a lay person and as a monk, I reflected on the food that I was about to eat, to see its intrinsic repulsiveness and seeing that it’s made up of earth, water, air and fire so as to make my mind equanimous and focused. While eating I reflected on the arising and disappearing of the food’s taste as it contacted the taste buds, knowing whether the food was sour, salty or sweet and whether it tasted good or not, further reflecting that once the food goes down the throat it has no flavour at all. If I didn’t have enough time to reflect before

eating the food, I concentrated my mind until it felt equanimous and then mindfully reflected on the food while eating. If I still was not satisfied with the food reflection I would contemplate again after the meal, seeing how all the food that has gone into the stomach is then metabolized by the digestive juices and bodily fire element. Whatever is of benefit to the body is absorbed for nourishment, and what is not is excreted as the earth and water elements. Reflecting in this way made my mind equanimous. I did this practise every day.

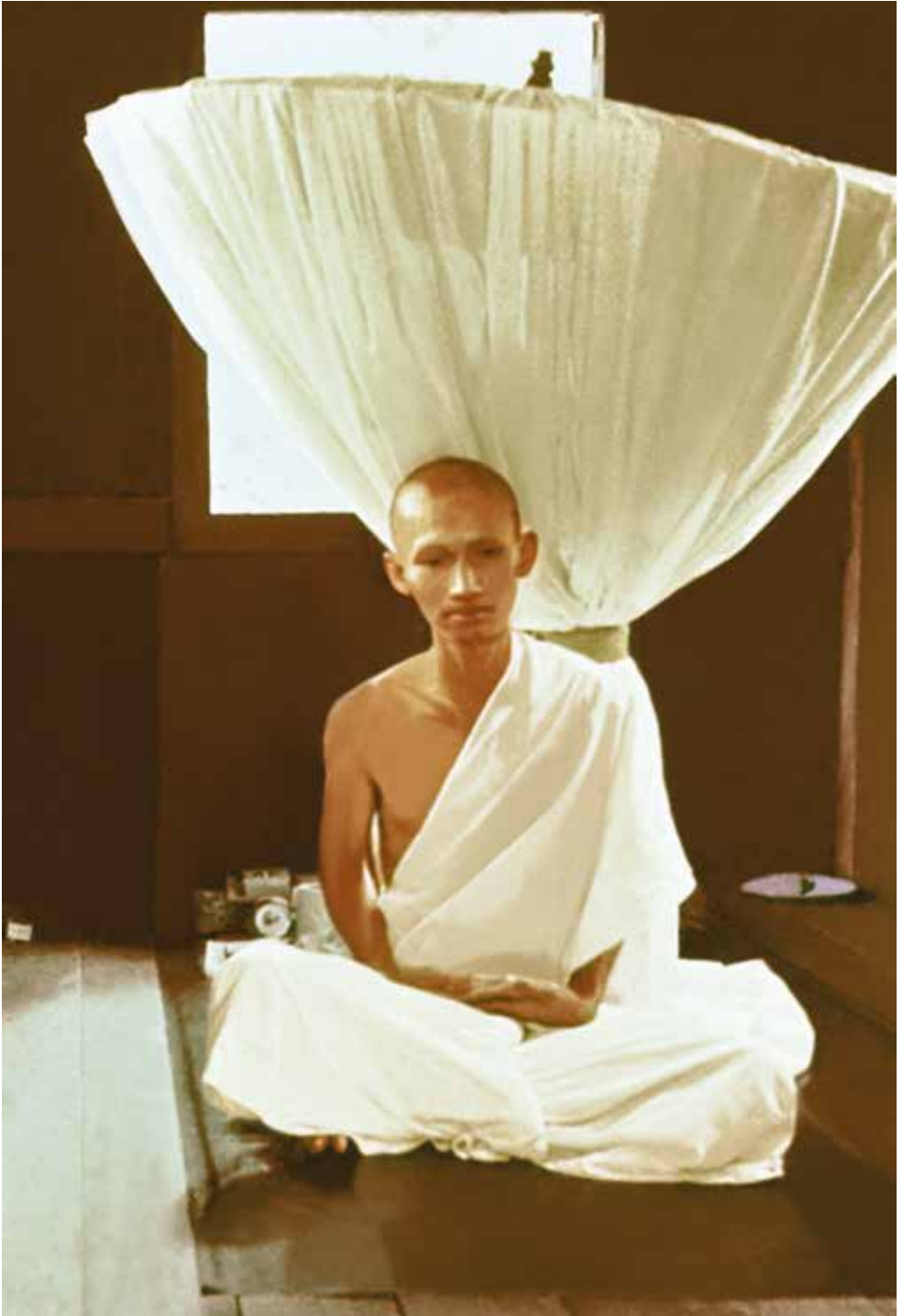
When I first went to live at Wat Pah Pong others kindly gave assistance and made me feel comfortable in many different ways, and this helped to better my understanding of the monastic life. I therefore wish to thank all those Ajahns – I have never forgotten.

My novice ordination took place on the twenty-fourth of June, 1978. I received the *bhikkhu* (monk) higher ordination on the ninth of July, 1978 in the *Uposatha Hall*<sup>1</sup> at Wat Pah Pong, with Venerable Bodhinyana Thera (Luang Por Chah Subhaddo) officiating as preceptor. My *kammavācāriya* instructor was Phra Kru Bodhisaragunawat (Phra Ajahn Boonchoo, Thitaguno) and the *anusāsanacāriya* instructor was Phra Joseph (*Pabhākāro*). My preceptor conferred on me the monk's name of '**Thiracitto**', meaning 'one whose mind is firmly established'.

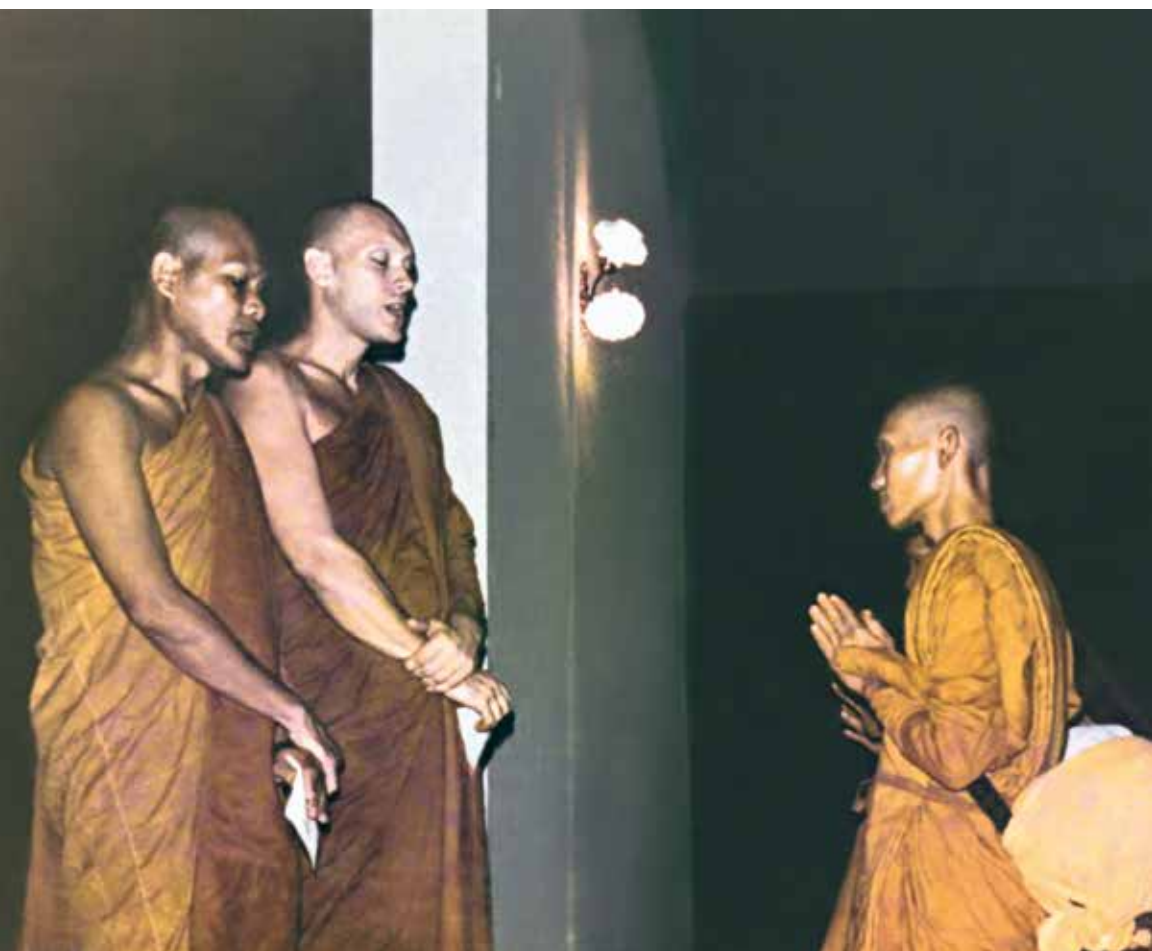


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<sup>1</sup> *Uposatha Hall (Pālī)*: The specially designated building in monastery, in which formal meeting of the *Sangha* and ceremonies such as ordinations and the *Pāṭimokkha* (code of monastic discipline) recitations take place.



Ajahn Dtun as an anāgārika  
on the eighth of June, 1978



Ajahn Dtun's full ordination as a monk on the ninth of July, 1978.

# First Rains Retreat



On the thirteenth of July, 1978, I along with four other monks, were sent to spend the Rains Retreat at Wat Beung Khao Luang in the Khuengnai district of Ubon. The monastery is located on a small hill with many large trees. The forest however isn't dense, but rather more open and airy, and within the monastery there is a marsh. The abbot was Luang Por Jun Indaviro. Before I went to live there I had a vision of a monk walking into a forest, with me walking behind him. It turned out that the monk in the vision was very similar to Luang Por Jun.

With regard to the daily meal, I observed the ascetic practises<sup>1</sup> of eating only once a day from my bowl, and not accepting any late-coming food. The monastery also had a practise of having certain monks act as food distributors to serve the food into all the monks' bowls. If any type of food stirred up strong desire, I wouldn't take it. Whatever foods I really liked I would only accept a small amount or not accept it at all, and any kind of food that I didn't particularly like, then I would take more of it. Once all the food had been served and was in my bowl, if I still felt unsatisfied with how much control I had over my feelings towards it, then I'd mix it all together so that the food was of one flavour. Only then would I eat my food. This I did as a regular practice to go against the grain of my *kilesa* towards food.

One day during the Rains Retreat a lay supporter brought some sticky rice and black bean dessert to offer to the *Sangha*. Before offering the dessert they arranged it into small pudding bowls.

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<sup>1</sup> *Dhutanga* practices: thirteen voluntary ascetic practises.

Only once in a very long time would a dessert like this be offered, and being rather fond of it I took a bowl. Nevertheless, I still emptied it into my alms-bowl before starting the meal. As I reflected on my food before eating the meal, I could sense the desire to eat that particular dessert, so I mixed all the food together in my bowl. When eating the meal everything had the same taste and so I never did get to taste the dessert. After the meal while washing my bowl, I could feel my mind was still craving that dessert – I had wanted to eat it, but hadn't allowed myself to. This craving was eventually expressed through speech when I asked a friend, 'Did you eat the sticky rice and black bean dessert?'

'Yes,' he replied.

'How was it? Was it delicious?'

'Yeah, really good'

Just see how the *kilesa* in the mind writhe and struggle when its desires are put under tight control.

During my first Rains Retreat I'd practice sitting and walking meditation for a combined total of no less than eight to ten hours per day. At night I'd rest for only four hours and not take a rest during the day, except when sick. Every Observance Day<sup>1</sup> I'd observe the *nesajika* practice<sup>2</sup>. As for my dwelling, my practice was to accept whatever *kuṭi*<sup>3</sup> was assigned to me by the *kuṭi* master. Every morning when I woke I would reflect on death (*marañanusati*) by saying to myself, 'So today I'm still alive, I'm still breathing. But at 10 p.m. tonight, when I go to bed, I will die.' Having contemplated death in this way, my mindfulness

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<sup>1</sup> Observance days of the moon: the full, new and half-moon nights, which occur once every seven or eight days.

<sup>2</sup> *Nesajika* is the thirteenth *dhutanga* (austerity) practise of refraining from lying down. In Wat Pah Pong it's practised by putting forth effort throughout the entire night (normally the Observance Day), hence, often referred to as the 'all-night vigil' in English.

<sup>3</sup> *Kuṭi*: a monastery hut or dwelling.



would return to the immediate present and I'd think to myself that today I will exert a great deal of effort in my practice and not be heedless in how I live my life. In each and every posture I would have mindfulness controlling my mind as best as I could, by firmly establishing my awareness in the present and not allowing the mind to think of the past and future. Whenever thoughts of the past arose, I would use my wisdom faculty to reflect on the thoughts and remove them from the mind. When I had thoughts of the future, I would also use my *sati-paññā* (mindfulness and wisdom) to reflect on them and let them go from the mind; having done so my awareness would return to the present. If ever any emotions or thoughts based on greed or aversion, satisfaction or dissatisfaction arose in my mind towards any sights, sounds, odours, flavours or bodily sensation, I would use my *sati-paññā* to reflect on the emotion, so as to discard it from the mind in each and every moment that they arose, with the aim of making the mind centred and equanimous. I always endeavoured to be as mindful as I could, while also attempting to keep constant watch over the mind. Before ordaining I had tried to train myself in mindfulness by attempting to think only wholesome thoughts. If ever my mind had any kind of unwholesome thoughts, I would instantly turn the focus on my breath. By doing this the thoughts would always cease. This method worked really well for me and always gave good results. Once ordained I tried a new approach to focusing mindfulness by trying to still my mind in *samādhi* – that is, I would try to not allow the mind to think regardless of whether the thoughts were good or bad. Instead, I'd concentrate my mind by watching the inhalation and exhalation of my breath and not allow the mind to think about anything. I considered that both good and bad thoughts should be cut off in the attempt of making the mind peaceful. I truly trusted the Buddha when he taught: 'Mindfulness is the only way<sup>1</sup>.'

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<sup>1</sup> A quote of the Buddha. The *Pālī* is '*ekayano ayaṃ maggo*.' Normally translated as 'This is the only way' or 'This is the sole way', implying a path leading straight to its destination (purification).

While living at Beung Khao Luang I worked on developing mindfulness and the constant keeping of a close watch on the mind. When sitting meditation I used the meditation word '*Buddho*': on the inhalation '*Bud -*', on the exhalation '*- dho*'. Initially, I practised solely on stilling the mind and making it peaceful. When doing so *nimittas*<sup>1</sup> would sometimes arise; sometimes I'd observe them and other times not. On the whole I wasn't so interested in them.

While sitting in meditation my mind would be peaceful and I'd experience rapture and feelings of ease. Whenever I broke from sitting meditation I would reflect that what has just passed by is now the past and it is not-self, because whatever arose has now disappeared. I would then focus on maintaining my awareness. When walking in meditation my object was never certain. Sometimes I'd start by focusing on my breath, while at other times I might start by being aware of my feet contacting the ground. When starting with walking meditation, if my mind was thinking a lot I would focus on my breathing, and when the thinking stopped I would return to focusing on my feet.

When I first ordained I realized that the cool, impassive state of mind, where the mind isn't thinking, is the state of being in the present moment. It was noticeable that when in this state the mind felt at ease, there being no worries or suffering present because the mind lets go of all thoughts to be focused in the present. I therefore considered that the correct state of the mind is being in the present moment. Afterwards whenever the mind drifted into thinking about the past or the future, I would always tell myself that letting the mind proliferate about the past or running off with thoughts about the future were surely wrong preoccupations of the mind. As a consequence I always tried to cut off all thoughts about the past or future, only allowing the present to remain,

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<sup>1</sup> Mental images or visions.

with mindfulness focused in the here and now. At first, doing this required a great deal of mindfulness in order to keep abreast of all my thoughts, moods and emotions. Various skilful means came to mind to help set the mind right and keep it in the present. I worked on developing *samādhī* and keeping a constant watch over my mind, until I was able to see the mind as independent from its objects. Midway through the Rains Retreat I understood the meaning of the phrase, ‘One who indulges in the world is deluded by their emotions; one who indulges in their emotions is deluded by the world.’<sup>1</sup> I was able to understand well the meaning of these words once I clearly knew within my own heart the mind and its objects.

If we practice meditation until the mind becomes still and peaceful, the mind will be securely anchored and mindfulness firmly established. You will then be able to see that all thoughts, moods and emotions arise and cease, and shouldn’t be attached to. Rather, you should know them clearly for what they are.



One day the cremation of an elderly woman took place in the monastery. The funeral chanting was at 2 p.m. and the cremation itself started at about 5 p.m. The event made me see how the separation from all that one loves and cherishes is a great source of suffering. I reflected on this with an aim to be as heedful as I possibly could at all times. That evening at about 9 or 10 p.m. I was walking meditation at my *kuṭī*, which was located about 300 metres from the cremation site. While walking I noticed that fear had arisen in my mind when thinking of the cremation site, so I lit a kerosene lantern and walked off by myself to the small hill

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<sup>1</sup> A quote of Luang Por Chah. When speaking of the world he is referring to one’s sensory environment (forms, sounds, odours, flavours and physical sensations), and the corresponding emotions or feelings of liking and disliking that arise on sense contact.

where the site was. I stood at the pyre and watched as it burned the woman's body. All around me I could hear the whistling of the wind as it passed through the tops of the bamboo thickets and fear entered into my mind again. I told myself that I will not return to my *kuṭi* until the fear subsides. I stood there and composed my mind until it became peaceful and then I contemplated the burning body, to see that it's made up of earth, water, air and fire. I then turned the contemplation onto myself to see that I too will be just the same one day. Upon seeing this, my mind temporarily let go of its attachment to the body, and the fear completely disappeared. When I opened my eyes I saw the skull roll down out of the pyre off to the side, and I could clearly see the abdomen and intestines still contained a lot of fluid, making it difficult to burn. I picked up a length of bamboo to push the remains back into the fire. I did this was because I wanted to counter my fear. Once my fear had gone I walked back to my *kuṭi*.

While walking for alms one day in the village of Baan Klaang Yai I noticed a rather attractive woman, and yet when seeing her there was just seeing. As I started to walk away after receiving her alms-food I wondered what would happen if I look at her, because I'd heard it's not good for monks to look at women. I turned around just for a second to have another look at her and in the blink of an eye she turned into a corpse. All I saw was a skeleton with flesh sticking to the bones (being merely elements). I was startled by the sight and quickly turned around, though I did feel satisfied with the *sabhāva-dhamma*<sup>1</sup> that I had witnessed. On the evening of that same day, which happened to be the Observance Day, there was the usual meeting<sup>2</sup> in the meditation

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<sup>1</sup> Condition of nature. Generally refers to reality manifesting as natural states, phenomena, or insights that arise spontaneously in the mind.

<sup>2</sup> On the Observance day the evening meeting normally commences with a period of chanting, followed by a period of sitting meditation. This is then followed by a Dhamma talk and then the all-night vigil – practising meditation until the morning chanting of the following day.

hall. As a rule, I would go to the hall before the scheduled time and sit in meditation until it was time for the chanting. While chanting I closed my eyes, but then opened them to look around to see whether or not a lot of laypeople had come to the meeting. As I looked I was startled to see that all the laypeople and the entire community of monks and novices that had assembled in the hall – with the exception of myself – were corpses that were either rotting or dried up.

Since that day, if ever I thought to focus on anyone they immediately became a corpse. At times when I wasn't doing anything in particular, I would sometimes focus on the other monks and see them in the same way. It was actually quite fun. Seeing things in this way, although strange, was of great benefit to me because it spared me the problem faced by other monks, in that I didn't spend much time thinking about the opposite sex. I felt contented, but I didn't allow myself to be too pleased, because I'd always try to be careful and alert.

When putting forth effort in the practice it's not possible to see immediate results, because we have let our minds run free for who knows how many years – the practice must be gone about steadily. However much one can do, one should be satisfied with that, but one must practise regularly – a large water jar can eventually be filled by individual drops of water.

During the Rains Retreat I was able to look at both humans and animals and automatically see them as corpses. I didn't have to mentally determine this, it happened all by itself for me to see with my actual eyes. Later however, I could make it happen at my own discretion, looking at anyone and viewing them as a corpse. Sometimes I would focus on the laypeople who came to make offerings, or at times look at the other monks and novices to see them all as dried up or rotting corpses. At other times everybody would appear as walking skeletons or in a manner similar to this.

On alms-round I would focus on the monks walking in front of me as being skeletons dressed in tattered robes, and I would determine to see the people offering food as corpses. I did this to the extent that if I ever thought of a female or a friend, a vision of that person would come to mind with their skin and flesh peeling off by layers, until leaving only the bones and then disappearing (this whole process happened in a moment). It was like this every time I thought of someone – it just happened by itself. These visions appeared in my mind until I felt completely repelled by them and nauseated, to the extent that I sometimes thought I would vomit. I stopped determining to see things as *asubha* for a period of time, because physically it was making me feel unwell, while mentally I felt deeply disenchanted. Consequently, I just continued with my normal practice of sitting and walking meditation. Every day after finishing each period of sitting and walking meditation, I would be attentive to maintain constant mindfulness.



Around the month of November, shortly after the end of the Rains Retreat, I continued on with my practice as normal. As I set off on alms-round one morning I was attentively keeping close watch on my mind. When I entered the village for alms I saw all the villagers and animals as corpses, and the entire village – its buildings and objects – appeared derelict. Some of the houses were covered with cobwebs, while others looked ready to fall down. The whole village was in a tumbledown state of disrepair. When looking at any actual object a superimposed image of the same object would appear whereby I would see it as *asubha* in a state of decay. At that moment the entire village with its occupants and animals were seen by the mind as being in a state of degeneration. As I approached the monastery the sight of the wall was superimposed by an image of a collapsed wall, revealing the nature of decay, and when I entered the monastery it was as

if the place had been abandoned. All I did was try to keep my mindfulness firmly established while the spontaneous images and states were manifesting for my mind to witness. I watched with indifference not thinking anything at all, other than exclaiming to myself, ‘What is this? Okay, whatever happens, let it happen – I’m not afraid!’ When I looked down at the pathways, the earth looked as if it were old and green with algae, like they’d never been walked on before. When I looked up at the trees they all appeared to be dried up and dead. For about two days I saw everything in this manner until it began to seem normal. While seeing these *sabhāva-dhammas* of decay and deterioration my mind merely watched the changing phenomena with a cool indifference, without thinking or conceptualizing about anything that was happening.

When I recalled what had happened in the past two days, I wondered why these states arose. I therefore wrote a letter to my father relating the various *sabhāva-dhamma* that had arisen and asked him to pass the letter to Luang Por Chah. The letter would have taken some time to reach him, because back then travelling wasn’t as convenient as it is today. In the meantime I went about my daily practice as normal.

One morning a few days later, I returned to my *kuṭi* after the meal. Once having taken care of my personal business, I started sweeping the veranda floor in preparation for walking meditation. As I did so, I thought of the events over the past few days. At that moment an understanding arose in my heart exclaiming, ‘All that arises, must by its very nature cease.’ In that moment my mind clearly saw the decay and decline inherent in everything. I felt as though my mind had lucidly seen the very nature of these natural phenomena until it acknowledged the truth: ‘All that arises is of the nature to cease.’

It seemed like within a single mind-moment the mind had flipped over. This was due to it understanding the *sabhāva-dhamma* and knowing full well the meaning of what had taken place in the mind. Since that moment I sensed that my heart had been greatly transformed, as if it had been turned over. When looking at any material object the mind knew that it was merely a composition of natural elements. It didn't view anything as being attractive in any way at all.

A friend later brought two umbrella-tents of the same style that he had made himself for me to look at. He asked me which one looked the best. The true feeling in my heart was that neither looked beautiful, they both seemed to be just the same because I was looking at them more deeply, to see that both were only the four elements of nature that had combined to make an object. Nevertheless, I mindfully considered both of them and answered using the conventional understanding that this one or that one looks more beautiful, even though my actual feeling was that nothing appealed as being beautiful. I felt that my own thoughts and feelings were now at complete variance with others'. My mind state when looking at material objects was that in seeing them there was only looking, without there being any feeling of attraction or aversion. I knew that my mind had irrevocably separated from material inanimate form. Despite this, another higher sense of knowing arose within my mind that told me, 'This state can't be taken for certain. Continue to watch it mindfully.'

I thought to myself that this which I have come to know, to see and comprehend clearly is something completely normal. It's the inherent nature of all things, but before now I didn't know this. Once seen and understood one shouldn't deludedly take it up as belonging to oneself, instead one should know things in accordance with their nature and then let them go, without attaching to them as being self. The events that had arisen were



merely *sabhāva-dhammas*; they arose for the mind to see the true nature of things, so that it could release its grasping and attachment to them.



Ever since witnessing and understanding well the state of decline and deterioration, my mind when seeing material forms just sees them without feeling any attraction or aversion, yet I still know whether that object is beautiful or not. Also, at the time of seeing the state of decline and decay I felt there was no distinction between men and women, because when we die everybody is exactly the same – we all decompose and break apart into elements. The disenchantment and weariness that I felt within my heart was so great that my mind no longer wished to do any further contemplation. Since that moment I no longer felt any sexual desire. Even if I were to think about women in any way, it still didn't arise. The desire had disappeared.

Women have normally never been a problem that's created any distress for me since ordaining. Actually, I considered the whole matter to be extremely easy, because my mind held no desire for them, even though the mood still existed. As soon as a thought or mood arose I'd replace it with an *asubha* contemplation, and the mood would disappear. Thus sexual lust has never been a threat to me in any way. When I first ordained, if ever any such thoughts or moods arose they wouldn't last for long, perhaps for three or five minutes before fading away. Later, as I became skilled at contemplating unattractiveness, when any sexual thought or mood began to form I would immediately bring up an *asubha* reflection. In doing so the feelings of pleasure or attraction wouldn't arise. This is why the whole matter has been very easy for me. I reflected on unattractiveness to the extent that even something as small as looking at young boys and girls, if I thought they looked cute, I would still call up an *asubha* image to destroy that feeling.

The moment when my heart witnessed the natural state of decay I experienced the strongest feeling of disenchantment, so I refrained from doing any kind of contemplation. At that time all feelings of sexual desire were absent from my mind, but I didn't wholly believe the situation and thought to myself, 'What is this? I've practised for only three or four months, could sexual lust really be finished? I'm going to keep an eye on this.' When my mind saw that the inherent nature of all material form and substance is to degenerate, it clearly perceived the state of true reality (*vimutti*) and thus understood relative, conventional reality. My mind perceived all forms as being just elements and remained equanimous by having no feelings of attraction or aversion for them. In seeing them, there was just seeing. At the time a clear knowing emerged in my heart that the mind had separated<sup>1</sup> from material inanimate form. This was a totally new understanding for me, something I had never known before. Along with it was a letting go due to my understanding that the *sabhāva-dhammas* I had clearly seen and known in line with the truth, were in their natural state – everything, without exception, comes into existence, remains for a time, and finally ceases before breaking apart.

The mind of an ordinary person however will not acknowledge these conditions as they naturally and truly are, and so they deludedly attach to what has come into existence. They never realize that it's impossible for the conditions that have arisen to endure indefinitely. Everything, including the life of every single person, must ultimately break apart. Attaching and clinging to anything is suffering. If we deludedly attach to anything, it will cause us to suffer. I understood and accepted the insight that I'd just experienced and recognized that it was the intrinsic nature of all things. I therefore let go of the normal understanding and allowed things to be as they are naturally,

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<sup>1</sup> In this instance, separated implies a severing away or freeing oneself from any attachment to material inanimate forms.

without taking the knowledge or the *sabhāva-dhamma* that I had seen to be either my own or ‘self.’

I was confident that my mind had separated from physical inanimate form, as no feelings of attraction or aversion towards such objects arose upon seeing them. In seeing there was just seeing – my mind was indifferent. The mind of any person who accesses this state will understand for themselves the meaning of the words: When seeing there is just seeing. No matter how much I say, anyone who has never experienced this state will be incapable of understanding it. Even if they did understand, it would only be according to their memorized knowledge, but in truth their heart doesn’t see it clearly in accordance with ultimate reality. For those who understand according to what they’ve read or heard, there is no way that the mental defilements can be eradicated because whenever they see forms, the defilements will arise again as attraction and desire. However, the inward state of one who has accessed the true reality of all phenomena as they exist in nature, will not experience any attraction or aversion.

To whatever degree the mental defilements have decreased, happiness will arise to that same degree. This happiness is not happiness as most people understand it to be – this happiness has no suffering concealed within it. What kind of happiness might that be? It’s the happiness that emanates from peacefulness and calmness. The Lord Buddha said there is no happiness greater than peace. So what is the happiness that issues from peacefulness like? This happiness isn’t the kind that arises from the peace and stillness of a concentrated mind – it’s not the rapture and happiness of concentration. Rather, it’s the happiness and bliss that issues forth once the *kilesas* are at peace. As a result, the mind becomes even more peaceful and calm owing to the absence of the *kilesas* which have been reduced by a degree. I say this happiness has no kind of suffering or discontent concealed within it, because in this state of happiness there no longer remains any feeling of

attraction or aversion. This is why the Buddha said there is no happiness greater than peace.

Normally as we practice *samādhi*, once the mind has become concentrated, feelings of happiness and lightness of body will arise. But when we emerge from *samādhi* and the mind receives sensory impressions it will again give rise to feelings of pleasure or displeasure. In this case it could be said that the mind is peaceful, but the *kilesas* are not. With regard to the *kilesas* being peaceful, it still happens within the very same mind, but it now sees in line with the reality of natural phenomena. In doing so the *kilesas* are brought to peace, with there being no feelings of attraction or aversion arising when experiencing sensory impressions.<sup>1</sup>

Deep within my heart no matter how much I believed that my mind had parted from all material inanimate objects, I still didn't allow myself to be complacent and disregard the things that I had abandoned. I kept a vigilant watch over my mind. Ever since the moment my mind saw the true state of conditioned phenomena with its implicit decay, it was as if my mind had been turned over, causing two clear changes within my mind. Firstly, with regard to my feelings of love and affection for other people, these feelings had completely disappeared. I didn't feel love for anyone, my mind felt that there were no men or women – everybody shared the same nature in that they all must decompose and ultimately return to the elements. This was how my mind perceived the reality of things, and so it didn't know why it would want to love any compounded phenomena that's assumed to be 'human' or 'man' or 'woman'. All love and affection was completely severed in that moment. Instead, these feelings were replaced by new feelings, namely, those of *mettā*<sup>2</sup> and compassion towards my

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to material inanimate objects only.

<sup>2</sup> *Mettā* in its true sense is a spiritual love whereby one wishes for others to experience only happiness; while compassion (*karuna*) is the wish for others to be free from suffering.

father, brother, and relatives. I wanted them to know and see as I did, because it would enable them to see things in line with the truth, thus alleviating their suffering. When they meet with separation from one another they wouldn't be saddened or distressed, because such occurrences are perfectly natural, for it is said, 'All that arises must cease. All conditioned things must ultimately decay and break apart.' When hearing or reading these two sentences it should be easy to understand them because they are both very clear, but those who insightfully know like this are the rarest people of all. Now it turns out that my feeling of love has disappeared only to be replaced by feelings of *mettā* and compassion for all people – I want everyone to know and see in accordance with the Buddha.

The second change regards the matter of desire, particularly the desires and wishes of the mind. From the moment that my mind witnessed the degeneration and decay of everything, it no longer felt any attraction or aversion towards any physical inanimate object, because it realized that everything which comes into being must ultimately break apart. I perceived everything as being only the four elements and remained in an equanimous, detached state by not taking pleasure or displeasure in anything at all, because I clearly understood that any kind of wealth or riches – all without exception – are merely elements. Gold or diamonds have no greater significance than pieces of ordinary stone; we have only agreed by consensus that they are 'gold' or 'diamond', but they have no intrinsic value at all, for all things are equal in nature. My mind looked upon everything, including all kinds of riches and wealth, as being worthless, possessing absolutely no true essence or meaning. They are all one and the same. As a consequence, the feeling of desire within my heart had decreased, leaving only the feeling of just wanting to make use of things as a support in my quest for the way to not take birth again. Within my heart there no longer remains the desire to obtain any fine or beautiful objects for my possession.



About two weeks after sending the letter to my father for him to take to Luang Por Chah, he came with a group of my relatives to visit me at Wat Beung Khao Luang. I hadn't seen my relatives for some time and so we all got involved in conversation. My father related how he took my letter to Luang Por and that Luang Por had him read the letter out for him to listen to. My father made a tape recording of Luang Por's response for me to listen to on a later date. He turned on the tape recording for me to listen to. Having listened to my father read the letter, Luang Por answered, 'This is his wholesome supportive conditioning from developing the spiritual perfections<sup>1</sup> in former lives. This birth will be his last.' Then he continued to speak on Dhamma of different kinds for a short time. After listening to his answer I didn't become self-important or forget who I was. I said to all my relatives who were gathered that what Luang Por has just said might be true, but then again it might not be. If I don't practise then it might not be as he said; if I do practise and don't become discouraged along the way, then it's possible it might be as he said. It all depends on me.

Before returning home, my father asked if I wanted to keep the tape<sup>2</sup>, but I declined and told him to take it with him. At that time I was quite focused on my meditation practice and had no interest in keeping hold of anything that I considered to be superfluous. Also, before I received Luang Por Chah's reply I had already obtained the answer from my own practice and understood all the questions and doubts that I'd had.

About a month and a half afterwards I noticed sexual feelings – a feeling that I thought had disappeared – began to reappear.

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<sup>1</sup> Ten spiritual perfections (*pāramī*) cultivated as a support for realizing enlightenment: 1) generosity, 2) morality, 3) renunciation, 4) wisdom, 5) effort, 6) patient endurance, 7) truthfulness – being true to one's word, 8) resolution, 9) loving-kindness 10) equanimity

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, a relative later recorded over this (believing it to be a blank tape) with Thai pop music.

During that month and a half I didn't do any *asubha* contemplation at all, and this neglect proved to be completely wrong. I'd been practising as usual, but I didn't continue with any contemplation of *asubha* because I didn't receive any guidance from anyone telling me to. But then I also hadn't related my experience to anyone. At the time I just went on with my practice and maintained a vigilant watch over my mind as normal. It was by mindfully keeping a continual watch on my mind that I saw these feelings hadn't truly come to an end, so I wasn't wrong, it was just as I had expected. I wasn't surprised or disappointed by their reappearance and so did not take it to be a big deal; I just continued on with heedfulness, hence my mind felt normal. The new feelings of attraction and aversion manifested only as taking pleasure or satisfaction with bodily forms, without there being any lust involved. I therefore knew that these feelings had still not been severed completely. I thought to myself, why is it that this has not been severed while all attraction and aversion towards material inanimate objects has been, with there being no need to contemplate them anymore. When I considered the situation I discovered that the reason sexual lust hadn't been completely severed was because in my previous contemplations of the body I had only seen the reality of external animate objects – I had seen humans and animals as foul and unattractive, but I had not yet seen this same quality as being present in my own body. Also, I realized that the reason these feelings had been absent wasn't due to any inexplicable cause, it was because I had regularly focused on contemplating *asubha* externally – the bodies of other people – to the extent that my mind felt a deep revulsion and disenchantment towards the body that caused physical nausea, hence discontinuing the practice.

Feelings of revulsion or aversion – in other words, dislike or hate – are incorrect mental states. They are incorrect because when strong revulsion arises, all feelings of attraction will be suspended

for a period of time, lasting as long as it takes for the revulsion to wane and allow feelings of attraction to reappear again in the mind. By keeping a vigilant watch on my mind, I was able to discover that the only reason lust was no longer present, was because feelings of revulsion were obscuring it. The feelings hadn't truly gone. As for material objects however, my mind still continued to view them all with indifference – it simply saw them. I further reflected that with inanimate material objects, when my mind saw their deterioration and dissolution in accordance with the truth, it was easily able to totally uproot its attachment and clinging to those objects because they are lifeless. With the human body it's quite different. I've attached and identified with the body for who knows how many life times. Only seeing the decay and dissolution of bodies external to me didn't enable sexual lust to be cut away, it only weakened the emotion, because I hadn't yet seen my own body with sufficient clarity. When I realized that this emotion still wasn't completely gone, I thought to myself that from then on I must turn and pay attention to contemplating the foulness of my own body too.

When I first ordained I would contemplate on the elderly and sick whenever I saw them on alms-round. But these reflections only saw the impermanence of other peoples' bodies – the external bodies. I later changed my practice – having contemplated the external body I would turn the contemplation onto myself to see the nature of my own body, the internal body. When seeing elderly people or reflecting on the unattractiveness of other peoples' bodies, I would then turn the focus onto my own body and sometimes reflect that I too must age and die, or at other times seeing the inherent foulness of my own body. When I first tried doing this I found it extremely difficult because contemplating one's own body is by far the hardest of all. Also prior to this, I had been doing very little in the way of body contemplation.



Later I read a book on the *Girimāndana Sutta*<sup>1</sup> which served to increase my confidence in the correctness of my own course of practice – it definitely wasn't wrong. The essence of the book was as follows:

*'Anyone who wishes to perfect the perception on the unattractiveness of the body must contemplate the asubha nature of one's own body' and 'Whoever cultivates the perception on the unattractiveness of the body and sees the inherent unattractiveness of one's own body will realize nibbāna.'*

Sometime later I reflected that this teaching which has been passed down isn't entirely correct. I thought of the Buddha's own words in the *Kālāma Sutta* when he said, 'Be not led by the authority of texts that have been passed down to you. Instead, one should consider things and know with discernment for oneself.' I further considered with regards to the contemplation on the unattractiveness of the body, if anyone cultivates this perception and sees it within their own body, to the extent that their spiritual faculties become strengthened and sufficiently matured for the Noble Path, then they will experience the complete and irrevocable letting go of all attachment towards one's own body, the bodies of others, and all material objects. All doubts are finished as to the nature of the body. All that remains of the *kilesa* is the mind's subtle delusion<sup>2</sup>.

When contemplating *asubha*, one may choose to reflect on any one part of the body until it is seen with clarity. This will also take one to the very end of body contemplation. Or, one might contemplate all the different body parts to see their impermanence

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<sup>1</sup> The *Girimāndana Sutta* describes ten perceptions (or themes of contemplation) which the Buddha instructed Ven. *Ānanda* (his personal attendant) to recite in order to restore the health of the Bhikkhu *Girimāndana* who was afflicted with a grave illness.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the mind of one attained to the level of *anāgāmi*, the non-returner, and not that of the *arahant* (fully enlightened being) as stated in the sutta.

and absence of self. Alternatively, one might reflect on each part to see it is completely devoid of self. I thought that anything whatsoever that I have seen or understood must be used as a tool when contemplating the body in ever greater detail.



During my six month stay (July to December, 1978) at Wat Beung Khao Luang my practice went very well. I tried to keep a constant watch over my mind. If ever there was any suffering or discontent present, then I considered that I had taken a wrong perspective or attitude towards something. Within my mind I would immediately work to resolve this by finding a means that was abreast of the situation and not to allow any further suffering or negative mental states to arise. I always tried as much as I could to keep the mind in the present moment, because I considered being in the present a good mental state that has little suffering. If ever I thought about the past or future I would reflect in ways that would bring the mind back into the present. The different means and methods that I employed to adjust the mind were many in number. I considered that if ever my mind began to experience any suffering, then I had applied the mind incorrectly. I would then reflect so as to adjust the mind and bring it back to normality – being in the present moment. Then I would concentrate the mind and be free from all worries and concerns.

During that six months whenever I sat in meditation, I paid little attention to the different images or rapture that would arise. When I finished sitting meditation I could cut off all the experiences and view them as past, never taking any of them to be my own or the product of a self. I always tried to have mindfulness present and knowing.

Around the twentieth of January, 1979, I returned to Wat Pah Pong. In early February, Wat Pah Pong was making preparations for a ceremony to cast a Buddha statue, to be enshrined as the principal

image in the *Uposatha Hall*. The event was held on the thirteenth of February, 1979, the day of *Māgha Puja*.

At that time there were frequent invitations for groups of monks to have the meal in laypeople's houses. Whenever I went on these invitations I'd focus my mind to make it peaceful and then reflect to see the deterioration of everything. When I closed my eyes to concentrate I'd determine to see the other monks or the laypeople as *asubha*, corpses or skeletons that could be in whatever stage of decomposition that I determined. I became proficient at focusing on other people and changing them as I willed, but as soon as I turned the reflection back onto myself I wouldn't see myself as clearly. Maybe it was due to being new at contemplating my own body as *asubha*. Nevertheless, I didn't let this discourage me. Each time I went on such invitations I would practise like this, contemplating both the other people and myself.

When going on alms-round, if my mind remained indifferent when seeing women then I wouldn't reflect on them, but any time when the mind began to move from its place of neutrality, I would counter the emotion by immediately calling up the perception of unattractiveness. In an instant my mind would be sobered and overcome with disenchantment, and all feelings of attraction would disappear. When I saw a woman and felt she was good looking, upon recognizing this my mind would instantly deal with the emotion. That's how I practised until it became an expertise. I considered attraction to be wrong because it's not neutral or balanced. Therefore, whenever attraction arose, I would reflect to make the mind move to its opposite. My belief was that by disillusioning the mind it would bring it back to the centre again and leave it to rest equanimously.

At this point I ask to make a small insertion. I almost forgot to mention that the *Kathina*<sup>1</sup> ceremony at Wat Beung Khao Luang was

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<sup>1</sup> A robe offering ceremony held in the month following the end of the Rains Retreat.

attended by many monks coming from other branch monasteries. Dhamma talks were given throughout the entire night and I listened to the talks given by two or three monks. I don't know what kind of person I am, but my feeling and understanding was that the monks were speaking from what they had read and weren't truly speaking from their hearts. They spoke of things that they can't yet do or haven't yet reached. How can they dare to teach others things that they themselves still can't do? Are they confident that they are not teaching anything that's incorrect? If they teach something incorrectly and a listener relates the teaching to others, then they will all misunderstand. I thought how can someone who isn't yet capable of swimming to the further shore teach others to do so? Before long they'll all drown. He should first learn to swim, and then swim to the other shore himself – then he can teach others. After listening to a few monks speak on the Dhamma I went to take a rest. Ever since then I've never really enjoyed listening to the Dhamma talks of others. If I sense there's something amiss about a talk I lose interest and don't listen. This is in no way a good trait of mine! When I returned to my *kuti* that evening, I reflected on the matter of teaching other people and I solemnly promised myself:

Firstly, as long as I haven't finished the practice (transcended all suffering), I will not take on the position of an abbot or teach anyone who isn't related or very familiar to me, because I don't want to teach others anything that might be wrong or instruct them on things that I can't yet do.

Secondly, I absolutely will not establish a monastery if I haven't yet gone beyond all suffering. Instead, I will live in the forest, or ask to live and die quietly in a monastery. This was my thinking at the time.

In March of the same year I read a small book by Luang Pu Tate (Thesarangsī) on the four *satipaṭṭhāna*<sup>1</sup>. Having read it I was left feeling extremely confident, because my own style of practice was suited to this teaching. I fully understood what I had read, because not long before doing so I had thought to practise in that way, without having ever read anything on this topic before. Therefore, I felt pleased while reading it because it was just how I was practising. I began to try a new approach to concentrating the mind (at least new for me) by calming it through body contemplation. Normally, I had used the meditation word ‘*Buddho*’ in coordination with the in-and-out breath as my meditation object. When I tried using body contemplation I found my mind easily became peaceful. While contemplating, the mind would experience a sobering disenchantment towards the body, which would then transform into a feeling of joy and rapture and then with ease the mind would settle and unify in *samādhi*. When I returned again to using ‘*Buddho*’ my mind also unified in concentration. The mental calm and stillness obtained from both approaches was similar. In my meditation practice I tried alternating between ‘*Buddho*’ and body contemplation, and found both achieved good states of peace. Nevertheless, a doubt arose as to which was the better technique.



At five in the evening on around the twenty-seventh of March, 1979 (which was the new moon Observance Day), I’d just finished bathing and sat in meditation using ‘*Buddho*’ as my object. Once the mind became calm and still, I withdrew it from this state to try contemplating the unattractiveness of my own body, and my mind became peaceful and unified in concentration once

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<sup>1</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna*: The foundations or establishments of mindfulness, the objects or spheres to which mindfulness is directed so as to develop concentration and wisdom: the contemplation of; 1) The body (*kaya*), 2) feelings (*vedana*), 3) states of mind (*citta*), and 4) phenomena or mental objects (*dhamma*).

again. I continued to alternate between the two until the same doubt returned. I wanted to choose just one object of meditation. I sat in meditation until 6 p.m. and then went down to walk in meditation beside my *kuṭi*. As I walked down the stairs of my *kuṭi* and approached the walking path I kept on thinking, ‘How will I know which method of calming the mind is most suited to my temperament?’ I asked myself over and over again until I stopped and stood at the start of my walking meditation path. Once again I thought, ‘How will I know which object of meditation is suited to my temperament?’ I closed my eyes and instantly an *asubha* image came to mind. The image of a dried up and darkened male corpse appeared to the left of my forehead. I focused on it for a short time before silently uttering, ‘What is this, am I just thinking this up or not?’ The image had taken me by surprise. I opened my eyes and started to walk in meditation. I don’t know what I was thinking, but by the time I was midway along the path I stopped due to doubting whether the image was true or not. I closed my eyes again and silently made a resolution, ‘Supposing that I truly have merit and spiritual potential and these visions are true, if I’m to transcend all suffering in this life time, then may the meditation object that is most suited to my temperament become apparent.’

When I finished making the resolution something out of the ordinary happened. The first image of the male corpse came back and was placed to the left of my mental screen. The corpse was dried out, but still had flesh. Then a second image manifested clearly. It was of two skeletons located at the centre of my mental screen. One skeleton of a man seemed to be in complete and perfect condition. The second skeleton, which wasn’t in good condition, lay on top of the male skeleton with its head resting on the male’s chest. A feeling told me this was a female skeleton. I focused on the image for a short time and then opened my eyes. I wondered about what I had seen and asked myself, ‘Hey, what is this? What’s happening? Why is it like this? Am I just making this up or not?’ Even though I saw the images twice I still didn’t

trust myself. I wondered what was happening. I opened my eyes and continued to walk in meditation. When I reached the end of the path I stopped. I stood there and asked myself whether what I had just seen were visual illusions or not. In order to be sure of myself, I firmly established my mindfulness so as to prevent all possibility of making it up myself and made a second resolution: ‘If these phenomena are true and I really have the merit and spiritual potential to attain full enlightenment in this life, then may the theme of meditation that is most suited for me present itself.’

The instant I finished making the second resolution both the dried up male corpse and the image of the two skeletons reappeared just as they had before. A third image then manifested, just off to the right of my mental screen. This time it was a rotting and bloated naked female corpse. At first the image wasn’t very distinct and so I focused on it for a while until it became clearer. It seemed to be so bloated that its chest wasn’t discernable as that of a female because the stomach had swollen to the same height as the chest. I focused intently on the image and threw a stone onto the corpse’s chest. The stone sank into it in a way no different from throwing a stone into mud. I could then see its shape and form clearly; it was lying on its back and had long hair. After focusing on the image for a while I opened my eyes and thought of the three images that I had seen at the start, the middle and the end of my meditation path. I thought to myself, are these three visions really the truth? I wanted to be completely certain as to whether or not they truly arose on account of my resolution. I was still standing at the end of my meditation path and decided to turn around. For a further time I consciously established my mindfulness for I wanted to verify whether or not the realities that had manifested were actually the truth, so for a third and final time I made another resolution: ‘May the spiritual perfection of the Lord Buddha be my supreme support. If these three phenomena I have experienced are the truth, and if I have sufficient spiritual

potential to attain full enlightenment in this very life, then may I have some kind of experience as verification during the *Pāṭimokkha*<sup>1</sup> tonight.’

When I finished making the resolution I concentrated my mind by continuing walking in meditation, until hearing the 7 p.m. bell signalling the monks to the *Pāṭimokkha*. At the time I didn’t know how I could have made these resolutions because I’d never made resolutions of this kind before, nor had anyone ever suggested that I do so – the volition arose spontaneously. Once I continued with walking meditation I didn’t think anything more about it. I actually forgot all about the matter because I’d directed my mind to cut off all thoughts and emotions, so as to concentrate the mind and keep it in the present moment. When I heard the bell, I prepared myself and walked to the *Uposatha Hall* to attend the *Pāṭimokkha*. At about 7.30 p.m. Luang Por Chah began leading the community of monks in the preliminary chanting. As soon as he did I closed my eyes and joined in. A few moments later, something completely unexpected began to happen. It felt as though pus was trickling out from my entire body and was soiling my robe. It seemed as if the pus was going to drip from my body onto the floor of the hall, so I opened my eyes thinking to find a way to prevent the floor from being soiled. It was only when I opened my eyes that I could see contrary to what I was feeling, there was no pus to be found seeping from anywhere – though at that time I really believed that it was oozing out of my body. What I experienced were merely feelings. When I closed my eyes again to continue with the chanting I again felt that pus was flowing out from my body, and so I opened my eyes only to find that it wasn’t. I closed my eyes once again, but this time thought to survey myself. I had the impression that my body was rotting with pus flowing from it. At times I focused my attention on the feeling, while at other times I didn’t due to my not being overly interested. While

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<sup>1</sup> The fortnightly recitation of the 227 training rules observed by a monk.



chanting, if I turned my attention I would always see my body rotting with pus oozing from it. When the chanting finished all these phenomena disappeared.

After the preliminary chanting, the *Pāṭimokkha* was recited. I sat and listened with my hands in anjali. I wondered why it was that I should experience such feelings during the chanting, for I had completely forgotten about the resolution I had made. I pondered on this until realizing that it was probably due to the resolution I had made earlier in the evening: ‘May I have some kind of experience at tonight’s *Pāṭimokkha* so as to be a verification of the phenomena I have experienced.’ It turned out that a fourth event really did take place at the *Uposatha Hall*. Ever since then, I’ve been confident that *asubha-kammaṭṭhāna* was the meditation object most suited to me and that contemplating the body was the correct way to practice. In my heart I didn’t take great pride in the outcome of my resolution, nor was I as excited by the occurrence as I should have been. If I were a lay person I would probably be so excited that I would forget myself. The events only made me more confident and certain as to *asubha* being my appropriate meditation object. I no longer held any doubts about practising *asubha*.

The reason I didn’t feel excited or take pride in the events that had taken place, was because regardless of whether or not these phenomena were true, the conditions of the resolutions were still a long way off in the future, and I shouldn’t feel pleased about events that have yet to come. Even if they were true, if I were to stop putting forth effort in my practice then how could they come about? For this reason, owing to the fact that the future is still yet to come, I shouldn’t hold to any expectations or think too much about it. I should just press forward with my practice. The most correct thing to do would be for me to be solely in the present as best I can. It doesn’t matter what the future might hold if I’ve already given my best effort now.

Since then I turned to contemplating the body as *asubha* as a means to enter *samādhi*. Once the mind saw this it would become soberly disenchanted and let go of its grasp on the body to unify in concentration. At other times I would focus solely on the mind, without watching the breath, so as to make it peaceful. I would be aware of whatever thoughts arose and reflect on the fleetingness of the thoughts until the mind was stilled. I would alternate these two approaches – contemplating *asubha* and watching the mind – as a means of entering *samādhi*.



One day in early April I went with a group of monks to take the meal in a lay person's home. While there I practised looking at both the monks and laypeople as being *asubha*. Sometimes while at Wat Pah Pong when my mind became peaceful during walking meditation, I would feel that my body was involuntarily transforming into a walking corpse, and I would just mindfully watch this taking place. Even though I would see natural phenomena such as this, I still wasn't very skilled at contemplating them.

On the thirteenth of April, 1979, being the day of Songkran<sup>1</sup>, the municipality of Warin Chamraap invited monks from many monasteries to receive alms-food at the municipal sports ground. The making of merit by offering alms-food to monks and novices is a beautiful tradition of the Thai people. A large number of monks and laypeople had gathered at the grounds to participate in the ceremony. All the monks sat together in a pavilion and waited for the alms-giving to commence. I looked around at the large gathering of laypeople who had come to participate and saw that they were comprised of both adults and children. A feeling of pride in the Lord Buddha's dispensation arose in my heart. I felt

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<sup>1</sup> Songkran Day is the traditional Thai New year celebration.

gratified and comforted in seeing the great faith we Thai people have in Buddhism. As I viewed the laypeople I was also looking at the state of my own mind and wondered why it was that when I saw people, feelings of pleasure and displeasure arose. No sexual lust arose, that is true, but the mind still fell on either side of pleasure and displeasure. I reflected that this condition of mind is biased and incorrect. The correct attitude for the mind to hold is one of neither pleasure nor displeasure. The mind must be in the centre. I then closed my eyes and made my mind calm and still in concentration. I envisioned all the people in front of me and asked myself what is the true condition of these people. My vision of these people began to change, and I saw all the tables of food gradually disintegrating and breaking apart, while the entire crowd of people turned into rotting or dried corpses.

I further asked myself what is the final end for all these things. The *nimitta* then changed again. All those people disintegrated until they became piles of earth on the ground. Everyone turned completely into the elements of earth, water, air and fire. Even all of the material objects in that area broke apart into the elements. The wall surrounding the sports ground appeared to disintegrate and a breeze blew through the grounds making me see that there was absolutely nothing there – no more people or material objects, just the presence of emptiness. All that appeared to remain was the ground with a dusty wind blowing.

Upon seeing this I asked myself, ‘What was the original constructed state like?’ Instantly, the elements reunified to become a crowd of people again, with all the tables and other material objects returning to their former state. When I withdrew from concentration and opened my eyes to see the crowds of people again, my mind felt completely indifferent and equanimous. This was quite unlike when I first arrived, because my mind no longer held any feelings of pleasure or displeasure towards the people I was looking at. The mind was bright and buoyant while

also being composed and neutral. In my heart I sensed that the state of absolute mental purity must be like this – experiencing neither attraction or aversion. When the time came to receive alms it seemed as though I was walking with my bowl, but there were no people there.

Around the twenty-sixth of April, 1979, I travelled to Bangkok with two other monks for a meal invitation. After the meal we had some free time so my two friends invited me to go see an autopsy at the Siriraj Hospital. On that particular day there were three autopsies: two men and one woman. The female corpse had died two or three days before and the body had bloated slightly. While contemplating her corpse I felt surprised because it seemed that I had seen this corpse before. I then remembered that this corpse was similar to the one I saw in March when I made a resolution. The bodily characteristics of this corpse were very similar to those in the *nimitta*, the only difference being that this corpse had decayed less than in the *nimitta*. If the fresh corpse were more rotten it would have been the same. I felt quite normal and experienced no fear or excitement as I watched the hospital staff perform the autopsies. I actually felt indifferent. Because I frequently had vivid *asubha nimittas*, what I was seeing all seemed rather dry and unimpressive, very ordinary really. I thought it couldn't beat the *asubha* visions that I'd been having. My heart, however, felt quite different when I left the autopsy room, for it felt extremely powerful and everything appeared to be empty. When I left the hospital the streets outside were filled with people, cars and buildings, but strangely, I wanted to walk right through all of them. I didn't want to alter my course for anything because it seemed there was absolutely nothing in my way. Nevertheless, I established and maintained my mindfulness for the three or four hours that things remained like this. The natural phenomenon which manifested showed that the mind was seeing the elemental nature of all things and penetrating through their emptiness until becoming the space element.

While the three of us were staying at a *Sangha* dwelling in the grounds of a lay person's home, I experienced some strange feelings towards the lay visitors that came to chat with us. I perceived the people to be lumps of something that had been placed there. They all looked the same with sound coming from them when they spoke. Their bodies appeared to be mere heaps of elements. Involuntarily, my mind began to change slowly –from seeing the seated laypeople and their different sized bodies as heaps of elements, to seeing them as all being the same size in every way. It was as if the bodies of all the visitors who came to talk to us were lifeless, just lumps of elements. At that time I found people to be so tiresome. I only wanted to return to the monastery. All the different phenomena that I had experienced can only be experienced for oneself, that's for certain, because they arise of their own accord.

Soon after, I travelled to Wat Beunglatthiwan in Ayutthaya for two or three days before returning to Wat Pah Pong. One evening rain was lightly falling. At about 6 p.m. the bell rang, calling the monks to the evening meeting. When I arrived at the meeting hall there were still hardly any monks there so I sat in meditation waiting for the meeting to start. After sitting for a short time my mind unified in concentration and a *nimitta* arose. I saw my body begin to change with my flesh being blended with gold. Recognizing this as a *nimitta* I paid it no attention, and I thought to myself that I have to get past it. I therefore withdrew my mind from concentration and tried refocusing it. Again I got stuck in the same place and it seemed as if my body, arms and legs had turned completely into gold without a trace of any normal flesh. I didn't want to give any attention to the vision and so again I withdrew from concentration. I applied my mind to another attempt and it gathered again in concentration. This time it appeared that my whole seated body was shining gold. I focused on the vision because it wouldn't go away. My entire body was golden – all shining and lustrous. There was even a golden flame

on the top of my head, just like on a Buddha statue. I watched the image for a short time before withdrawing from *samādhi*. As I did I heard the bell to start the evening meeting. A large number of monks and novices had assembled in the hall and were beginning the evening chanting. Once having withdrawn from *samādhi*, I considered the phenomena that had just arisen and saw that they came into being only to pass away. The visions had no self-entity and should not be clung to as having such. I established mindfulness and gave no more attention to the phenomena that had arisen until about two weeks after arriving back at Wat Pah Pong. Some days when I focused attention on the body I would see my whole body as being made of gold. Regardless of whether I was walking, standing, lying or sitting in meditation my body would always appear to be golden. When I walked it seemed as if I was a walking Buddha statue, and when I sat in meditation I was like a statue of the Buddha seated in meditation. Sometimes I focused on this perception and at other times not, but it remained like that for about a month and a half from mid-May to late June. I just couldn't see of what benefit these visions could have, so I paid them no attention.

Sometime in early July, 1979, I was practising walking meditation on the veranda of my *kuṭi*. Once my mind became peaceful it seemed that my body was going through a gradual transformation of aging, until I became almost eighty years old, and then changed further to leave only bones that were walking. My *kuṭi* and bones then broke apart and disintegrated. I simply established mindfulness and casually watched this *sabhāva-dhamma*. Some days while at my *kuṭi* I would practise meditation in the lying posture. At times I would have visions of forests, mountains and fields of corn. It really felt as if I entered that environment and the weather was cool and comfortable. However when I withdrew from *samādhi*, I paid no attention to the images.



## Concluding my first year

I tried as much as I could to always keep the mind in the present, until I became quite familiar with the state of mind that has separated from its thoughts and emotions. My *asubha* practice also progressed rather smoothly and effortlessly. In my practice I focused on remedying any suffering right at the mind itself. If ever there was suffering present, I would try to find a means to correct it as quickly as possible. Women were not a major problem for me at all; this matter has been rather easy with no need for me to be concerned, although I wasn't careless. I tried to maintain mindful awareness as much as I could because I believe, 'Mindfulness is the only way.' When I practised sitting meditation, if ever a *sabhāva-dhamma* arose as a result of the mind being peaceful, when I withdrew from concentration I would reflect to see that what had arisen was merely a natural condition; it arose and ceased and was without self-entity, because it was now in the past. After I finished contemplating this I returned my awareness to the present moment. This is how I practised.

When practising *samādhi*, if any *sabhāva-dhamma* or the effects of one arose, then once I'd withdrawn from concentration and returned to being with the present moment, I would see what kind of effects these *sabhāva-dhammas* had. When contemplating them I gave greatest importance to their immediate effect. If any kind of natural phenomena arose while sitting in meditation which, when having withdrawn from the state of concentration, led to feelings of disenchantment, a loosening of the attachment to self, to a weakening of sexual lust, to dispassion, to a subsiding of greed, aversion and delusion, then I considered the phenomena to be correct. If however any natural phenomena arose while sitting in meditation, and when having withdrawn from that state and returning to normal consciousness, did not lead to feelings of dispassion or disenchantment towards my body, nor did they bring

about a weakening of the attachment and identification with the body as being oneself, then I would consider them to be wrong. I wouldn't pay any attention to such phenomena that didn't cause disenchantment, because if I did, instead of weakening my attachment it might actually delude and misguide me.

There were many different incidents and natural conditions of Dhamma that I experienced, but have not related here because I feel they are not very important, while there are others that I've mentioned without going into much detail. Sometimes when I sat in meditation I'd experience rapture which would be followed by a whole variety of conditions, but I paid no attention to them. Occasionally when I sat in meditation my body would feel cool and light and my heart would feel cool and peaceful. It happened frequently that it felt as though my body was expanding until finally all my flesh dissolved into the air, to leave only a state of emptiness endowed with knowing. On occasion I saw statues of the Buddha and all kinds of other things. When I withdrew from *samādhi*, if I felt that the phenomena didn't cause the arising of dispassion and disenchantment towards my body, then I wouldn't give them my attention.

While living at Wat Pah Pong I had many *asubha nimittas* arising in my practice. When they arose I'd contemplate the external *nimitta* of another person's body, and then internalize it by reflecting on my own body, to see it in the same state as the *nimitta*. Doing so made my mind calm and peaceful, and it would unify in concentration. When the mind withdrew from the state of concentration I saw that practising in this way gave rise to disenchantment, to dispassion, and weakened my attachment and identification towards my own body. To some extent it also helped diminish certain conceited views and opinions. I therefore considered it to be a correct approach to the practice and so I tried to contemplate the body frequently.



When visions arise, one must not deludedly take them seriously as being products of a self. They should be considered as merely visions and are only an aid or an instrument for one's use. Recognizing this, one should then let them go, because *nimittas* can corrupt and obscure one's discernment and be an obstacle to the development of insight.

During my first year the practice progressed easily, smoothly and quickly without any difficulties arising. My heart always felt good with a sense of ease as I joyously went about the practice and life of a monk. When ordaining as a monk it's as if you separate yourself from or live in a different world than laypeople, but it does require a fair amount of patience and endurance. I attained peacefulness from the Dhamma that I had seen and experienced in my heart, which became a source of happiness for me instead of the kind found in the world. Sometimes while doing walking meditation I'd reflect on the state of my life as a monk and feel that it's almost beyond belief that I have been so fortunate. I didn't know how I managed to slip loose from the world and make it here – I was now living in a safe environment. I thought how sad it was that the vast majority of people remain unaware, still indulging and taking pleasure in the things they consider to be the best or most desirable, by indulging in the pleasures of the five senses, even though death is creeping up on them from behind. I truly felt sorry for them.



### **My personal training guidelines:**

Give careful consideration to food.

Do not indulge in sleeping.

Don't be neglectful of putting forth effort.

Do not forget to be mindful while speaking.

## Common personal reminders:

Don't be deluded by whatever arises.

Impermanence: everything is uncertain.

Give care and attention to everything you do.

Don't boast, because it's a defilement.

Don't be conceited or overbearing, because other people will not like what they hear.

Don't find fault with others, because it's not my duty to do so. My wish is to cleanse my own heart.

Know moderation in all things (The Middle Way).

When putting forth effort don't give sole importance to the mind. You must also take the body into account.

If I gain insight into things that I never knew, they must be used as a tool for furthering and deepening contemplation. But they shouldn't be held to as being the truth.

I asked to spend the next Rains Retreat at Wat Pah Nohn Sawan. On the eighth of July, 1979, I travelled there from Wat Pah Pong, arriving at about 6 p.m. When I went out on alms-round the following morning, I felt that a vision I'd previously had turned out to be this place, namely the town of Nam Yeun.



# Second Rains Retreat

Wat Pah Nohn Sawan, Si Wichian, Ubon



The thirteenth of July, 1979, was the day of entering the annual Rains Retreat. The monastery was approximately 74 acres in size and had a good amount of shaded forest, well suited to meditation practice with cool and comfortable weather. It's located on a small knoll two kilometres away from the municipality of Nam Yeun. There were five monks and two novices resident for the retreat. The abbot was Venerable Ajahn Nudaeng (Dhammadipo). I spent approximately four months there, from July to October.

During the retreat there was quite a lot of manual work to do with making paths in the monastery and digging earth to fill in an area to build a toilet block. The work lasted for nearly the full duration of the retreat. Because of all the work, I wasn't able to give full effort to my meditation practice. At times I felt physically weak and exhausted which caused my practice of sitting meditation to suffer – sometimes it was good and other times not, sometimes peaceful and other times not. I reflected as to why I felt pleased when my sitting meditation was peaceful and displeased when it wasn't. I was sure it was wrong to feel this way. Around the middle of the retreat I tried to not allow myself to feel satisfied or dissatisfied with the results of my sitting meditation. Regardless of whether my mind was peaceful or not, I'd make the effort to normalize my attitude towards it and be impartial. I practised doing this until I was able to adjust the mind to not take pleasure or displeasure in the state of peacefulness it was experiencing. My mind therefore remained constant regardless of whether it had become peaceful or not from sitting in meditation. I considered this to be the right approach to take for the mind to assume a correct attitude.

During the retreat I practised walking meditation more than sitting, nevertheless, my heart always felt peaceful and at ease. At times when I didn't feel like practising meditation, there would be something that would remind me to be more diligent. Sometimes it would come in my dreams as a vision showing my laziness and letting me know that I was being too careless. It always caused me to put forth greater effort. As with the previous Rains Retreat, there were a number of times that *nimittas* arose serving to remind me to get on with my practice when I was taking it too easy. In the retreat, I reflected on a number of different matters such as each person's wholesome supportive conditioning from past life development and realized just how much it differed for each person. I also saw that the purpose of ordaining for each monk was very different, thus resulting in different kinds of monks. I could see how heedless it was not to feel the urgency to put forth effort in the practice to go beyond all suffering. I felt we were being very neglectful indeed.

Once the retreat ended and the *Kathina* ceremony had not long past, I returned to Wat Pah Pong. Soon after, I asked Luang Por Chah for his permission to travel with a friend to practise in a cremation forest at Nong Kaew, in the district of Kantararom, Srisaket.<sup>1</sup> He gave me permission to go for two months, telling me I should return to Wat Pah Pong in January, 1980. Due to a change of circumstance however, we were not able to go there. Instead, we went to Khao Kheow in the province of Chonburi.

In November, 1979, we arrived at Wat Khao Chalak<sup>2</sup> in Chonburi and practised there for about twenty days. We agreed to take turns going to practice on top of Khao Kheow as there was a limited supply of water there, so my friend went up first while I remained practising at Wat Khao Chalak. During my time at Wat Khao

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<sup>1</sup> Srisaket is an adjoining province to Ubon.

<sup>2</sup> A well-known monastery in Sriracha, Chonburi. The *Sangha* residence on Khao Kheow is governed by Wat Khao Chalak.

Chalak, I was able to exert myself in the practice of meditation and found I was able to contemplate the unattractiveness of the body rather well. In the past Rains Retreat there had been so much work that I hardly contemplated on the foulness of the body. Instead, I emphasized my *samādhi* practice and the maintaining of mindfulness, so as to stay abreast of all thoughts, moods and emotions. Whilst at Wat Khao Chalak I realized that I was able to see all ten of the *asubha* themes.<sup>1</sup> I also knew clearly that contemplating external *asubha nimittas*, that is, seeing the unattractiveness of other people's bodies, was probably no longer necessary for me because I felt completely passionless when seeing them. When I saw women it caused no feelings of attraction or interest to arise. I thought I should just leave external forms alone as they were, and view them dispassionately without there being a need to contemplate them. I considered it was only necessary to reflect on my own body as being foul and unattractive. This alone would be sufficient, because I was positive that if I saw this clearly within my own body, then other bodies would also be the same. I decided from that time on I wouldn't waste time contemplating external bodies, but would focus solely on the internal body – the *asubha* nature of my own body. I'd contemplated other bodies quite a lot already and when seeing them my mind felt completely normal and undisturbed. They were no longer a problem for me, so I shouldn't be taking corrective measures as if they were.

One afternoon while doing walking meditation I contemplated on the intrinsic unattractiveness of my own body and my mind further let go of its attachment and identification towards my body. In doing so I was aware that the emotions of greed and sensual desire had been weakened even more, as was aversion and displeasure. In my heart I knew the identification with the body as being self had been further weakened.

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<sup>1</sup> As listed in the *Visuddhimagga*.

Not long after this, Luang Por Chah sent a friend of ours to tell my friend he had to return to Wat Pah Pong, to help with some office duties. The three of us therefore set out from Wat Khao Chalak to return to Wat Pah Pong. Before returning to Ubon, we travelled with a group of laypeople to Baan Phai in the province of Khon Kaen and stopped to pay respects to Luang Pu Boon-Nah Punnajayo (a disciple of Luang Pu Khao Anālayo). We stayed with him for two or three nights before travelling to Ubon. The monk who came to collect us invited me to go practice with him at Wat Pah Srimongkol, in the district of Samrong, Ubon. He had previously spent a rains retreat there and told me the monastery was over eighty acres in size and was surrounded by a river. He said the place was very peaceful and quiet, but most important of all, there was no construction work that the monks had to do. In early December, 1979, I decided to go with him and we stayed for about twenty days. While staying at Wat Pah Srimongkol I could apply myself to meditation practice as usual. The place was quite good and so my practice went well, even though that winter was colder than normal.



On the nineteenth of December, I was almost gored by a water buffalo while walking for alms to a local village. I usually walked with two other monks, but on that day I went alone because a number of monks had been invited to take their meal at a lay person's house. The alms-route passed two villages which are about two kilometres apart from each other. Normally when there were more monks, we divided into two groups to create two routes with each group going to a different village. Both villages had laypeople with strong faith, so I chose to walk to both so that all would have the opportunity to give alms. If one walks along the road it's a round-trip of six kilometres from the monastery to both villages. I felt that I didn't have enough time to walk to both places by myself, so I set out early at about 5.30 a.m. and took a

shortcut across the paddy field embankments. When I was about 250 metres from the road going into the village, I saw four buffalo walking along another embankment approximately fifty metres from me. They had been led out from the village by their owner and released to graze for the morning. The instant I noticed them, all four proceeded to cut across the paddy field and walk directly towards me. This gave me an odd feeling. The manner of the buffalo didn't look right, and was not to be trusted. I recollected the words of a fellow monk who said, 'The buffalo in this area are very aggressive, and at times have almost gored monks. The owners of some have to cover the animals' eyes with their hands to prevent them from seeing any monks walking by.' Remembering this I looked to the four buffalo. They consisted of a mother, a bull and their two calves. The mother led the way for her two calves while the bull kept to the rear.

As I walked I kept a constant watch on them, while also extending feelings of *mettā* towards them, but I felt a strange foreboding. When I came within twenty-five meters of the buffalo, I noticed some abnormal behaviour in the mother. Instead of leading the way for her two calves, it turned around to take up the rear and walked beside the bull. She and the bull proceeded to hurriedly push the calves forward with their horns. The direction in which they were pushing the calves towards was a stretch of the route I had to take to enter the village. Once they had driven the two calves off the embankment and into a field, the male continued to drive them along. I had noticed things didn't look right when the female began to push her calves forward, so I concentrated my mind on extending *mettā* to all four buffalo. As I walked, I never let them out of sight. By the time I was close to them they had already passed the route I was walking. They were two or three meters away from me on an adjacent field. The female had stopped and stood to the rear with its back to the route I was taking. As I stepped onto the corner of the embankment that I had to walk along, the buffalo had almost walked to the field's

opposite end. The female turned and jumped onto the embankment opposite to me which was about ten meters away. Its movements were like those of a boxer about to jump up into the ring. I remained cautious the whole time. Then it started charging towards me like a boxer not waiting for the bell, leaving his opponent wondering what the other is angry about. From the time the buffalo jumped up on the embankment my mind immediately gathered and became one-pointed, calm and concentrated. I didn't think about anything at all – I had no concerns, not even for my own life, but I did think this time it's going to get me to for sure.

My heart possessed only *mettā* as its weapon of defence. I thought to myself, 'I've come here to develop the practices of a *samaṇa*, practising with an aim to seek out the truth and transcend all suffering. I have no intention to harm anyone – I'm of harm to no being at all.' As I stood there my eyes remained fixed on those of the buffalo, extending metta, without thinking anything at all. The charging buffalo stopped only four or five steps away from me. It stood and thrashed its horns about for a while, before going down from the embankment to walk back to the corner it had previously been standing at. The whole incident was very strange. Once it had left the embankment I was standing on I continued to walk, but only took a few steps forward when it again came at me. It paid no attention to its owner's shouting and came charging straight towards me like before. The situation was serious. I focused my mind and thought, 'If in a past life I have ever harmed or done you wrong, then go ahead and charge into me, but may there be no more feelings of ill will or vengefulness between us.' When the thought had finished the buffalo stopped short just two or three paces away. As I gazed into its eyes, I could sense that it didn't mean to be aggressive. Its eyes seemed merely to express concern for its calves. It was probably afraid the two were in danger because I was walking in the direction that they had to pass. A mother's love for her offspring makes her protective. Watching the whole incident were two or three people who were warming themselves



by a fire near the village. One was probably the owner, and he ran shouting trying to drive the buffalo away. He then hit the animal to drive it along. I thanked him and said I was alright. I told him not to hit the animal, because it was only protecting its calves.

The moment it appeared that the buffalo was going to run into me, I could feel my mind quickly gathering in concentration. It felt as though my mind was floating in the air above, watching two objects about to collide. I thought my body was going to get trampled for certain, and I probably would not survive. I pictured it just like two trains colliding. In my heart however I felt no fear or aversion, nor was I even slightly startled. Instead I felt normal, without any worries or concerns at all, not even for my life or body. It's hard to describe accurately, but I felt very much at ease.



On another morning I was returning from alms-round with a more senior monk, maintaining mindful restraint of the senses as usual. As we walked out of the village I looked at the sandy earthen path back to the monastery. I noticed the path was completely covered with an animal's footprints, but I didn't know what kind. I asked the other monk, 'Ajahn, what type of footprints are these?'

He turned around to look and asked, 'Which ones?'

'Those ones' I replied, as I pointed to the ground.

He laughed and said 'Dtun, those are chicken footprints. Don't you know?' He then said, 'You certainly never let your mind go out, do you.'

I could see he understood that I didn't send my mind out to other things. It had been almost two years since I ordained and came to live in the north-east. In all the rural villages that I've walked for

alms, it's normal for most villagers to raise chickens. Never before had I noticed their footprints though, because previously if ever I saw chickens, I would see them as rotting or dried out carcasses that were running about, so I never looked to their footprints. That was the first time since ordaining that I'd noticed chicken prints. This incident is still embedded in my memory to this day.

Not long after this, I had to go to Bangkok for several days to take care of some business. While there I met Luang Pu Boon-Nah again and had the opportunity to travel with him and a group of laypeople to pay respects to Luang Pu Khao, Luang Pu Kinnaree, Ajahn Juan and Ajahn Baen. We went to pay respects to Luang Pu Kinnaree at his monastery, Wat Kanta Silawat, in the province of Nakhon Phanom. His *kuṭi* was a small wooden building with a veranda. He received us on the veranda, and after paying respects to him he gave a short Dhamma talk for about half an hour. He spoke on two topics, contemplating the body and contemplating *asubha* until separating the body into its constituent elements (earth, water, fire and air). When we left his *kuṭi* Luang Pu Boon-Nah asked me, 'How was it Dtun? Did you understand Luang Pu Kinnaree's Dhamma?'

'Yes, sir' I replied, but told him there were some parts that my own practice hadn't yet reached. He taught the practice of *asubha* contemplation to the stage of letting go of the body. In my own practice I contemplated *asubha*, but was still not able to irrevocably let go of the body. Luang Pu Boon-Nah said it wasn't very often that he got to hear the Dhamma coming directly from the heart of a revered and eminent teacher. He said it was so uplifting and profoundly satisfying. When the trip was over, Luang Pu Boon-Nah and his group took me back to Wat Pah Pong while also taking the opportunity to pay respects to Luang Por Chah. When Luang Pu Boon-Nah had left, Luang Por Chah said to me, 'That old monk, he's important you know.'

The day I returned was the third of January, 1980, and Wat Pah Pong seemed unusually quiet. Maybe it was because Luang Por Chah was still staying at Wat Baan Gor Nork<sup>1</sup> where he had spent the last Rains Retreat. The community of monks and novices at that time was rather small at around twenty-five in total. Many of the monks had gone off to branch monasteries or off on tudong.<sup>2</sup> The fewer the monks there were, the more I liked it because the place felt more relaxed with fewer problems. Luang Por didn't return to Wat Pah Pong until mid-February.



Regarding my meditation practice during 1980, I shall relate only some of the *sabhāva-dhammas* that arose, starting from the month of January, however it's not possible to describe these things in detail like the real event. *Sabhāva-dhammas* function merely as causal conditions, nothing more. As for the fruit that they give rise to – the lessening and weakening of the mental defilements – this can only be known or realized within one's heart. I will write specifically about the contemplation of my own body, as it was no longer necessary for me to contemplate external bodies. Many different kinds of *sabhāva-dhammas* manifested.

To start with, there were times when if I were to look at anyone who came into the monastery, it was as if their skin dissolved into thin air to leave only a state of emptiness. This occurred the instant I looked, and was like that for about a week. Frequent contemplation of the body brought with it the arising of spontaneous *sabhāva-dhammas*, which in turn caused the mind to see phenomena as being merely elements. At times I sat in meditation and saw my body all shrivelled and dried up, or

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<sup>1</sup> Luang Por Chah's home village monastery, which is only short distance from Wat Pah Pong.

<sup>2</sup> A Thai word derived from the Pāli 'dhutanga'. The common usage in Thai for tudong is for a monk to go wandering on foot through the country side in search of quiet places to practise.

sometimes rotting. When walking – both in and outside of formal meditation – I would always see my body as being something foul and unattractive. As I continued to cultivate seeing my own body as *asubha* whilst sitting and walking in meditation, it was as if I'd come to a certain point and my mind would slip into a mode causing a stream of *sabhāva-dhammas* to arise automatically. For example, while contemplating I would frequently see the body separate into elements and then automatically disappear into a void. It all happened in a single mind-moment. Regardless of whether I was sitting or walking at that time, all bodily consciousness disappeared to be replaced by *sabhāva-dhammas* such as these. Nevertheless, I considered it unnecessary to contemplate such self-arisen phenomena.

When I passed any rice fields on alms-round, if there were farmers at work in field then I was able to concentrate my mind and mentally destroy the farmers, by instantly making them revert to their primal condition of being four elements. Their bodies would break apart and dissolve into the earth and water. Then I'd reconstruct the four elements back into the original person.

In May, there were times when I'd do walking meditation and contemplate the elements. I would see the body as being only the water element floating in the air. Outside of that there was only emptiness. There was another period of about two weeks during which when I'd do walking meditation contemplating the bodily elements, I would see my whole body turn into a mass of solid earth pacing back and forth. The earth had cracks throughout like cracked pottery. Even outside of meditation this *sabhāva-dhamma* would still manifest. During this period whenever I focused on my own body I'd see it as being made of clay. Each day before eating the meal there was a period of fifteen to twenty minutes that I was free to sit in meditation. When it was time to start eating I would do so, but continue contemplating. One day it

seemed that the food in my mouth had turned entirely into earth. I almost spat it out, but was quick to reflect and see my body as being made of earth too, so it was as if earth was eating earth. It was only by reflecting like this that I was able to continue with my meal. At times when walking for alms, my mind would still be in the familiar mode of contemplating *asubha* and would see the monks walking in front of me as corpses. I had to deliberately reflect so as to bring my mind back to an objective, normal state.

In the month of June, 1980, when practising concentration in any of the four postures, I would for the most part see the nature of all phenomena as being comprised of elements. The various *sabhāva-dhammas* that arose could possibly cause a person to become even more deluded or misled if the mind identified with them as being products of self, instead of seeing that it's entirely natural for these things to arise and disappear. When *sabhāva-dhammas* arise, if the meditator lacks wisdom to reflect on them with an aim to uproot all self-identification, they can attach to and identify with them, thinking 'I'm great', 'I'm this', 'I'm that', causing them to become even more deluded and mistaken. These things should be used to give up or let go of one's self-identification. Anyone possessing the discernment to know how to correctly reflect on these conditions can gain wisdom from them. During this time I felt I wanted to withdraw from the community and find a place to practise by myself, or at a place with few monks and no building work, so that I could practise body contemplation more intensively. Two places came to mind. One was a place in the district of Baan Mee in Lopburi province, the other was Luang Pu Kinnaree's monastery, Wat Pah Kanta Silawat in the province of Nakhon Phanom. My intention was to be by myself far from my friends and put greater effort into my practice.

On the twenty-fifth of June, 1980, different *sabhāva-dhammas* manifested. That morning I set off on alms-round with some

friends. On the way back to the monastery (Wat Pah Pong) two monks were walking ahead of me while I walked behind chatting with a novice. While talking I also concentrated my mind by focusing on my body as I normally did. However, I couldn't see my body because it had completely disappeared, and all that was there were the four elements floating and revolving in the air just like someone stirring cake mix in a large bowl. There were only the four elements spinning around and the mind's knowing presence. On returning to the monastery I told my friends about what had happened. It began to feel like something was about to overflow from my mind, so I went to the eating hall and sat in meditation. As I closed my eyes, I saw the four elements reassemble again. I was aware that I was perceiving things more clearly, and that what I had seen earlier was the state of emptiness – the complete absence of a self-entity. I knew that ultimately my body was only the four elements. The body could not be discerned, there were only elements. Tears streamed from my eyes while thinking of all the beings that still hadn't seen the truth that I had just seen. My heart brimmed with feelings of boundless kindness and compassion towards all beings. I wanted them to know and see as I did. I also recollected the boundless goodwill and compassion of the Lord Buddha. I thought how fortunate I was to have the merit to see the truth that had manifested. These thoughts caused an outflow of tears that wouldn't stop, until eventually I had to leave the eating hall. I rushed off to a friend's *kuṭi* nearby as the tears kept flowing. When I got to his *kuṭi* I bowed three times to the Buddha statue inside. However, on the third bow, I sank down. The recollection of the Lord Buddha's infinite compassion had moved me to tears.

The following morning while on alms-round three things occurred that were quite out of the ordinary. First, both my body and mind felt extremely light and subtle. My body seemed so light and airy, as if it were a balloon about to float up. It felt empty as if it had no internal organs, and yet because my mind felt very

strong it seemed that I would be able to carry the whole world on my shoulders. I felt a change had taken place within my mind. I perceived it to be purer and more subtle than before. Actually, I sensed that changes were about to take place within my mind about a week before this. At first, I thought my character and behaviour would change accordingly, but as time passed, I knew my outward character was just as before. What had changed was only the inner state of my mind. Secondly, I saw both the elderly and the young as being exactly the same, feeling neither attraction nor aversion. This however wasn't on account of the mind being firmly established or unmoved by whatever it saw. Rather, it was due to my having gained a more subtle insight into the body, hence causing the mind to be equanimous. Thirdly, as I returned from alms-round my heart delighted as I recollected the Buddha's Dhamma and his boundless compassion, but not to the same extent as the day before.

Regarding the mental defilements, or more specifically the natural human sexual urge, it arose independent of external impressions, and normally at a time when I wasn't doing anything at all. However, it didn't last for long before ceasing. In my first year as a monk, such feelings once arisen would remain for two to three minutes, or at most five minutes. Back then I wasn't yet skilled in how to deal with them. After my second Rains Retreat, whenever these feelings arose, they would last no longer than one minute before dissipating. These feelings naturally arose by themselves without my desiring them. I observed them with indifference and they didn't trouble me in any way. In the period before entering my third Rains Retreat, these feelings had become much lighter and rarely manifested at all. My mind was aware of their arising when I took a rest or was doing nothing in particular, but I knew that they had absolutely no power over me. Externally, no matter how beautiful women might be it caused no thoughts or desire to arise in my mind. The basic underlying state of my mind was such that when I'd see or meet women, I'd view them as being

just older or younger sisters. My heart felt only kindness towards them, as if they were my family.

Sometime before these events, an announcement had been made asking if any monks wished to spend the Rains Retreat with Luang Pu Kinnaree. I requested to go, but Luang Por Chah said Luang Pu Kinnaree prefers elderly monks more his own age, so I didn't go. Shortly afterwards a friend and I received permission to spend the retreat at Baan Mee.





## Third Rains Retreat

Samnaksong Vipassanā-Chuan-Puang-Put, Baan Mee, Lopburi



My friend and I were sent to a small monastery for the Rains Retreat. When we arrived, we found that there was also another monk living here, making a total of three monks for the retreat. The hermitage had been divided off from Wat Klong Suthawat as a place for meditation practice. It was less than one acre with one hall and five *kuṭis* – only four were habitable. There were enough trees to provide some cool shade, and also a lotus pond.

I felt a general sense of ease during the retreat because we decided to keep things simple. We didn't hold many of the normal formalities, giving each other the opportunity to go about individual practise to the fullest as one pleased. We decided not to have any formal meetings with chanting so as to give each other the freedom to practise intensively, because each of us already knew how to go about the practice. Without any real work, there was a lot of free time to practise. We just had a few daily chores like sweeping leaves, filling the water jar for bowl washing, and mopping the hall's floor, which we all helped with, so there were no problems.

The alms-round wasn't very long, it took about an hour round-trip to walk to the local town market in Baan Mee. Most mornings there would be three or four people from several of the houses bringing tiffin carriers to offer at the hermitage. During the retreat, if it was the Observance Day, the number of people coming would increase to five or six. There was quite a lot of food and the weather was good, so everything was suitable for

practise. Sometimes you could hear the sound of music whenever a movie was being shown in the monastery adjacent to us, but it was only a minor disturbance, and I didn't have a problem with it.

At the beginning of the Rains Retreat, whenever I went into the village for alms my mind would converge into one focal point and become equanimous. Whether seeing animate or inanimate objects my mind would remain indifferent and undisturbed, not taking pleasure or displeasure in anything I saw. I noticed the mind was peaceful and calmer owing to having contemplated both attraction and aversion. It wasn't peaceful as a result of *samādhi* suppressing the mind, rather, it was the fruit of contemplation and its consequent letting go. For this reason, I felt that for the time being there wasn't any external work for me to do in my practice. I did however wonder as to what approach I was going to take to deal with the body. I pondered this for a whole week and concluded that I would take the body as my constant object of recollection by always trying to have mindfulness established within the body. Sometimes when focusing on my skin different *sabhāva-dhammas* arose. For example, at times my skin would dissolve, other times it would turn into the four elements, gradually growing in size until finally disintegrating and disappearing. The mind would then give up the *nimitta* and unify in concentration, remaining there in a state of equanimity. My mind had become more subtle and stopped pursuing its contemplation of the elements or unattractiveness, and turned to see the body of the present as being devoid of any entity that could be called self. Outside of formal practice, in the normal state of consciousness, the body was being perceived as unclean and foul. About a month afterwards, wherever I looked I began to see the total emptiness of the world. My mind and eyes saw this simultaneously, knowing everything the eyes saw to be completely empty. In my heart, I knew everything to be merely a combination of elements that accord with nature. I saw both animate and inanimate objects as being empty. Everything seemed open and

unobstructed. At that time, I truly understood the nature of all things to be merely elements.

By coincidence, at the time when I was considering what approach to take, I came across the book '*Eighty Anubuddha*'.<sup>1</sup> I read the story of Venerable *Mahā* Kassapa. When he renounced the lay life and requested ordination the Buddha instructed him on three points that he should practise. On the third point, the Buddha said to him, 'Pay heed, Kassapa. You must have mindfulness established in the body. Do not let your mindfulness leave the body.' Later he ultimately attained to *arahantship*. When I finished reading this I knew the way I'd decided to practise was certainly correct. However, when taking the body as one's meditation object there are several ways that mindfulness can go about contemplating it. Previously, I'd contemplated *asubha* as well as the four elements. A doubt arose as to which approach would be best to take. I considered that I had previously contemplated *asubha* and made an earnest resolution only reflect on this theme. Another problem arose due to seeing many kinds of *nimittas* on the theme of *asubha*, and I wondered what kind would be best to contemplate. Finally, I decided to focus on contemplating decomposition. All other *nimittas* would be discarded (except for ones arising automatically), because I felt visions of the body decomposing with pus oozing from it made the greatest impression on my mind. I resolved to direct my awareness throughout the day to the development of concentration in all postures until it was time to sleep at night. Mindfulness was directed towards contemplating *asubha* as my meditation object, because formerly I'd always considered the body to be myself. If I made the mind see to the contrary, I'd certainly stand a chance of bringing the practice to completion. I believed that practising in this way would definitely cause my clinging and attachment to weaken.

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<sup>1</sup> A book containing the biographical stories of 80 direct disciples of the Buddha.

Afterwards while going on alms-round my mind remained focused solely on the body. As a result, the whole time that I walked for alms I saw my whole body decomposing with pus running from it. My mind however remained equanimous, and looked on with indifference. For three or four days I tried to always remain with my object throughout the day. When I practised walking meditation, I focused on there being pus pouring from the soles of my feet. It felt as though my feet were rotting, and this sent tingling shivers through both of them, but in spite of this, I observed mindfully with dispassion. At this stage of practice, I considered it necessary to have mindfulness guiding the mind using the strength acquired from *samādhi* practise, and to totally occupy the mind with the body until the two were irrevocably severed. I steadily went about my practice as opportunity permitted without being too tense. During the retreat, there were some mornings when walking on alms-round that my mind maintained constant equanimity. When I saw women it didn't cause any feelings of attraction to arise. Instead, a *sabhāva-dhamma* arose revealing that the person's nature was to decay and deteriorate until there was absolutely nothing remaining. From the state of emptiness the mind would automatically synthesize the elements to reconstruct the original person. This is how it normally was when I looked at anybody without needing to determine so.

In early August, 1980, I began to see the arising of a particular kind of *sabhāva-dhamma*. When I looked at people their bodies would instantly separate apart, dissolving to leave only emptiness. The feeling that arose was truly amazing. To describe it in full detail like the real thing would be extremely difficult to do. The things that manifested caused all attachment and identification with a self to lessen. As a result, greed, aversion, delusion and sexual desire were naturally lessened as well. I experienced so much sympathy for people that I was almost moved to tears. I saw that their bodies didn't belong to them – the

body is just a fabricated condition which the mind enters into and inhabits. People therefore attach and identify with the body as being oneself. When we wrongly believe that the body is something attractive and desirable, we will naturally see other people's bodies as being attractive. Because of identification with a self, we assign ownership to material objects, in particular objects belonging to oneself. As a result, greed, aversion and delusion come into being. When we go against this current by reflecting to see the exact opposite, seeing the body as not belonging to oneself and that the body is unattractive and undesirable, we will naturally see other peoples' bodies as being unattractive. When our attachment to the body and material objects lessens, it happens as a natural consequence that greed, aversion and delusion will lessen too.



I continued to focus on developing *samādhi*. It seemed that when I established mindfulness within the body aided by the strength of *samādhi*, with the aim of seeing the unattractiveness of the body, my mind wouldn't see it, and thus there were no feelings of disenchantment. Instead, I was seeing a different kind of natural condition. It was like my mind would dive into the flesh and go right through to the bones, only to shoot back out again to the surface of my flesh. Diving in and shooting out, the mind entered into the body seeing each level along the way: skin, flesh, sinews, bones and then back out. I looked on with indifference as it quickly penetrated into the body and then shot back out. I was seeing my body very clearly as if I'd burrowed into it to see what it was like inside the flesh and bones. After that day, when I bathed or did anything, it felt as though my body wasn't mine – it was just something that I bathed. This was a feeling that I'd never experienced before. Even when I did walking meditation, I'd contemplate the thirty-two parts of the body and I was aware that I was seeing the body very clearly. I positively felt that my

body wasn't my own, seeing this vividly unlike anything I'd experience before. With mindfulness well established I viewed things with dispassion. My mind experienced no disenchantment like it used to. It was as if it were acknowledging the truth that the body isn't self. By September there were no feelings of disenchantment whenever I reflected on the unattractiveness of the body. Rather, my mind accepted what it was seeing. Mindfulness was simply aware, knowing everything that arose in the present moment. Sometime later I read about Luang Pu Tate's (Thesarangsī) own practice in his autobiography. I discovered that he had once been stuck in *samādhi* for several years due to his mind frequently entering *bhavanga*.<sup>1</sup> He sought advice from Tan Ajahn Singh, but was still unsatisfied with the answer he had received because he was told to contemplate the body and see its unattractiveness. Luang Pu Tate remained sceptical because he thought that he was already contemplating the mind, which is something far more subtle than the body – why should he have to revert to contemplating something coarse? However, he still didn't fully trust himself and he decided to ask Luang Pu Mun (Bhūridatta), the only person he felt could help relieve him of his doubt. He set out on foot to find Luang Pu Mun, finally meeting him at Mae Pang in Chiang Mai.

Luang Pu Tate informed Luang Pu Mun of how he'd been practising. At that time Luang Pu Tate had been a monk for twelve years. Having listened to Luang Pu Tate, Luang Pu Mun kindly gave him a teaching and some advice for him to put into practise.

‘Venerable Tate, any monk who follows my way of practise until becoming solid and skilled in the practice will meet with progress. At the very least he will be able to remain securely as a monk. Any monk who doesn't follow my way of practise will not last long; he declines or even disrobes. Even myself, if I'm very busy with my duties in the community of monks, my practice then lacks

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<sup>1</sup> The state of *bhavanga* is a void of unawareness i.e. unaware of sensory impressions.

continuity and my contemplation of the body isn't so refined. The mind isn't clear and at ease. When contemplating, don't let your mind escape from your body. Regardless of whether you see the body clearly or not, don't be discouraged. Focus only on the body. You can reflect on *asubha* or see the body as being composed of elements. You could reflect on the body as being composed of *khandhas*,<sup>1</sup> or see the three characteristics within the body. All are valid, but you must earnestly focus only on that theme regardless of which of the four postures you might assume. It's not that you stop the work of contemplation once you can see the body. Whether you see it clearly or not, just keep at it. When you contemplate any of these themes and see it clearly in your heart, then other things external to these themes will also manifest clearly in the very same place.'

He also told him not to let his mind unify and enter the state of *bhavanga*. Luang Pu Mun's advice to Luang Pu Tate made me even more confident that I had taken the correct path of practice and was going about it correctly.

On the fourteenth of October, 1980, two *nimittas* arose. The first one arose in the early evening while seated in meditation. My mind was peaceful, and a vision arose of an extremely beautiful woman who was trying to tempt me, but my heart wasn't affected, not even for a single moment – no feelings of attraction whatsoever arose. I watched mindfully with indifference. The second vision arose after I had finished sitting in meditation. I was in the process of lying down while still directing my attention to my meditation object. A vision of another equally

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<sup>1</sup> *Khandhas*: physical and mental components of personality: 1) *rūpa* (the physical body); 2) *vedanā* (feelings); 3) *saññā* (memory and perception); 4) *sankhāra* (thinking and imagination); 5) *viññāṇa* (sense consciousness). They are often called the aggregates of attachment, because the mind attaches to them, identifying with them as being one's self. They are in fact simply natural phenomena which continually arise and cease and are devoid of any abiding entity that could be called a self. The last four *khandhas* are generally referred to as the mental *khandhas*.

beautiful woman arose, making use of all the wiles of a woman, behaving in a provocative and flirtatious manner. Nevertheless, my mind remained unperturbed and mindfully looked on while not feeling the slightest attraction or sexual desire for her. My mind went completely still and abided in equanimity. When I came out of *samādhi*, I reviewed the *nimittas* and thought anyone seeing the visions I had just seen – if they were unaware that the emotion of sexual desire was still present within them – that person might deludedly understand the visions to mean they have attained to something,<sup>1</sup> because at the time of seeing the visions not even the slightest bit of desire arose. I felt fortunate to have this knowing presence, and was thus not deceived by the visions.



In the retreat I was determined to find a way to completely rid the mind of sensual and sexual desire, looking for a way to bring about a complete and irrevocable separation between mind and body, and I could feel that I was growing closer to making this a reality. I contemplated the theme of *asubha* to the fullest of my capability and felt that I had made a good deal of progress. The level of mindfulness and all-around awareness that I had was also good. I was able to sustain concentration at a particular level while the presence of knowing within my mind remained firmly constant, showing that regardless of whether my concentration was subtle or not, my mind always remained normal. There was no delighting in the peacefulness of concentration, nor was there suffering when the mind wasn't peaceful. It remained indifferent and normal by not attaching to the bliss of peaceful concentration. I remained aware and abreast of the changing conditions of concentration, without chasing after any mental impressions or states of mind. Instead, *paññā* was seeing things in line with the truth and had, to a degree, eradicated the more coarse defilements

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning any of the four stages of enlightenment.



of the mind. What has been abandoned will never arise again. *Samādhi* is an impermanent phenomenon, whereas *paññā* that has understood and to some extent eliminated the mental defilements is everlasting.

During the retreat there was often the sound of loud music coming from a cinema, from houses, or even the nearby monastery – audible enough for a person to sing along to. My mind, however, remained normal and focused the whole time. It wasn't carried away by the music like it would have been when I was a layman. My mind of its own accord took no pleasure in the music and was indifferent. The practice of contemplating my own body as *asubha* progressed rather well, though the mind didn't feel disenchanted with what it was seeing like it had in my previous Rains Retreats. Instead, it remained constant, and mindfully looked on with dispassion. It seemed the mind had accepted the inherent truth of what it was perceiving, and was deeply impressed by it. As for material objects, my mind remained as it was since my first Rains Retreat, when it saw their decay and deterioration. This insight never weakened, and my heart remained as indifferent and equanimous as before. When I saw anything, I just saw it without any attraction or aversion arising. Everything was perceived as being of no value and having no true substance or meaning because all things are just elements that accord to nature.

In the Rains Retreat, I reflected on the topic of birth and existence, the unremitting cycle of rebirth. I thought to myself, how wearisome if this is all there is to human existence – death and rebirth, birth and death. I've probably already experienced a great deal of everything, both happiness and suffering for who knows how many lifetimes. I should look for a way to bring suffering to an end, and right now give up all the small pleasures and sources of happiness that infatuate all beings, so as to seek out the happiness that the Lord Buddha spoke of when he said, 'There is

no happiness greater than peace.’ I’ve already renounced the pleasures that beguile human beings and have ordained as a monk, with an aim to find the state of happiness that the Buddha himself had discovered. The happiness and pleasure obtained from sights, sounds, odours, tastes and physical contact can’t be compared to the experience of someone who has won the happiness issuing from peace. But what kind of peace? It’s the peace that comes from the absence of all that brings suffering: greed, aversion, delusion, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It’s the peace of having brought to an end the mental defilements, whereby attraction and aversion no longer exist. The happiness that issues from this peace is far beyond that achieved by ordinary people in the world.

After the retreat, I went to Bangkok to visit my father and younger brother who had returned from America to visit home. While staying in Bangkok I had little appetite for food, and yet my heart felt full and contented. I tried to eat, but would stop after five or ten minutes. Even though I ate very little my mind remained strongly established. Because I wasn’t hungry, I thought if I didn’t eat at all I could still survive. After considering the situation I knew this would be the wrong approach to take, so I made an effort to eat as much as I was able to in order to nourish the body. *Sabhāva-dhammas* of various kinds can arise by way of body and mind, and it is therefore better if all practitioners are constantly aware and use their mindfulness to focus on finding what causes these things to arise each time.



I decided to go with three others to practise at Baan Pe in the province of Rayong. We spent the first three nights at Samnak Rampai-Panneewan and then travelled on to stay and practise at Khao Thapklaang and Khao Mapring. Khao Tapglaang wasn’t so large, but was very steep. At the foot of both mountains were rubber plantations, and in the valley between were the houses

of local farmers who cultivated small orchards of rambutan and durian, amongst other things. There was a well in the valley belonging to a farmer which we used for both drinking and general use. For alms, there were about twelve houses that we relied on, and the walk took about an hour and a half round-trip. On some days we received a lot of food, and other days not, but this wasn't a problem for us. There were a number of places that one could stay. I chose to stay at the foot at Khao Thapklaang while the other three stayed at Khao Mapring. We had the meal together in the valley, and once finished we went our separate ways and returned to our places of practice.

My feeling of having little appetite, which started ever since being in Bangkok, continued for about one month, and I was still feeling this way when I arrived. When practising in solitude at Khao Tapglaang however, I had to frequently walk up and down the mountain. Because of the exercise, I was able to start eating more until returning to my normal amount. The reason for having little appetite was due to my seeing the natural state of emptiness, that is, my mind saw that all things are composed of elements, and it maintained this perception of emptiness for a long period of time afterwards.

After being there for about five days, two of the group returned to Bangkok, leaving only myself and one other friend. We continued with our practice while living separately at the foot of different mountains. Being by myself I was able to devote a lot of energy to the practice. This was the first time I'd had the opportunity to seek out some solitude and stay alone in the mountains and forests. Late at night, it was completely quiet, and the weather was also good. I experienced no difficulties, even though it appeared to be not as convenient or comfortable as being in a monastery. Any discomfort was only external, whereas my heart felt normal, so the discomfort made no difference.

One evening I gazed far off to the forest on top of the hills. I thought if I were to go and stay there by myself it would be so quiet and peaceful, but would I be afraid of being there all alone? I asked myself, ‘How do I feel in the daytime, am I afraid? No, I’m not afraid. So, what is there to fear at night? At night it isn’t bright, that’s all. So why be afraid? Being in exactly the same place, the only difference is that by day it’s bright and at night it’s dark – that’s all.’ Afterwards, I continued to sit in meditation until it was time for me to take a rest. Ever since then I’ve not been afraid of anything. I feel completely normal when staying alone, and am unaffected by any fear of the dark or mysterious unseen things, because my heart emanates only pure-hearted *mettā* as its strength allows it to.

During this time I was able to put a good deal of effort into my practice. My reason for coming here was so that I could intensify my effort, because when living as a group in a monastery there are many kinds of duties that must be taken care of. This is why I wanted to have a break from that and find a quiet place to practise where I would have a lot of free time to exert my fullest effort. I admit that whether one lives in a monastery, a city, or anywhere else for that matter, one can still practice. But in going off this time I wanted to practise with only a small number of monks so that I could try out something I’d been wanting to do. At that point in time I felt staying alone would be the best thing, so I went to practise in a quiet place without any duties and less socializing, so that the mindfulness that was being developed could be put to work as much as possible. When I first went to Khao Thapklaang, I asked myself, ‘Dtun, what are you doing in this forest? For what reason have you come here? Why aren’t you staying in a nice monastery where you could live comfortably with plenty of good food, a comfortable sleeping place, and friends to chat with like other people do?’ I retorted, ‘I want to go beyond all suffering and realize the peace that comes from the complete absence of all mental defilement that the Lord Buddha himself discovered,

illuminating the way for his disciples to follow and practise as he had – to ordain, don the ochre robe, and practise for the complete cessation of suffering.’

When first going to live at Khao Thapklaang I felt unwell almost every day. Some days I felt really bad, which might have been due to changes in the weather, however I didn’t tell my friends or let it show. I cared for myself through meditation, which eliminated any illness that arose. I’d practise walking meditation, and once the mind became peaceful I’d contemplate the particular part or region of the body that felt unwell. By doing this I was able to recover from minor complaints. For stronger illnesses, I’d sit in meditation and focus my mind directly onto the affected area and reflect on it. I first had to localize where I was feeling sick before treating it with *samādhi*.

It has been a practice of mine ever since my first Rains Retreat to not take any medication. Back then I’d contemplate other peoples’ bodies to see their inherent unattractiveness, and would often see them as decomposing corpses. I reflected that the body is in no way self, because it is only a combination of elements – of which I had hitherto been ignorant — with absolutely no male or female entity, because once dead, all decomposing bodies are the same. I therefore decided that if ever I was sick, I would not take any medicine. If the body wants to be sick then let it get better by itself, it’s not ‘me’, it’s the bodily elements being out of balance that causes sickness. And so, for my first three years as a monk I didn’t take medicine, but later I came to see during that time I’d been too extreme, so I thought that if ever the body is sick it’d be better to take care of it however is necessary. I could see no harm in doing this and started to sometimes take medicine. However, if I was only mildly unwell, I would still treat myself by using *samādhi*. I’d focus on my body and contemplate it until I became quite adept at it. Every time I had a minor complaint I was able to recover by treating myself in this way, though if I were to have

had a more serious illness I can't be sure whether or not I would have been able to cure myself. Fortunately, I didn't experience anything too serious. Contemplating the body served as a means to treat illness, as well as giving up all clinging and attachment towards it; it's also a means to develop concentration. Its benefits are many.

I practiced at Khao Thapklaang for close to one month until the twenty-fourth of December, 1980. From there I returned to Samnak Rampai-Panneewan in Rayong, to prepare my general requisites and equipment to go for a period of further solitude at Khao Chong-Lom in Chantaburi. On the sixth of January, 1981, I along with three other monks and novices set out by vehicle from Samnak Rampai-Panneewan to go to Khao Cha-Ang. The route took us from Baan Pe to the district of Klaeng, where we took the turn off for Khao Cha-Mao National Park. After travelling a further twenty kilometres we arrived at Khao Cha-Ang. One monk and a novice were coming to stay here, while I along with a friend intended to go on further to Khao Chong-Lom. We continued our journey from Khao Cha-Ang in a vehicle belonging to a local man who took us as far as the junction in the town of Kaset-Phatana. By that time it was 12.30 p.m. We then set out walking in the direction of Baan Phawaa, but after only a short while we were picked up and taken there by car. We then continued walking to Saampheenong in Tha Mai district, Chantaburi and arrived at 4 p.m. We could see that rain clouds were moving in so we decided to stay the night at Wat Nurn-Jampa, then continue the journey the following day. The way from Khao Cha-Mao to Saampheenong passed by Khao Kaat and Khao Pang. The route was an unpaved road that is generally used for transporting cassava. The local inhabitants cleared the forest up to the foothills in order to cultivate the land. Both sides of the road had fields of cassava and bananas. Beyond the fields were many hills and mountain ranges. Their houses were located about five hundred metres apart, which made me think they must have been quite competent to succeed

in their effort to come out here and clear the land for cultivation. Going deeper into the forest are still more houses. A lot of people have come here to make a living.

Seeing the forest and hills made my heart even more calm and content. Having no burdens, I felt free and untroubled. My only thought was to focus on my practice so that I could seek out the truth and transcend all suffering. Initially, I almost came here by myself while my friend was to remain and continue with his practice in Baan Pe. However, some events arose that made him change his mind and decide to come with me. I kept thinking that if I came by myself it would be so much easier, because I would have nothing to worry or be concerned about. If I had gone by myself, I was certain that I wouldn't return to society too easily, not until I'd gone beyond all suffering. Otherwise, I would have just stayed there until I died.

Late at night the weather was rather cool, but not too cold to endure. The following morning when I walked for alms, I received a boiled egg, two pieces of bread and four filled cakes. I contemplated the food and ate my meal as normal. Even though there wasn't much food my heart was content, and I felt no hunger. Food wasn't a problem for me because I ate only to sustain my life. On the way back from the alms-round we met a bus driver who knew the way to Khao Chong-Lom. We inquired how to get there, and he told us to meet him at 2 p.m. the following day, he would take us himself.

We arrived at Khao Chong-Lom on the seventh of January, 1981, at about 5 p.m. A layman then led us on the ten-minute walk up the hill. We reached a cave that was quite large, big enough for both of us to stay and put forth effort in meditation practice. One side of the cave was bright and airy, while the other side was more dimly lit. The path leading up to the cave was very steep and you had to go down to the foot of the mountain to collect water from

a stream flowing nearby. The people there had good faith and we received quite a lot of food on alms-round. The side of the cave that I stayed on had poor ventilation which caused me to feel rather stifled and dull. The temperature inside the cave was neither too hot nor too cold, though outside the cave it was very cold as the entire surrounding region is mountainous. Every day the sound of hunters' gunfire could be heard. The locals told us that in this area there were wild boar, mountain goats and porcupine. If you go deeper into the mountains there are tigers, elephants, bear, wild oxen, barking deer and many, many more kinds of animals.

The region of Khao Chong-Lom extends as far as the village of Thaa Morn in the district of Thaa Mai, Chantaburi. From Khao Chong-Lom it's possible to walk through the forest to Khao Yai and onto the province of Chonburi. We stayed there until the fourteenth of January, 1981, and then returned to Bangkok because my friend wanted to. Because I was still under dependence<sup>1</sup> he didn't give his permission for me to remain on or travel elsewhere. I therefore had to return with him in spite of my wanting to remain practising there until eventually travelling on.



When I returned to Bangkok, I met Luang Pu Boon Nah again. He took me along with him to pay respects to Chao Khun Buddhaphot, Luang Pu Lui, Luang Por *Mahā* Bin, Venerable Pimondhamma and Chao Khun Woranart. I gained quite some benefit from seeing how the personalities of these venerable monks differed depending on their level of purity.

In the month of February, 1981, the more I practised the more I would view other people and feel that everyone, without

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<sup>1</sup> The traditional five-year commitment of a junior monk to live under the guidance of his teacher. During this period if he travels without his teacher, he must have another monk who has been ordained for five or more years as his companion.



exception, experiences suffering regardless of whether they are rich or poor. Looking at them I felt that they didn't experience much happiness really. Suffering is the predominant feature of everyone's mind. For the whole of the last three years I had not seen anyone who was without suffering, no one except for the *arahants*, those whose minds are pure. What the Lord Buddha said is true, 'There is only suffering that arises, and only suffering that ceases.' The here and now is where we need to be, being here with mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom fully present in every moment. By doing so, the mind can be peaceful, still and capable of dealing with all of the circumstances and phenomena that we meet with, while also having the discernment to resolve all that arises with an acceptance of the true state of things. The state of being fully present is, however, so difficult to achieve. The best way to live is with right view, always knowing the truth of all phenomena as they arise. Each person has the right to choose which path they'll take. If they create good causes, they will receive good results; if they create bad causes, they will receive bad results.

With regard to external and internal *sabhāva-dhammas*, my contemplation of the body continued growing clearer all the time. I had previously perceived people in terms of 'this person is nice', 'that person isn't nice'. By this point however, my mind had been transformed, causing me to feel wearied and indifferent when seeing people. I felt that everyone is of the same nature, so much so that I no longer felt attraction or aversion towards the body; 'A flower once blossomed must wither, the sun having risen must set. Our lives are the same – having been born we must die.'

Something else which I reflected on at this time was, 'Do not practise desiring the praise of others; one mustn't take interest in the behaviour of others. What is important is one's aspiration for a heart that is pure.'

On the fifth of March, 1981, a friend and I went to pay our final respects to the body of Luang Pu Kinnaree Jantiyo. His funeral was set for midnight on the seventh of March.

Around this time when investigating the body, I would sometimes contemplate the mind too, and I sensed that sensual and sexual lust would soon die out. If I were to have taken this feeling too seriously it's possible that I might have mistakenly believed it, and failed to do further vigorous contemplation of the body. Inspecting the mind, it appeared to be well cleansed, and constantly abided brimming with *mettā*. I liked to keep it in this state while also maintaining a knowing presence. During this time I was having frequent *nimittas* reminding me to accelerate my effort in the practice and not be heedless.

At the beginning of May, I travelled to Wat Pah Pong with three other monks and novices. In the evening we went to Luang Por Chah's *kuṭi* to pay our respects to him. I sat and listened as he talked with some laypeople. He related how he had received a letter inviting him to give a Dhamma talk at Wat Benchamabophit<sup>1</sup>, but said it wasn't convenient to go because his health wasn't very good. He turned to me and teased me by asking, 'Phra Akaradej, do you know how to give a Dhamma talk, yet?'

'Not yet, sir' I replied.

'I thought you could; I'd send you to Wat Benchamabophit instead.'

While listening to Luang Por talk, my mind felt peacefully light and empty. My body also felt extremely light, almost as if I didn't have one. There was just a knowing presence floating in the air. At the time everything seemed empty.



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<sup>1</sup> A well-known monastery in Bangkok.

# Fourth Rains Retreat

Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam, Lamlukka, Pathum Thani



This year the Rains Retreat began on the seventeenth of July, 1981. The community was comprised of three monks and one novice. The monastery's land area was about two acres and was entirely surrounded by rice fields. There were five *kuṭis* but very few trees, most of which were small and did not yet provide any shade. During the day there was normally a cool breeze, but some days were hot and humid. At night the weather was comfortable and airy. There was not much work or chores to do other than the planting of trees on some days. It was quite a good place to stay in the cold and rainy seasons but not so good in the hot season, because we had to water the trees a lot – the entire monastery had only two original trees that offered some shade. There was an abundance of food and also a lot of time for practice since we were not disturbed by the local laypeople.

Since entering the retreat, my meditation practice focused less on the contemplation of unattractiveness. Instead, I mostly emphasized *kāyagatā-sati*<sup>1</sup> because I had already contemplated unattractiveness a great deal. This caused the mind to come back and see the body in its present state more clearly. My mind focused on each part of the body as it presently was, and it converged in *samādhi* more easily without my needing to contemplate any deeper by moving onto the theme of unattractiveness and seeing the body decomposing or dried up. The mind would converge in

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<sup>1</sup> *Kāyagatā -Sati (Pālī)*, Mindfulness of the body. Can have two meanings: 1) A general awareness of the body together with its movements and activities. 2) All the practices comprised under contemplation of the body. In this case it refers to a general awareness of the body in the present without needing to contemplate any deeper than this.

*samādhi* and accept the truth of whatever the body exhibited. On some occasions I would find the act of contemplating to be rather tiresome because it's the same over and over again, and yet at other times it would be enjoyable.

Previously, what I'd contemplated most frequently was the body of the past and future. Now however, I turned to contemplate the body in its present condition, but even doing just this still feels to be quite tedious. My mind would always see my own body and those of others as being something foul – upon seeing a body it would know and accept this, so it was not necessary to shift the contemplation onto the theme of *asubha*. This might be due to having previously done a great deal of reflection on unattractiveness which is now causing the mind to revert to seeing the foulness of the body in its present state. Even though I could see the bodily condition of the past, present and future, my mind had yet to reach the culmination of this level of practice. I was therefore constantly aware that the path<sup>1</sup> for this level of practice had yet to reach fulfilment. My mind had still not seen the nature of the body clearly enough, so I did not let up with my contemplation of the body. I took up the body of the past, future and present and attacked it with the three characteristics. I thought that some day in the future if I possess sufficient merit, my mind will probably be able to see clearly as to whether the body is something worthy of being clung to or worthy of being let go. I would not be heedless, nor would I easily slacken and give up contemplating the body, not until my heart was able to see everything with great clarity.

Luang Por Chah came to stay in Bangkok after the retreat. On the twenty-sixth of November, 1981, a meeting was held at Citta bhavanaraam attended by the abbots of various Wat Pah Pong branch monasteries. It was also an observance day and so we had the *Pāṭimokkha* together.

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<sup>1</sup> *Magga*

Since the end of the rains retreat there was a steady flow of monks going to stay at Cittabhavanaraam, so I decided to have a change of place for a while and go to practice quietly at Wat Pah Jantarawaat at Baan Goray, Khueang Nai, Ubon. The abbot of this monastery had spent the rains retreat at Wat Beaug Khao Luang the same year that I had. After staying here for a while he invited me to go with him to the funeral of Luang Por Bun Chantaro at Baan Kamdaeng in the province of Yasothon. We stayed in Baan Kamdaeng for a time and then set out on the four hour walk to Baan Sai-Moon sixteen kilometres away. We spent the night at Wat Pah Dhamma-Wiwekaraam before continuing to Wat Beaug Khao Luang where I stayed for a while before returning to Cittabhavanaraam. I was back only for a short time before the whole *Sangha* travelled to Wat Pah Chaiwarin, Baan Phai district, Khon Kaen, to pay our respects to Luang Pu Boon Nah. He then took us to Wat Pah Nigrodharaam in the province of Udon Thani to help with the preparations for Luang Pu Orn Yanasiri's funeral. After the funeral in early March, 1982, we returned to Cittabhavanaraam.

Not long after returning I asked to go and practice alone at Khao Cha-Aang Cave in the province of Rayong. It was my intention to remain there and practice for some time, but after being there for a while I was able to free myself from a doubt through gaining a better understanding of something. One morning at the break of dawn I stood on a hill looking at the smoke coming from a fire in the house of a forest settler. As I looked, I thought that is where I will go for alms. Another thought also arose. I thought that I've retreated here to the mountains to spend time in a cave set in the forest. Laypeople also come here deep into the forest to clear land, settle on it and establish farms and orchards, while some make a living from hunting game. Those who travel along the path of practice come looking for peaceful places in forests and mountains to practice in solitude with an aim to transcend suffering. Yet others come to live and work in the peacefulness

and tranquillity of the forest with wrong views<sup>1</sup>, they earn their livelihood in unskilful or unethical ways. The utterance ‘*Sammā-ditṭhi* – right view’ resonated in my heart. If we possess correct understanding we’re able to practise anywhere. On realizing this I gained an understanding about certain things. When I returned from alms-round I had my meal, tidied up, gathered my belongings and then returned to Pathum Thani. For the time being, I decided to stop seeking solitude, that short time had been enough.

It was normal for my mind to maintain a constant level of concentration. Regardless of whether I was standing, walking, sitting or lying down I was able to make my mind calm and peaceful, and it remained so throughout the entire day. I thought to myself that wherever I live if I have right view I’ll be able to practice for *magga*, *phāla* and *nibbāna*. Consequently, I decided to continue my effort to go beyond suffering while staying at Cittabhavanaraam.

In June, 1982, I had been giving full consideration to the idea of leaving the community of monks to practise by myself, because in my heart I don’t really want to be spending time socializing. During this month my mind had become increasingly refined with hardly anything able to affect or disturb its clarity. All mental impressions and emotions issuing from sensory contacts were more subtle, to the extent that my heart remained completely unaffected.



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<sup>1</sup> In this case, wrong view refers to an incorrect understanding of how to live life in an ethical way that doesn’t break any moral precepts, e.g. abstaining from the taking of life. This incident also points to the fact that to know and see the Dhamma doesn’t require one to live in remote places, because many people living in such places will never know or see the Dhamma due to not having right view.

On the twenty-fourth of June, 1982, my mind didn't want to think at all, as my awareness was firmly established abiding only in the present moment. It had been sharp and alert all day without feeling any sleepiness. That evening when I sat in meditation my mind saw the body in such subtle detail that it was as if my body had dissolved into the space element – there was absolutely nothing there. This state was similar to the body being totally empty or expansively open. It's a state I can't correctly describe. When I finished sitting meditation, I got up to do walking meditation. My mindfulness was good, and I walked until my heart felt content and at ease. By 9.30 p.m. I went up to my *kuṭi* and lay down. I continued practising *samādhi*, keeping mindfulness established at the mind. I then observed the arising of a *sabhāva-dhamma*: a bright ray of light came racing through and my mind moved outwards shedding off its 'rust' or the *anusaya*<sup>1</sup> in the process – I witnessed the mind completely abandoning satisfaction and dissatisfaction. I was overcome with a feeling of indescribable amazement. The moment the mind moved outwards and shed its rust, a knowing arose within: the mind has separated away.<sup>2</sup> From where mindfulness and clear comprehension came from I don't know, but it was much greater than before. The following morning I looked upon everything as being just nature. My mind was so cool and tranquil, experiencing only an indescribable lightness and ease. If anyone said anything inappropriate it didn't affect my mind in any way. I knew that all feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction had now been shed. My mind has separated away and let them go. When I saw other people, I fully comprehend that they're all the same. I also had a greater understanding of each person's emotions or

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<sup>1</sup> *Anusaya* (*Pālī*): underlying tendencies; obsessions to which the mind returns over and over again.

<sup>2</sup> This denotes the mind severing all attachment and identification with the body. As a consequence, greed and aversion are finally eradicated. The defilement that still remains is a subtle delusion that causes the mind to identify with the four mental *khandhas* (*vedana, saññā, sankhāra, viññāṇa*) as being a function of a self.

personality and know their state of being is normal and natural for them. Within everybody I see only emptiness – completely open – there is no me or them. This feeling is one that I had never known or experienced before.

The following morning I wanted to cry when thinking of myself and the folly of my naive and deluded heart that had enjoyed indulging in the emotion of satisfaction, without ever thinking to rid itself of the suffering that it caused. Instead, I had always been going along with my own preferences and wishes. In truth, it's only a small mental adjustment that's needed. I had mistakenly perceived myself to be stuck on something else, whereas in actual fact I was only stuck on the emotion of satisfaction – my wish to please others. Once I'd corrected and gone beyond this everything became lighter, my heart remained cool and peaceful throughout the entire day and night. I can't adequately describe just how tranquil and aware the mind was. I felt that my mindfulness and concentration were fully developed for this level of the practice, as my mind is one-pointed in all postures and activities. I did not necessarily need to practise sitting or walking meditation. The mind was completely at ease and I saw everyone as being a part of nature without feeling any satisfaction or dissatisfaction. It was perfectly balanced and objective, without moving to either side by approving or disapproving of anyone as being attractive or unattractive. They are all viewed impassively. It's like having once abandoned feelings of satisfaction or attraction towards the body, everybody becomes exactly the same, without anybody being more special than another. Both the young and old are of the same natural condition: all are impermanent and devoid of any entity that could be called a self.

My heart has no worries or concerns for anybody, not even for myself. The mind has separated away. It's no longer attached to the body whether it be my own or somebody else's, nor is it



attached to any material objects. When seeing, I just see; when hearing, I just hear. The mind moves in the midst of peacefulness and tranquillity. Absolutely everything in the world seems to be merely elements that comply only to nature, and as such the mind has irrevocably let go of its attachment and identification with the body. As a result, greed and aversion have finally been extinguished and all sexual and sensual desire has permanently died out. The work of body contemplation has come to a conclusion, and so has the reflection on the loathsomeness of food. Having let go of all attachment towards the body, the task of food reflection no longer has a purpose. Since I ordained there has never been a day that I've eaten food with desire.



# Fifth Rains Retreat

Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam



The annual Rains Retreat began the sixth of July, 1982, with five monks in residence. During that time I was trying to intensify my effort in the practice. One morning while walking for alms I was continuously contemplating the Dhamma together with whatever object was present in the mind. As a consequence, I gained an understanding of many different dhammas. My mind reflected on its own, seeking the cause to prevent rebirth into any of the various realms of existence. The answer it arrived at was to sever all clinging and attachment. I contemplated the subtle object that still remained. I had to free the mind from *avijjā*,<sup>1</sup> that is, delusion – the state of not knowing or an incomplete knowing of things. It's also the deluded taking of pleasure in the coolness and tranquillity of the mind. Delusion is to be abandoned through contemplating the three characteristics.

As usual, I focused my mind and all its energy towards the absolute highest. All contentment with taking birth or rebirth, which is the normal state of things, had been cut: never again will I be born in either the human or celestial (*Deva*) realms. Taking birth as a *Brahma*<sup>2</sup> god was also something I didn't desire because I've had enough. I would be satisfied with only one thing, and

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<sup>1</sup> *Avijjā*: Fundamental ignorance or delusion as to the true nature of oneself. This ignorance is also the essential factor binding living beings to the cycle of rebirth. It is the seed of being and birth, the nucleus of all existence. It is the one defilement that gives rise to all the others (greed, aversion and delusion), the one root which holds them all in place.

<sup>2</sup> Heavenly beings composed of purest light. Their existence is more subtle than that of *devatās* (celestial beings that experience pleasure through the five sense) due to the refinement of their minds' being able to access states of mental absorption (*jhāna*), thus they abide in the highest heavens.

that's *nibbāna*, never taking birth again. The celestial and *Brahma* realms are still bound with suffering because one still hasn't finished one's spiritual work, and with there still being work remaining one must take rebirth.

*Avijjā*, as a mental state, is the incomplete knowing of things. It manifests as contentment with the various realms of existence and all that arises. The cutting off of *avijjā* is done by removing one's contentment with birth and existence, together with severing the feeling of being pleased with the different levels the mind has attained to and the pleasure being experienced at that level. We foolishly cling however, and thus become stuck or attached.

Ironically I had wanted to live quietly this retreat, but as it turned out work was going on around the area of my *kuṭi* with the constant noise of digging, hammering etc., and yet strangely I felt at ease, without any irritation at all. Less than twenty metres away from my *kuṭi* the builders were constructing a hall and so there was the noise of construction. Concrete was also being mixed and poured to make an edge around the pond. Less than three metres from my *kuṭi* there was a diesel generator and electric planer, yet despite all of this my mind remained well established and completely unperturbed by the sound of the workers or their tools and machinery. The whole time it felt that the sounds were distinctly separate from the mind. The mind and its awareness were one thing while the sounds being perceived were another. The two didn't get involved with one another. When I wish for peace and quiet (I had even requested to refrain from speaking so that I could live quietly. There was no opportunity for me to live in a forest by myself, so I wished to live in the monastery as if I were by myself), I end up surrounded by the loudest noises. But in spite of this my heart was at ease, it has nothing at all to do with the noise. The freedom of heart that has been achieved at this stage of practice brings with it a happiness and bliss that emanates from the still, cool, tranquillity of mind.

With regards to satisfaction and contentment with the feelings of affection and consideration that I've felt towards my friends over the past two full years, foolishness has led me to take greater satisfaction in my friends than *nibbāna*. I had been duped by *avijja* into always thinking, 'Nibbāna can come later, for the time being I'll remain with my friends. This is my final lifetime anyway so I can achieve *nibbāna* anytime I want.' To have greater interest in one's friends than *nibbāna* is so stupid it could make one cry. It fooled me into thinking, 'You're stuck on something really small. It's just a tiny little thing.' This is what it's like when one isn't close to a teacher to receive advice.

Before entering this year's Rains Retreat, I'd thought to go practise and learn the ways of some other monasteries; for example, Wat Pah Baan Taad and Wat Suan Mokh<sup>1</sup> amongst other places. However, in the week since entering the retreat, my heart no longer had any desire to go here or there. I felt that I did not want to go anywhere at all. I just wanted to remain where I was and not go running about to other places. If I were to go someplace, I must feel that there is an appropriate reason for doing so. Without any such reason, I didn't want to go. Ever since my mind separated away [from the body] I had been thinking a great deal of my esteemed teachers, Luang Por Chah and Luang Pu Boon-Nah, giving much thought to the different things they had said. I could see that all their words carried meaning, and all their actions were full of kindness and good intentions. I came to know this in my own heart after having passed a certain point in the practice.

After the Rains Retreat, I continued to practise at Cittabhavanaraam. Around the end of the year I was given the opportunity to give a Dhamma talk to the laity that came to offer food and

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<sup>1</sup> The monasteries of Luang Ta *Mahā* Boowa and Ajahn Buddhadasa, respectively.

requisites on the Observance Day. I did this as a way of repaying them for providing the four requisites<sup>1</sup> that my life depends on in order to put forth effort in the practice, so as to go beyond *samsāra*<sup>2</sup>. In the talk I spoke about going to the Triple Gem<sup>3</sup> for refuge and also on the theme of generosity, moral virtue, and meditative development<sup>4</sup> according to the strength of the *sati-paṇṇā* that I had cultivated. Afterwards, while recollecting the talk, I saw that very few people actually understood it deeply. They mostly listened and just let it pass by, in spite of the fact that what I was teaching was Dhamma that had been well vetted within my own heart. I had worked diligently to find the path to transcendence until knowing for certain that this was the correct path. The reason the listeners did not fully take the Dhamma into their hearts was because I had been a monk for just a few years, and also at that time I was quite young — most of the listeners were 50-60 years' old, old enough to be my parents.

Having conceited views and opinions and putting too much emphasis on the outward qualities of the speaker, such as age, can cause the Dhamma to not flow into peoples' hearts, despite the fact that the Dhamma expounded at that time will be just the same in another twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years' time. However, in the future people will pay more attention and listen with greater ease as the Dhamma more easily enters their hearts, simply because with the passage of time (twenty to thirty years) the speaker will be of a more trustworthy age, and thus the listeners will have more faith and greater confidence in him. The same Dhamma taught at different times will have different results.

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<sup>1</sup> Robes, alms-food, lodgings and medicine.

<sup>2</sup> *Samsāra*: The continuity of existence i.e. the uninterrupted succession of births, deaths, and rebirths within the numerous realms of sentient existence.

<sup>3</sup> The Buddha, Dhamma and *Sangha*. Often called the three refuges.

<sup>4</sup> The three basic categories of meritorious activities taught by the Buddha are to practise generosity (*dāna*), moral virtue (*sīla*), and meditative development or mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). *Bhāvana* is the development of mental peace (*samādhi*) together with the cultivation of wisdom (*pañṇā*).

As a rule, I had never thought to teach the Dhamma to anyone. At times when it was necessary however, such as when the teacher is away, then I felt I had a responsibility to do so. Nevertheless, when giving instruction to anyone it was always in accordance with the level of where my own heart was at. I would only teach that which I had already put into practise myself. After noticing that my teaching hadn't met with the results that it could, owing to the listener's advanced age and their personal conceit and opinions, I decided that in future I didn't want to instruct or teach anyone if not necessary.

One night as I sat in meditation and my mind was resting in the stillness of *samādhi*, a vision of a revered teacher appeared. In the vision he was squatting down and I saw that it was Luang Por Kop (Wat Khao Tham Sarika). He came to instruct me on the practice of the light *kasina* and the development of the formless states of mental-absorption. I knew that what he was teaching was for gaining knowledge of the past and future, and also for developing the divine eye and the divine ear. However, at the time my only desire was for the realization of *nibbāna*, so I didn't follow his teaching. For three consecutive days he came to me while I was in *samādhi*. When he saw that I was paying no heed to his instruction he never appeared to me again. At that time my mind was sufficiently empty to try practising what he wanted to teach, but in spite of that I firmly held to my heart's goal. *Nibbāna* was my only aspiration and so I didn't follow his teaching. Sometime afterwards I reflected on how kind he had been to come and teach me. I should have followed his teaching because he knew that in the future I'd have a lot of free time. At the time it wasn't smart of me to not heed his instruction.



## A Summary of 1982

I felt satisfied with the results of my sustained and concerted effort over the past four years that I had been searching for all possible means to cut my heart completely free of its attachment and identification with the body until finally succeeding. To make a worldly comparison, I felt that the four years of practice up until the mind had completely let go of the body, had been easier than the four years I spent at university until graduating with an economics degree. Maybe it's because I had always been content with my practice and satisfied with the results at each stage along the way, which made things up to that point feel not so difficult. Or maybe it's due to the spiritual practice and virtues that I had previously developed and accumulated in past lives. I'm not sure if this is true or not, but I feel it was very easy to reach that stage. Only once in 1980, while living at Samnaksong Chuan-Puang-Put, did I feel a little troubled, desiring to know the way to let go of the remaining defilements associated with the body<sup>1</sup> once and for all. Until that point my practice felt like a journey that I had previously travelled, so I had no doubts, not until I reached a point where I no longer knew which way to proceed on my journey. This feeling arose at a time in my practice when I was exerting myself to the fullest.

At the end of the year, I felt that in my practice I'd already killed off all of an arch villain's henchmen. All that remained was the leader himself. I had followed hot on his heels until he managed to escape into a very dark cave – so dark that I couldn't see anything, and so was not able to go in and apprehend him. I didn't yet have the necessary equipment – electricity or lighting – that was needed for the job. I therefore kept a vigilant watch at the cave's entrance. He dared not come out because he probably

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<sup>1</sup> The defilements of greed and aversion.

knew I was outside, ready and waiting. I thought that as soon as I'm fully equipped, I'm going to go in there and deal with him. He's now all by himself and wounded.

On the seventeenth of September, 1982, Luang Pu Boon-nah was admitted to hospital due to kidney and lung disorders, as well as heart disease. I was able to stay and attend to him for the whole thirteen days that he was in hospital. He passed away peacefully on the morning of the third of January, 1983. I stayed at his monastery until after his cremation and then returned to Pathum Thani.

During November and December Luang Por Chah was unwell and went for treatment at Chulalongkorn Hospital in Bangkok. I and the other monks at Cittabhavanaraam visited him a number of times. My wish was to help as one of his attendants, but there were already enough monks doing so. All I could do was visit him and listen to news on his condition.

In early January, 1983, Luang Por Chah returned to Wat Pah Pong to be nursed further at the monastery. By that time, he was no longer capable of helping himself. I had the opportunity to join the special Air Force flight that returned him to Wat Pah Pong

As for my practice, I was looking for a way to destroy *avijjā*, and for the way to let go of my subtle attachment and identification with the mental formations (*sankhāra*) and sensory consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Until that time, my practice could be compared to having done hard physical labour in the sun and rain. Since June, 1982, however, it was like I had achieved good results from my work, and so my employer allowed me to rest leisurely, or had been invited to work inside a house with air conditioning, various conveniences, and could sleep and eat whenever I wanted. Life had become easy and relaxed in every way, quite different from the past, because I no longer had to worry about anything at all. I



could rest and sleep in peace without any worries or concerns. But still, I didn't forget to be alert so that I could take care of the work that still remained. For the time being I could take some time out to rest easy – but still I warned myself, 'Don't go enjoying it too much, Dtun!' My mind felt so peaceful, cool, and at ease. Mindfulness was stronger too, and there was a feeling of being satiated with *samādhī*, as I didn't desire anything more than I already had, as if I was sufficiently full for this level of the practice. During this time I was attached to the sublime happiness that I was experiencing after having finally put down the burden of attachment to the physical body. I was being complacent without truly knowing what was happening, on account of my not being close to a teacher to receive guidance.

Around June, 1983, I was giving thought to the imminence of death, and also recollecting my father's kindness while raising me. I thought of going to spend the upcoming Rains Retreat at Wat Pah Pong so that I could be of some benefit to him spiritually. A friend, however, asked me to remain and help out at Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam.

My health wasn't so strong during this time. It felt like my inhalations were not getting into my lungs. One morning I was feeling quite ill, but I'd already arranged to go with a friend to visit a sick monk at Wat Khao Chalaak in the province of Chonburi. When I walked outside after visiting him, I fainted and collapsed. I was lucky my head didn't hit the concrete surface that I was standing on. My only injuries were a sore hip and shoulder. When it happened, I felt a little exhausted, and my arms and legs became weak, yet my mind had no concern whatsoever for the body. As I fainted, I saw my body as being a bright golden colour, while my mind was at complete ease and unconcerned.



# Sixth Rains Retreat

Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam



The annual Rains Retreat began on the twenty-fifth of July, 1983. There were five monks and two novices resident. During the retreat, whenever I looked at anybody they would be replaced by emptiness for an instant, that is, I would see *anattā*. Their body would momentarily vanish leaving only emptiness, then in the following instant, their body would reappear as before. This happened automatically without any contemplation.

Physically, I was not feeling very strong and my overall health wasn't good. I felt stifled, and breathing was rather difficult. I felt unable to draw air deeply into my lungs. I therefore had my awareness focused on the mind without paying any attention to my breathing. This helped a little. I also had frequent fainting spells, but I never went to see a doctor because I was accustomed to using 'Dhamma-medicine'<sup>1</sup>. Whenever I fainted, my mind would spontaneously unify in *samādhi* and separate away from the body, and then while in this state, I looked on at the abnormal condition of the body. My mind was absolutely without fear of sickness and death. Since mid-1982 I completely stopped contemplating the body as well as food. With food I only take what I know to be agreeable to my constitution and eat only for the survival and continuance of the body.

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<sup>1</sup> Making use of the curative or therapeutic properties of Dhamma practice. It is administered by applying one's mindfulness and wisdom that has arisen from concentration, to contemplate any illness or painful feeling, to see its impermanence and absence of self.

I've had some occurrences of foreknowledge about different things that concern both myself and things external to me, but I'm not able to record these things. They arose naturally on account of the mind gaining a greater degree of purity, hence creating knowledge and understanding.

My *samādhi* was at full measure, and so it seemed normal for me to feel perfectly content with the peacefulness and stillness of the mind. I eventually began practising to increase my level of *sati-paññā*, so as to see the fleeting nature of all mind states and mental activity. At times I thought this shouldn't be too difficult and that the goal was near, but in truth, it really is difficult, and not as near as I thought. It seemed like there wasn't much defilement remaining within my heart, but actually there was still a lot. I can't foresee as to when the arch-villain [*avijjā*] will be killed. All that remained now was *avijjā*, but it's the most well-hidden and elusive thing of all – or is it? You have to find a light and the equipment necessary to enter the dark cave where the villain is hiding, and catch him. *Avijjā* is surely in there, but you're not yet able to go in and deal with him, because you have no light, nor do you know what dangers lie in wait there. My feeling this way was how the subtle *kilesa* was keeping me at bay; I'm not yet able to go in and destroy it.

On the fourth of January, 1984, Luang Pu Lui together with five monks and novices came and had the meal at Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam.

Almost every day since the start of the year I had *nimittas* cautioning me not to be heedless, but to take the middle way and be energetic in my practice. It had been a year and a half since my heart had been constantly at ease and peaceful, and I grew attached to the sublime happiness that I was experiencing. I knew I had to put forth effort to go beyond suffering.

While in a quiet, peaceful place I didn't need to practise meditation, because my mind maintained a state of constant peace regardless of whether my eyes were open or closed. Newcomers to meditation make their mind peaceful through the absence of sights, sounds, odours, tastes and bodily sensations. My mind, however, is peaceful because the causes that condition the mind to be active have ceased, hence it always abides in a state of peace. My mind had been transformed. When I see a form, I'm conscious of it and its being perceived as either beautiful or not. Simultaneous to this, however, is the presence of an additional layer of knowing or consciousness that sees the constant arising and ceasing of form.



My monastic friends invited me to go with them to pay respects to some venerated teachers in the north and north-east: On the twenty-first of February, 1984, we went to Wat Phra Buddhabaat Taak Phaa in the province of Lampoon and paid respects to Luang Pu Kruba Bhromachak Sangworn. I felt he possessed a great deal of *mettā*. He was eighty-seven years old and still leading the *Sangha* in group meetings for chanting and sitting meditation. This is hard to find.

On the twenty-ninth of February, 1984, we went to Tham Pah Pai, Lampoon. It was a good place to stay, and was also very quiet and peaceful, however obtaining water for general use and drinking was inconvenient. On the first of March, 1984, we travelled to Wat Pha Nam, also in Lampoon.

On the third of March, 1984, we went to Wat Phra Buddhapaada Huai Tom and then on to Wat Suan Dok in the province of Chiang Mai where we stayed the night.

Fourth of March, 1984, we went to Wat Doi Mae Pang and paid our respects to Luang Pu Waen. From there we went to Wat Tham Pha Plong. Afterwards we went to pay respects to Tan Ajahn Plien at Wat Aranyawiwek and stayed the night.

Seventh of March, 1984, we travelled to Phitsanuloke to pay homage to the Phra Buddha Chinaraat statue. Afterwards we went on to the province of Udon Thani and stayed the night at Wat Bodhisomphon.

Eighth of March, 1984, we went to Wat Hin Maak Peng to pay respects to Luang Pu Tate, and then spent the night. We then went on to Wat Pah Baan Taad to pay respects to Luang Ta *Mahā* Boowa, where we also stayed a short time. On the fourteenth of March, 1984, we travelled to Wat Pah Pong, and after spending fifteen days attending on Luang Por Chah we returned to Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam on the first of April, 1984.

Around the month of July, 1984, some laypeople from Baan Pe in the province of Rayong invited us to go and look at a small hill behind their durian orchard. Their intention was to turn the place into somewhere for monks to stay. There were four monks that went to look at the land, and we all stayed there for two or three nights. Two of the group returned to Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam leaving myself and a friend to stay on for several more days. I considered the land to be not yet suitable for establishing a place of practice.

One day while returning from alms-round, a lay person offered to give us a ride back to where we were staying. As he drove, he spoke of a tract of state forest situated behind his family's durian orchard. He said the place was a very nice forest covered mountain that provided good shade and would be a more suitable place for practising than where we were already staying. Personally, I wanted to take a look at the land he recommended,

but my friend didn't care to. After some urging, he agreed to. We had to walk for two or three kilometres before we could see the mountain and forest he mentioned. We had to settle for looking at it from a nearby durian orchard, because at the time it was raining very hard. On seeing the place, I really liked it, but my friend felt quite the opposite. When we returned to where we were staying, we talked about the other piece of land. I said that it's well forested and is a good and suitable place for practise, but he disagreed for various reasons. That evening I thought tomorrow after the meal I will go for another look, but this time I must go into the forest as well.

The following morning after the meal, I asked my friend to go with me and take another look, because the night before my thoughts were occupied by a feeling that I really had to go and take a look inside the forest. From the moment we arrived there and entered the forest, I liked it and found the place to be most agreeable. I felt that it would be suitable if a *Sangha* residence were to be established there, and confident of the fact that it could certainly be done.

My whole feeling and mood towards the place was one of great liking and approval, and yet at the same time I could also see my mind letting go of the mood. I was fully conscious of my liking for the place, while simultaneously seeing the feeling being let go of owing to my not attaching and identifying with the mood. When we returned to where we were staying, I talked with my friend, but he still didn't like the place. His reasons were due to his only seeing negative aspects of the place, and he wasn't in favour of establishing anything there. I put the matter aside for the time being.

While walking alms-round on my last morning there I said to myself, 'Someday in the future I will return here and definitely create a monastery. If I finish the practice that I still have to do,

then I will definitely return here, sooner or later – of this I'm absolutely certain. I will establish a monastery that will exist long into the future.' I knew this within my heart, even though my friend still disagreed. Afterwards we returned to Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam.



# Seventh Rains Retreat

Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam



The day of entering the annual Rains Retreat was the thirteenth of July, 1984. There were a total of eight monks and novices in residence. This year was my fourth consecutive Rains Retreat here.

In this retreat my mind had been stuck in wholesome mental states. I felt a great deal of goodwill and kindness to my fellow human beings, wishing for them all to experience good health and prosperity in their lives. My mind was so tranquilly cool that it blinded me from seeing the remaining subtle defilements of the mind. This caused me to be remiss in my practice, and not energetically push on with it like I should have been. Some nights when I laid down to sleep, a *nimitta* would arise cautioning me to hasten my effort and not to be negligent or complacent. I knew I must continue with my practice in order to perfect *sati-paññā*, so that I could clearly see *avijjā* and have the discernment to stay abreast of it.

I spoke with my friend about the place we had been to see at Khao Taphao Khwam in Baan Pe, Rayong, before entering the Rains Retreat. I told him, ‘I really like the place, and someday in the future when I’ve finished my work [spiritual practice], if ever I think to establish a monastery, then Khao Taphao Khwam will be the first place I do so. It’s just that at this point in time I’m still not ready to do so, because I’ve vowed that if I still haven’t finished my work, or gained deliverance from suffering, then for this life I do not wish to be an abbot. Instead, I ask to continue with my practice until I die while residing in suitable monasteries.



Nonetheless, I believe that in the future the number of monks and novices who will request to live and depend on me will grow a great deal (there was a knowing that in the future a large number of people will ordain as monks and novices and ask to live with me. I could see the flow growing in ever increasing numbers). There's a limited number of *kuṭis* here at Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam, and with the place being not so large, it's not able to accommodate many monks. Khao Taphao Khwam is appropriate for the establishment of a quiet place for practice. Why don't you like it? I really do think the place is good. If you agree to go, I'll assist in establishing the place, but I don't want to be in charge – you can be – I'll help you develop the monastery. We will live there quietly and have a lot more time to practise.' I related my reasons to him until he agreed to go there and develop a place of practice.

Some other monks and I went to take another look at the place. I really liked it and thought it was suitable for establishing a monastery. I saw that if I do so, the future monastery will grow and prosper. A vision arose in my mind of a paved road. This denotes the place's development, showing that it will certainly be a monastery in the future. That night I turned my mind towards that piece of land and saw a stupa, a symbol indicating a monastery will be established in that particular place. (I recorded this incident in October, 1984). When we returned to Cittabhavanaraam we decided that after the Rains Retreat has finished and the rainy season has come to an end, three of us will try living and practising there to first see what it's like.

In hindsight, I realized the intention to establish a monastery was coming from the goodwill and benevolence I was feeling towards my fellow monks and the lay community, but it also proved to be a great obstacle to my practice. My intention was to establish a place of meditation for monks, novices and lay

people who are intent on practising. I'd become stuck because of the mind's clinging to wholesome mental states.



## Concluding 1984

Ever since the end of the previous Rains Retreat I knew that I might not remain living at Cittabhavanaraam. I had nothing to assist or repay the laypeople with other than offering some words of Dhamma, so that they might gain some faith in good and evil, and that the practise of Dhamma truly does bear fruit –happiness. I also thought that getting to know the way of practice would be of benefit to them – if not a lot, then at least a little. I therefore told my life story to the monks, novices and laypeople who were present, and related how things had evolved for me (some parts just as you have read here in this account). I feel that the people who were present that evening believed what I related to them, and for the laypeople the outcome was that it generated greater faith in the Buddha's teaching. After giving the talk, my story managed to make it out for others to listen to because someone had made a recording of it. They had good intentions and wanted other people to be able to listen to it, so that it might also inspire faith in them as well.

Some of those who listened to the recording did believe what they heard, and it aroused their faith, while others didn't believe what they heard, and rejected it. In general, the outcome was that some people thought I was deluded, while others said my practice would soon deteriorate. Some people even said the story just isn't true. All kinds of things were said with different reasons depending on what each particular person thought. I had no thoughts of criticism for these people in any way at all, because in my heart I knew full well that I wasn't wishing for anything in return. I just felt sorry for them because my own feeling is if their

hearts haven't yet accessed the truth, they shouldn't quickly dismiss what they've heard, nor should they judge it on the basis of their own personal opinions and ideas. My heart wasn't affected by their attacks or criticism, because the truth is the truth, and only time will tell. I believe that criticizing others without knowing the truth for oneself ends up being of harm to oneself. Anybody cultivating spiritual virtues, regardless of whatever they might aspire to, would be better off knowing how to say 'well done.' If one doesn't know the truth, one should have an open-minded attitude and not ignorantly criticize others, for negative criticism is never a good thing. I do feel great pity for those people, as I know well what will become of them, and I sincerely don't want that to happen. For many years I've held back from telling my biography to others unless I feel it necessary. For those whose confidence in Buddhism has been inspired by listening to it, then I am truly pleased, for I can only bring you to the start of the path, but then you – and only you – must walk or crawl the path for yourself.

On the twenty-third of November, two other monks, a novice and I travelled from Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam to stay at Baan Pe. The following day we went to Khao Taphao Khwam and spent our first day there. We were joined by some laypeople who came to be of whatever assistance they could, and over the space of four or five days they cleared paths and sites for setting up our umbrella-tents, as well as making a temporary toilet. When this was done the laypeople and one monk returned, leaving three of us to stay on practising in the forest.

In January, 1985, a monk from Samnaksong Suan Aw, in the province of Chonburi, came to invite me to be the abbot there. I declined because I was still not ready to be one.

Early in the year the friend that I was living there with was sick with malaria, so I moved the location of my umbrella-tent to a

site under a large tree to be closer to him. Every evening I would attend to him, and then I would return to my campsite, feeling exhausted and quite unwell. During his sickness there was only myself who could be of support to the novice and laity, so I didn't make it apparent to them that I was also unwell. Most days while taking care of him, he tried to persuade me that we should return to Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam. I asked him if we go, who will live here? He replied that we let some other monks live here instead. Personally, I didn't want to damage the good faith of the laypeople who were in the process of building five permanent *kuṭis* and one hall. Every day he kept saying that we should return to Samnaksong Cittabhavanaraam. I was afraid that one day I would soften and give in to him.

One night after I'd finished attending on him, I returned to my campsite feeling ill and feverish. I managed to keep myself up and bowed down to the Buddha and then made a resolution: 'May this place be the first monastery that I develop so that it can be a monument for recollection in this lifetime. If I haven't completed its construction I will not leave here regardless of sickness or even death. If I'm not able to establish this place then I will not back away from here.' The following morning when I went to attend on him, he once again encouraged me to abandon this place. I therefore told him that I can't do that because the night before I made a resolution to stay. Actually, the reason I made this resolution is because I knew it would also make him stay, too.

By the end of January, 1985, five *kuṭis* and one grass-roof hall had been completed together with two temporary toilets and one well. In February I was able to move into one of the *kuṭis*.

My health continued to be poor during this time. One day when I returned after the meal, I laid down feeling very ill, unable to move. I couldn't even get up to reach for the thermometer that was on my *kuṭi*'s wall.



## Eighth to Twelfth Rains Retreat

Samnaksong Supattabanpot<sup>1</sup>, Klaeng, Amphur Meaung, Rayong



The monastery is located on a hill standing in front of Khao Taphao Khwam. Its forest is evergreen providing a good amount of pleasant shade. The weather is also cool and airy. The place was comfortably supplied with the four requisites and did not lack in anything, making it a suitable place for the spiritual development of any monk, novice or lay person interested in meditation practice. While living there I had the opportunity to give instruction and Dhamma teachings to the monastics and laity. I also assisted the resident *Sangha* by overseeing the construction of a number of buildings so that they can serve as long-lasting structures for the Buddhist religion. People with an interest would be able to go there and use the monastery to develop their meditation practice. While living there I also took the opportunity to go to Wat Pah Pong each year for fifteen days to help attend on Luang Por Chah.

During the time spent at Supattabanpot, my thoughts were concerned solely with assisting and supporting other people, without giving any thought whatsoever to applying myself to the practice so as to be of benefit to myself. Living there I felt my mind to be very wholesome – stuck in its wholesome thoughts and emotions. It was still attached to these subtle skilful moods and emotions by mostly thinking of other peoples' benefit and well-being without thinking of my own. Occasionally I felt an urge that reminded me to get on with completing the remaining work in my own practice, as I had previously aspired to do. I don't know what

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<sup>1</sup> Officially renamed Wat Marp Jan.

*kamma* it was of mine, but whenever I thought to go somewhere else I couldn't, because my friend would not consent to my going anywhere. Yet I could not abandon him because I must first help him develop this place into a well-established monastery. I had a number of *Sangha* duties and responsibilities to take care of personally, such as overseeing all the construction work, as well as guiding the monastic and lay communities in their practice. If one hasn't fully completed one's practice, I see all manner of building work as a burden which slows down the practice at each and every stage, even if one doesn't actually do the building oneself. In reality, the practice of transcending all suffering requires having the time to constantly keep a watch on one's heart in order to keep abreast of the defilements and abandon them.

Because my mind abided with such great peace and ease, it seemed that I hardly had an opportunity to observe the mind's subtle delusion so as to bring it to an end. It's incredibly hard to catch or destroy *avijjā* because only once in a long time does it show its face before vanishing again. I feel it's difficult for beings of the world to comprehend dhamma as subtle as this. If ordinary worldly beings don't give the time and constant commitment that is necessary for this, then I consider it incredibly difficult to destroy the things that bind the heart. It became my wish to go off on my own, putting aside all my duties and responsibilities so as to bring an end to suffering. I could not yet leave however, because I'd given my word to assist the monastic community until an established monastery had been created. That I tolerated living there might be due to thinking that even though I'm in this predicament, I was still practising to realize the absolute end of suffering. I was unsure if in reality my thinking was correct.

For the whole of the past five months my mind had been stuck in a mental state that I safeguarded and valued dearly. I didn't dare destroy the mental defilements, or *avijjā*, because I feared that in

doing so it would affect or harm that which the mind was stuck on. It's analogous to my wanting to apprehend a criminal that had also taken hold of a hostage. I didn't dare shoot the villain for fear of hitting the hostage and so I had to let him go free. The defilements, or *avijjā*, had brought me to a standstill and I dared not move on.

During this time my health was not so good, and physically I didn't feel very strong. Since 1982 I had frequent spells of feeling unwell which I treated with Dhamma-medicine. The illnesses, however, didn't create any worry or concern because my mind had been liberated from the body. Sometimes when unwell I felt so exhausted that I was not even able to move. My treatment was to rely on the curative powers of Dhamma practise by means of which I was able to sustain and keep myself going. On other days I just felt tired and ached all over. I felt my body lacked strength and was deteriorating by the day. Any day that I rested little, my body really weakened, quite unlike when I first ordained and could take little sleep without being affected. It's my mind that helped me endure and keep going.

In January, 1987, I was sick with malaria P.F. and in February, 1987, I was extremely ill with malaria P.V., which was also complicated by haematuria<sup>1</sup>, causing my urine to be the colour of Coca-Cola, and whenever I vomited there was only greenish bile coming up. Initially I treated myself in the monastery and was determined to not leave, however the other monks and laypeople were afraid that I was going to die, so they took me to a hospital. While hospitalized I was infused with seven pints of blood.

In January, 1988, I was again sick with malaria P. F. and experienced an adverse reaction to the medication. I had to be put on a drip because I had no appetite and couldn't bring myself to

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<sup>1</sup> The presence of blood in the urine.

eat anything. Because my body was not strong, every time I was ill it would be quite serious. I had malaria four or five times while living there, and each time my body would weaken greatly.

In October, 1987, I attended the *Kathina* ceremony at Samnaksong Vimutti-Wanaraam (Suan Aw). That morning while sitting in meditation, I saw my whole body transform into relics of many different colours, brightly glistening and beautiful in appearance.

The fifth of November, 1989, was the day of the *Kathina* at Supattabanpot. I was greatly overjoyed seeing the monks, novices, and laity coming together to express their appreciation with the offering of the *Kathina* cloth, as well as the formal offering of the Bodhinyana Hall and its principal Buddha statue. I felt relieved and completely satisfied that everything had finished smoothly. I also knew that it was the day that my obligation towards my friend and the resident *Sangha* came to an end. I felt I'd helped the *Sangha* considerably and that the monastery had been sufficiently developed as a place of practice for any interested monks, novices and laypeople.

I wanted to retreat from the *Sangha* so that I could go and practise as I had previously intended, and was pleased that I could intensify my efforts once again. I provided as much benefit and support as I could to others, while my own personal benefit had yet to be fulfilled. I therefore wished to find a peaceful, secluded place to practise. Once, after living there for three years, I mentioned to my friend that I wanted to go and live in seclusion in order to practise for my own deliverance from suffering. However, he asked me to remain and help supervise the construction of the Dhamma Hall before leaving. I was disappointed because I wanted to go and practise. I felt he should have given more support to my practice than to construction work. I therefore put my own wishes aside and resolved that when the hall is finished, I would leave to practise, and that he better



not have any more reasons to prevent me from doing so. I thus remained practising at Khao Taphao Khwam while also overseeing the construction of the hall. The day I was waiting for had arrived, and I felt relieved, as if a burden had been laid down. I was happy that I could go off to practise alone without any worries or concerns.

While living at Supattabanpot, my meditation practice had been gradual, but nothing special. I wasn't able to give it my complete attention and effort because I had been responsible for teaching the monks, novices and laypeople, as well as overseeing all of the building and development work inside the monastery – essentially everything. Everything was done for the sake of the religion and the resident monastic community, hence I gave it my utmost. During the five years that had passed I grew to know more about worldly-dhammas<sup>1</sup>, which gave me a greater understanding of the Dhamma and the ways of the world. Many factors came together to evoke feelings of disenchantment towards the defilements in my own heart, until resolving to leave so that I can go alone to practise for the ending of all suffering. I felt I had wasted too much time on external matters and regretted how much time had passed. This is why I determined to help complete the *Sangha* work that I was asked to do and then leave in order to intensify my efforts in the practice once again.



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<sup>1</sup> Worldly dhammas (*Pāli: loka dhamma*): four pairs of opposing conditions inextricably bound up with human life: gain and loss; fame and disrepute; praise and criticism; happiness and suffering.

## Practising at Khao Yai, Nakhon Ratchasima Province

I practised at Khao Yai<sup>1</sup> from the eighth of February to the twenty-second of April, 1990. Also accompanying me were three other monks, one of them a westerner. After being there for one month, two of the monks returned to leave only myself and one other monk. We stayed on opposite sides of a mountain quite some distance from one another. We couldn't see each other, nor would one be able to hear if the other was to call out. My own feeling while practising there was if I don't come down from this mountain alive it doesn't matter. When I first arrived I set up my umbrella-tent on a large rock located deep within the forest, far from any tourist spots. It was very peaceful and also full of wild animals living in their natural habitat.

At Khao Yai my meditation practice was very good. I clearly saw how up until that point I had been entangled in wholesome mental states and subtle forms of conceit. When my practice had acquired sufficient intensity<sup>2</sup> for *sati-paññā* to cut through these wholesome mental states and conceit it was like watching a video tape playing in reverse. I could see the things in which I was stuck. With wisdom I was able to cut out those wholesome states of mind, which enabled me to clearly see any *kilesa* still concealed within the mind, as well as the past circumstances that I'd been stuck in. The collective strength of my mind cut through this, abandoning it all in the present moment, hence manifesting as the tape having been cut. The tape replayed for me to see the truth of the hidden tricks and wiles of the *kilesa* that I'd unknowingly been stuck in. Having now gone passed this I was able to know and understand my own heart, as well as gaining insight into

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<sup>1</sup> A large national park in central Thailand.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'sufficient intensity' in this case comes from a term that could be literally translated as 'walking the path'. It implies the collective strength of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* required to move one along the Noble path, by progressively cutting through the defilements at that particular level of path development.



Ajahn Dtun practising at Khao Yai,  
Nakhon Ratchasima Province  
April, 1990



Ajahn Dtun practising at Khao Yai,  
Nakhon Ratchasima Province April, 1990

various refined dhammas. I could see the mind's subtle conceit more clearly, and let it go by degrees.

While staying in that particular spot there was a period of about fifteen days when late each morning a doe and her calf would come to rest close to my camp-site and remain there throughout the day and night. One evening, at about 10 p.m., I saw a tusked elephant eating rattan and bamboo close to where I was staying. It remained there eating until the following morning. I practised sitting and walking meditation throughout the night until going for alms. I wasn't afraid, but was not heedless either. If I rested it might have come and torn down my umbrella-tent or harmed me in some way. About a week after that, at about 4 p.m., I was doing walking meditation and as I approached one end of my meditation path, I could hear what sounded like a windstorm coming through the forest. I looked to the tree tops, but everything was normal. A long rustling sound then followed and I saw a herd of wild boar, maybe 200-300 in number, running towards me. They stopped and stood silently at the end of my meditation path and looked at me. I too had stopped and looked towards the leader of the herd. After a short time, the leader grunted a signal and they all turned around and proceeded to make their way down to the bottom of the mountain ridge. The forest became silent again and I continued with my practice.

While practising there I really exerted myself and took little rest. There was one night that I felt worn out and took a rest at midnight. At around 3 a.m. while I was still sleeping, I heard a whispering beside my ear, 'Venerable, wake up. Get up and practise. In the future you will be a refuge to a great number of people.'

Around the middle of March, I moved my campsite to another side of the mountain. The new spot was about 500 metres into the forest, about a fifteen minute walk in. This part of the ridge was very quiet and was a path frequented by tigers in search of food.

At dusk one evening, around 6.45 p.m., I'd just finished bathing at an abandoned house and started walking back to my site. The path I used was about fifty centimetres wide and followed a mountain ridge. I kept it cleanly swept by using branches. After walking for about five minutes the forest became more dense and darker. I heard the sound of digging and earth being scraped at the foot of a large tree about thirty metres off to my left. I shone my torch in the direction of the sound. The instant my light touched the animal it turned around and stood up. It was a black bear. It had a white 'v' shaped marking on its chest and its body was about the size of a 200-litre drum. I felt it wasn't a danger to me and it sensed I wasn't a danger to it. As I continued walking the bear also came out onto the swept path three to four metres in front of me. As it walked along the path, I followed behind close enough that I could have reached out and touched its back. After a short distance it turned to the side of the path and continued scraping and foraging for food, with its backside sticking out beside the path. I stopped for a moment and thought to stroke its back like one would fondly do to a dog. However, as I thought to reach out, the saying 'Don't be careless around animals with fangs and claws' came to mind. I therefore walked passed its backside and paid it no more attention. When I reached my place of practice, I began walking meditation. As I walked, I reflected that if I'd touched its back it might have been startled and may well have harmed me.

After my meal one morning I started practising sitting and walking meditation. My meditation path was approximately twenty-five paces in length. At one end of the path was a large rock about two metres in width and one 170 centimetres in height. While walking in meditation a young male tiger jumped up onto the rock. I wasn't alarmed and continued walking, taking another few paces towards the tiger. The tiger jumped down behind the rock onto a path going down the mountain. I immediately went to look for it, but I couldn't hear or see any trace of it.

On the eighth of April, 1990, I travelled to Bangkok to attend the royal cremation of Luang Por Lui at Wat Phra Sri Mahathat in the region of Bang Khen. I returned to Khao Yai on the following day and carried on with my practice which continued to progress well. Both the place and the weather were very good, and I was comfortably provided with the four requisites. By the twenty-second of April, it was necessary for me to leave because it was getting close to the rainy season, so I had to find a place to spend the upcoming Rains Retreat. I also wanted to take leave of the community at Supattabanpot. I left Khao Yai feeling sorry to be departing from this place of practise and the opportunities available to me while staying there. During my time there I saw numerous animals of all sizes, such as: squirrels, chipmunks, a variety of birds – hornbills for instance – wild chickens, a troop of monkeys, a herd of wild boar, barking and common deer, black bears, tigers, elephants, and many other kinds of animals. It was enjoyable seeing them, and I also felt great kindness and compassion towards them.



While at Khao Yai I thought for the upcoming Rains Retreat I wanted to find a secluded place to continue practising alone. I wondered whether it would be good to look for somewhere down in the south or up in the north-east (Isaan). I also remembered how in 1988 I'd visited a plantation belonging to a lay supporter [Boon Jenjirawatana] in the province of Chonburi and saw a piece of forest approximately eighty acres in size. The forest was very mixed with a great variety of trees. At first sight I thought it could well become a future place of meditation practise, so I told the lay supporter to take good care of it, because before long it will become a monastery. The land within the forest is mostly flat, but does have some low areas and a small hill. It's hard to find forest like this in this area because normally any forest is mostly on the high hills. The flatter areas have all been turned into plantations

and farms. I felt a great liking for this forest because it was peaceful and secluded. It's also still dense and in very good condition, entirely suitable as a place for solitary practise, because it's situated six kilometres away from the nearest village and about twenty-five kilometres away from the nearest highway. Travelling in was difficult because it was a dirt road with a log-bridge crossing a canal. I asked the lay supporter if the forest was still there, and she replied it was. I asked her if I could go there to practise, and she enquired with her father if a monk could go and practise in that particular forest. Her family was happy to let me do so, hence my decision to go stay there [present day Wat Boonyawad] and practise alone.

From the fifth to the eighteenth of May, 1990, I returned to Supattabanpot to say farewell to the *Sangha*. On Sunday, the twentieth of May, 1990, I travelled to the forest at Baan Klong Yai, Bo Thong, Chonburi. At the time I was thirty-five years old and had been a monk for twelve years (Rains Retreats). When I arrived the lay supporters had already built a *kuṭi* with a separate toilet for me. In coming here to practise it was my intention that if it proves suitable, I would remain for the Rains Retreat. If there were no real obstacles of any kind, I would just stay on practising here indefinitely. If one were to imagine personifying the *kilesa*, *avijjā* and my heart could no longer live together. If I don't die, then let *avijjā* be the one that does. It's because my heart still had *kilesa* concealed within that I came here to practise. I didn't want the defilements to roam around outside, so I brought *avijjā* here to live with me. I desired to brace the neck of *avijjā* and lock into a fight<sup>1</sup>. May the best man survive. If I was to survive then *avijjā* must die. Each and every day I would put forth effort and continue to do so until my very last breath. If I didn't reach the final end of all suffering... well, let's just see.

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<sup>1</sup> The image is of two Thai-boxers as they brace necks and engage in a full-on exchange of repeated knee blows.



But whatever the case, *avijjā* and I could no longer remain living together – we're done!



# Thirteenth Rains Retreat to the Present

Wat Boonyawad, Baan Klong Yai, Bo Thong, Chonburi



The eighteenth of July, 1990, was the day of entering the annual Rains Retreat. I spent it by myself in this pleasantly breezy and shaded forest. The wildlife here is comprised of many varieties of birds, rabbits, chipmunks, barking deer, fishing cats and porcupines, amongst others. The four requisites are amply provided and everything is convenient and conducive for practise. While practising my mind felt clear and at ease, more able to clearly contemplate my mind and reflect on dhammas. It was nice and quiet living by oneself and I felt so peaceful and happy. Every day I walked to the house of the foreman of the Jenjirawatana plantations for alms. The plantation owner had him offer a variety of food in an amount that was comfortably sufficient. It was peaceful and quiet throughout the day and night because it's far from any villages or houses.

## **Daily schedule during the retreat:**

- 3.00 a.m. Rise, personal chores.
- 3.15 a.m. Sitting meditation.
- 4.30 a.m. Walking meditation.
- 5.15 a.m. Prepare my eating place and get ready for alms-round.
- 6.10 a.m. Alms-round.
- 6.50 a.m. Return.
- 7.00 a.m. Sitting meditation.
- 7.45 a.m. Prepare to eat.
- 8.00 a.m. Take my meal, bowl washing, personal chores.
- 9.30 a.m. - 4.00 p.m. Sitting and walking meditation.
- 4.00 p.m. Daily chores, sweeping, cleaning my *kuṭi*, bathing.



Ajahn Dtun's first kuṭi at Wat Boonyawad.



Mr.Boon Jenjirawatana and family  
formally offering the land to establish Wat Boonyawad.

5.30 p.m. Sitting meditation.

6.30 p.m. Evening drink.

7.30 - 11.00 p.m. Sitting and walking meditation.

11.00 p.m. Rest.

It was my intention to continue practising like this each and every day. If I did not reach the culmination of the practice then I would not stop exerting myself until I breathed my final breath. I could not rest or take a break from my effort for long, as I had to continue my attack on the enemy, *avijjā*. Should I have ever fallen back onto the defensive then I would have been immediately disadvantaged, because *avijjā* is so smart and cunning. It has laid a network of mazes everywhere to trap one in. To achieve success and come out the victor, it was necessary to always stay on the offensive and be persistently attacking, because *magga*, the Noble path, must remain stronger than the mental defilements. I continually reminded myself that when putting forth effort I must overcome laziness – effort must always exceed laziness. All of my mental strength and energy had to unite into one focal point, having full awareness in the present moment, for the fight with *avijjā*.

I could see the *sankhāra* unravelling from the mind with greater clarity. I investigated the faculty of *saññā* and could see more clearly how *saññā* is completely absent of any self-entity. But once I came to *sankhāra* I mused that if I investigate them as being *anattā*, what will I be left with? What is the pure mind if one's feelings and thoughts are *anattā*? If that's the case the mind must be *anattā* as well. Does the pure mind not have feeling or cognizance? And what is the pure mind if all things are fabrications<sup>1</sup>, and fabrications are *anattā*? These were speculations that I toyed with. In contemplating up to this point

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<sup>1</sup> Another rendering for the Pālī word 'sankhāra'. In a broader sense of its meaning, *sankhāra* can refer to anything formed or fashioned by conditions, instead of its more specific meaning of being thought-formations within the mind.

I felt that I'd reached a dead end. Delusion had rendered me incapable of moving forward because I couldn't resolve these points. This is actually an advanced level of contemplation and not the mere thinking in accordance with what one has remembered or heard. I really wanted to ask a meditation master, but I didn't know who to seek out or where to go because the Rains Retreat still hadn't finished, and that aside, I was not at a complete loss. I thought if I continued practising, I would probably know and see things for myself. *Avijjā* was probably leading me around so as to disorient me.



One night in 1990, I had an auspicious *nimitta*. I dreamt I went to pay respects to Luang Ta *Mahā* Boowa and related to him what was happening in my practice. He then answered the questions I'd been wondering about with great clarity. On another night, I walked in meditation reflecting on *sankhāra* (thoughts and mental formations) and saw in ever greater detail the delusion of attaching to *saññā*, *sankhāra* and *viññāṇa*. I saw how *avijjā* had fused with the mind until it became one and the same, just like the mixing of gold and brass. They must be separated!

My *sati-paññā* had become more subtle and worked to track down the defilements within the mind. I saw my previous state of delusion that had seized hold of *sankhāra* as being the mind itself and therefore not dare to investigate them, in order to destroy and finally sever it from the mind. I didn't dare to separate it because I was uncertain and feared that there would be nothing remaining – the *kilesas* had been leading me in circles. At this level one can't allow what has been remembered or heard to mix in with the mind. When thinking, one must use mindfulness and discernment that are penetratingly sharp. One's conventional understanding that form, feeling, memory and perception, mental formations and sensory consciousness are not-self in

accordance with the scriptures needs to be temporarily discarded. One will not see the truth if memory is allowed to interfere. The knowledge and understanding that we obtain from books isn't the heart's own understanding that is gained from finely honed faculties of *sati-paññā*. One must study and investigate anew with true *sati-paññā*. When these two persistently probe the mind, one will see more clearly that having let go of the body (*rūpa*) and feelings (physical *vedanā*, i.e. not mental vedana), the mind that has been purified to some degree still remains – why is it we don't die after letting go of these two? It's the same as gold being separated from brass, copper and other substances that have been alloyed. *Saññā*, *sankhāra* and *viññāṇa* must likewise be able to be separated from the pure mind, which will exist independently of them without dying. In contemplating up until that point, I was able to see that they've joined together into a cohesive unit and was able to more clearly separate *saññā*. When it comes to *sankhāra* and *viññāṇa* though, the *kilesa* continued to lead me around in circles. Within my heart I was beginning to see things more clearly though, and expected that one day a showdown was going to take place for sure.

When I set my focus on contemplating the mind and its modes of *saññā*, *sankhāra* and *viññāṇa* (*avijjā*), it made me think of the time in my fourth year at university when the mind was thinking endlessly. At the time I wondered why it is that I believed this mind which would not stop thinking and was out of my control, was my own mind. I therefore tried to find a way to bring it under my control, and first made use of the meditation word '*Buddho*'. At the time I had no knowledge about mental development and had received no advice from anyone. If I had known that thoughts are impermanent and not-self I would have let them go, instead of holding fast to them. I wasn't smart enough to know.

I felt joy to be living and practising here, and I was comfortable with my heart's abiding. The natural environment of the forest

with its varied wildlife and the scent of wild flowers also provided happiness. Living alone offers both physical and mental seclusion. My heart was cool and truly peaceful. While walking in meditation I investigated the *sankhāra* and dhammas, and saw them with ever greater clarity and detail, consequently letting go of *sankhāra* at intervals.

In August, 1990, there was an instance when I investigated the mental formations while walking in meditation. As I walked, I observed the arising of a *sabhāva-dhamma* within my mind, when in an instant, the mental formations exploded into fine particles and my mind became lighter. It was then that I knew with clarity the way to proceed to destroy *sankhāra*.

I investigated the mental *khandhas* and saw the knower. In a mental-image I saw my thoughts of the past, future and present not bonding the mind. The mind didn't absorb the past, future, or present. I looked on with indifference as I saw their repeated arising and ceasing. Formerly, the mind had attached to, and identified with, the past, the future and the present. Once I knew the way of practice, I was able to let go of the past and future, but still remained stuck on the present. Now I've let go of not only the past and future, but also the present.

In the beginning of January, 1992, I had a *nimitta* in which I saw my top molars fall out from my mouth.<sup>1</sup> Shortly afterwards, on the sixteenth of January, 1992, I received the news that Luang Por Chah had passed away that day at Wat Pah Pong. That same evening I travelled to Wat Pah Pong.



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<sup>1</sup> In Thailand this is traditionally considered a very inauspicious sign portending to the death of a close relation or someone important to oneself.



On the twenty-second of January, 1992, Venerable Luang Ta *Mahā* Boowa visited Wat Pah Pong to attend the ceremonies<sup>1</sup> and stayed overnight. After the meal the following morning he was sitting in an open area underneath Luang Por Chah's *kuṭi*, so I took the opportunity to ask him some questions about Dhamma practice. Actually I had no doubts, but still asked in line with the *nimitta* I had in 1990 when I was at an impasse regarding the matter of contemplating *sankhāra* and dared not destroy them. Sometime later however, my contemplation had surpassed this matter. Meeting Luang Ta at Wat Pah Pong was just like in the *nimitta*, so I approached him and asked as I did in the vision:

**Ajahn Dtun:** At first when contemplating, it seemed like I would destroy myself because *sankhāra*...

**Luang Ta Mahā Boowa:** Huh?

**Ajahn Dtun:** Regarding the mental *sankhāra*. When I first started contemplating it, it seemed as if I were committing suicide, owing to the fact that we're so used to attaching and identifying with our thoughts as being oneself. Hence, when I started to contemplate, I was afraid because it appeared similar to destroying *sankhāra*. Regardless of this I continued until seeing the three characteristics within the *sankhāra*, and temporarily saw their total absence of self. As I proceeded to contemplate, I sometimes saw that all thoughts and mental states pertaining to the past, future or present shouldn't be held to, and so I let them go. I should continue contemplating like this, right?

**Luang Ta:** That's right, contemplate like that.

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<sup>1</sup> Following Luang Por Chah's death there was a fifteen-day period of Dhamma practice consisting of chanting, meditation and Dhamma talks.

**Ajahn Dtun:** Occasionally when contemplating I think, what is it that remains? What is the true pure mind? If *sankhāra*, or thoughts, are not to be held to or identified with, then what will I be left with? But sometimes I see that what remains is knowing – nothing but knowing. Is that correct or not?

**Luang Ta:** Say that again.

**Ajahn Dtun:** I see the arising of subtle *sankhāra* – whether they are of the past, future, or present, they’re perceived and then simply pass by. It’s like they exist separate of this independent state of knowing. This knowing exists only temporarily because present-moment mental states shouldn’t be held to, as they are just passing by without engaging with the mind. And so sometimes I wonder what is it that remains of a mind that is pure, because when I think about when the great meditation masters speak or teach the Dhamma, isn’t this also *sankhāra* that they are putting to conventional use?

**Luang Ta:** You’re saying contemplating *sankhāra* will lead to their extinction, leaving nothing for you to hold to or identify with – it’s like that is it?

**Ajahn Dtun:** Yes, sir.

**Luang Ta:** Just think, the Lord Buddha and his *arahant* disciples, once having attained purity they’d be like tree stumps<sup>1</sup> – it’s like that, is it? They had no awareness or knowing, eh? Question yourself in this way, because the answer comes from within the heart. Contemplate without safeguarding or worrying about anything. If you fear death, it’s a matter of the *kilesa*.

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<sup>1</sup> In Thai, this suggests a meaning of a person being completely devoid of all mental activity.

**Ajahn Dtun:** I saw when making a Buddha statue they combine gold, naak<sup>1</sup> and silver together. I thought it should therefore be possible to separate the gold from the naak and silver. If a pure mind is like gold I ought to be able to separate it out from all other substances to leave only pure gold. Sometimes I compare it to dirty water, or water stained by red, black and green dyes. It ought to be possible to separate the colours out so as to purify the water. I'm trying to analyze and reflect on this point to see whether it's correct or not.

**Luang Ta:** Correct. I've previously contemplated this point. At this point what are you keeping hold of? When reaching this stage don't preserve anything. Bring everything to cessation, even the knowing, and make sure you see this within yourself... (recording becomes unclear) ... and the mind will also cease. If this is called being a tree stump, then I don't know. Do you understand?

**Ajahn Dtun:** Yes, sir.

**Luang Ta:** If you're still clinging to or protecting anything then that is *kilesa*; it's the safe keeping of a thorn. When it comes to the stage that everything must be let go ...(unclear)... what will remain? Will you be a tree stump? See for yourself! This is called laying waste to everything ...(unclear)... Safeguarding anything is tantamount to *kilesa*. Do you understand?

**Ajahn Dtun:** Yes, sir

**Luang Ta:** Having reached this stage, don't be selective. At this stage let nothing remain. Contemplate until absolutely nothing remains, especially *avijjā*. In this way, what remains is the mind. It's like separating naak from gold, the *kilesa* and the mind become separate. *Kilesa* arise and cease, but for the mind there's

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<sup>1</sup> An alloy of gold, silver and copper; sometimes called pink gold.

no such words as arising and ceasing. It's quite the opposite. When this has all been let go, destroy whatever it's preserving ... (unclear)... You can't keep anything aside! At this point don't safeguard anything. (At this moment the conversation was interrupted by a lay person lacking a sense of the appropriate time to make offerings).

This conversation was transcribed from a recording made by another monk.



When I returned from Luang Por Chah's pre-funeral ceremonies I intensified my effort in meditation practice. In all postures, I'd direct the mind to concentration. My awareness was focused at the mind, watching the arising and ceasing of mental formations in each and every moment. Mindfulness and wisdom were solely directed to contemplating the mind in the present moment.

One day as I was practising sitting and walking meditation, my faculties of mindfulness and wisdom remained constant throughout the entire day, staying aware of the present. The mind was free of all thoughts and emotions pertaining to the past or future. It remained solely in the present and dwelled in emptiness for the entire day. Late that night as I was doing walking meditation, mindfulness and wisdom were still focused at the mind observing the arising and ceasing of all mental formations, until – in a single mind-moment – *sati-paññā* clearly perceived the mental formations to be merely a mode of the mind, while simultaneously letting go of the delusion that had always attached and identified with these formations as being the mind itself. In that instant my mind entered into a state of subtle emptiness – it had been freed. It no longer clung to any aspect of conventional reality; it was impartial and free with only pure knowing arising within the mind. A feeling of indescribable wonder arose

in my heart together with the knowing that my mind had been freed from *avijjā*. Mindfulness and wisdom clearly saw everything that I'd been preserving, on account of being too afraid to destroy it, was in fact *avijjā*. It was then that I lucidly saw within my mind: That which thinks is not the mind; rather, it is that which does not think – that, is the mind. By no longer protecting or preserving anything, the moment my mind saw the arising and ceasing of all mental formations, mindfulness and wisdom perceived this clearly and let go of relative, conventional reality to leave only absolute purity of mind.

*Sankhāra* are merely an activity or mode of the mind that arise and cease. Once the mind irrevocably let's go of this, all that remains is purity of mind. The liberated mind does not abide in the body, nor does it abide in mental feeling, memory and perception, mental formations, or sensory consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Once the mind's deluded attachment and identification with all five *khandhas* has ceased, the mind relinquishes all identification with the knowing of the present moment. The mind is not bound to the past or future, nor is it bound to the present. It has uprooted all attachment and clinging to the three worlds of existence<sup>2</sup>, leaving only pure knowing, because *avijjā* has been reduced to extinction.

A comparison can be drawn to the proliferation of the mental formations as being the ceaseless creators of existence within all the realms in *samsāra*. *Avijjā* is the director of the play of life who makes the mental formations act and function in accordance with their specific roles in each existence. When knowing (*paññā*) arises, one's ignorance as to the nature of the mental formations

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<sup>1</sup> This implies the pure mind is above and beyond the *khandhas*. It is independent of their working and yet still exists amid the same *khandhas* with which it used to intermix, although no longer sharing any common characteristic with them.

<sup>2</sup> The three worlds of existence into which beings are born: the Sensual World (*Kāma – Loka*), the Fine Material World (*Rupa-Loka*) and the Immaterial World (*Arupa-Loka*) which together comprise the entire universe of sentient existence.

consequently ceases, and so the play's director is no longer needed, and never again will it cause birth.

The wise sages, the ones who know, must investigate for themselves. Each stage must be known for oneself.



## Remembering My Father's Kindness

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I would like to mention the details around my father's ordination in 1988. Before this time, I'd been recollecting his great kindness and thought that I'd have no opportunity to repay my debt of gratitude to him in a material way or with physical comforts. So I thought to repay his kindness by way of the Dhamma. I therefore wrote him a letter encouraging him to ordain. He approved of what I said in the letter, and agreed to do so. For my part I arranged for all the requisites<sup>1</sup> necessary for his ordination.

In May, 1988, he received the Eight Precepts of an *anāgārika*, and on the sixteenth of June, 1988, he received full ordination as a monk. Afterwards he came to live with me at Supattabanpot in Rayong until 1990, when I went to practise in seclusion at Khao Yai. On leaving I entrusted him to the abbot. Eventually I made my way here (Wat Boonyawad) intending to practise in solitude. At the time my father didn't know where I was staying, but he was eventually able to contact me via a lay person. He wanted to ask for permission to go and practise in the north-east of Thailand. Because of his advanced age I didn't want him to go so far away, so I invited him to come live with me so that I could take care of him. He agreed, and I was able to repay him with the Dhamma.

In August, 2003, Luang Por Tiap was diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer. His doctor said the cancer couldn't be treated

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<sup>1</sup> A monk possesses eight basic requisites: the three main robes, an alms-bowl, a waist band, a needle and thread for mending robes a razor to shave head and beard, and a water filter.

and that he probably wouldn't live for more than another three months. He passed away on the twenty-first of November, 2003, at the age of eighty. He had been a monk for sixteen years. He was cremated on twenty-third of November, 2003.

To the best of my memory, ever since I was born, I'd never once argued with my father, not a word. I can remember one evening when he returned home to Bangkok from his work in another province. The following morning when I met him, he asked me whether my elder brother had slept at home that night. I told him that he hadn't and that he was probably staying at a friend's house. He said to me, 'Do you know I didn't sleep at all last night?' I presumed it was because he was worried and concerned for his son. I said to myself, 'From now on, may I be the one to bear any suffering within my father's heart. He will not experience any suffering or uneasiness on account of me.' Ever since that day I would do whatever he wanted me to. Sometimes when I wanted to go out he wouldn't let me, but to keep him happy, I would do as he said and abide by his wishes. For this lifetime I feel that I've fully repaid my debt of gratitude to him.









## The Creation of Wat Boonyawad

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Wat Boonyawad is located at 44 Moo 8, Baan Klong Yai, Bo Thong, Chonburi. I first saw this place in 1988 when I came here on the invitation of a lay supporter. The forest is approximate 80 acres (32.4 hectares) and belongs to Mr and Mrs Boon and Seem Jenjirawatana. They take care of the forest while also farming the surrounding land to the south, east, and west by growing plantations of rubber-trees, palm, cashew, sugar cane, eucalyptus, pineapple and other crops.

This entire area was originally classified as state forest, however around 1957, concessions were issued by the government to cut the forest. People were able to lay claim to plots of land and purchase the right to clear it for agricultural use. Mr Boon Jenjirawatana did exactly this, though he chose to preserve this tract of relatively flat land in its original condition so that his children and grandchildren would know what the forest in this area was once like. Otherwise, outside of this forest, the only remaining forest is to be found on the surrounding hills and mountain ranges.

I came here to practise after spending some time at Khao Yai National Park. It was two of Boon Jenjirawatana's children, Suwaree Jenjirawatana and her younger brother Suwat, who brought me here. Suwat sponsored the building of my *kuṭi* and a separate toilet. In those days travelling into here wasn't as convenient as it is today, because highway 344 from Baan Beaug to Klaeng was still only a standard two-lane road. Once leaving the highway, it was another 26 kilometres along red dirt roads.

The several streams running through this area had to be crossed on wooden bridges, some of which were simply logs cut in half and lashed together.

When I came here, I determined that if there were no obstacles of any kind, I would continue practising here by myself. In the Rains Retreat that year my practice progressed well and the results were most satisfactory. In early October, 1990, I pondered as to whether I would remain here or seek out another place to continue practising. One day in late October I had been sitting in meditation for a short time on the veranda of my *kuṭi*. At around 3 p.m. I was aware that several flocks of birds came to perch in the surrounding trees. The noise they made became increasingly louder to the extent that the clamour caused me to open my eyes to see what was happening. I counted at least ten different types of birds, with each type forming a flock of no less than thirty to forty in number. Once this great gathering of birds had all sung their call they proceeded to fly away, flock by flock, until not a single bird was left and the forest became silent again. I mused as to why this had happened, because nothing of its kind had ever happened before. I then remembered that earlier in the month I'd given some thought as to whether I would remain practising here or go elsewhere. However, after this incident I reflected that if I were to leave, laypeople will cut down the forest to make rubber and palm plantations, depriving many thousands of animals of their habitat. Also, other than the forest's large variety of birds, there lived many other kinds of animals, such as squirrels, tree shrews, chipmunks, Siamese hares, wild chicken, porcupine, mongoose, small palm civets, fishing cats, barking deer and various types of snakes. I asked myself what will happen if I remain here, and I saw that the eighty-acre forest would be preserved allowing tens of thousands of animals to keep their habitat. But of greatest importance, I saw that sometime in the future this will be a place where Buddhism will be perpetuated. After reflecting in this way I therefore chose to remain and continue my practice here.

One evening I experienced the mind-set of a *Pacceka Buddha*.<sup>1</sup> Even though it wasn't the real thing, it was probably quite similar.

The feelings I had were as follows:

I felt disenchanted and wearied after seeing the truth of worldly-dhammas, and I just didn't want to help or get involved with anyone. I thought it was a natural law that each person is the owner and heir to their own *kamma*.

I felt satisfied to live simply, quietly and alone without getting involved with others.

I was completely unaffected by praise or criticism.

The majority of people at that time were *padaparama*<sup>2</sup> and so could not be taught.

These were my own thoughts and feelings that came about in my meditation practice, but then again it might not be so.

When my father and another monk who was a disciple of mine came to live with me, it became necessary to establish some rules and conditions to govern our living together. I specified that they are expected to quietly practise here for about two years. During that time, it was forbidden to contact anybody or have any kind of outside business unless I deemed it necessary. My actual intention in coming here was to practise, not to establish a monastery. This is the reason why I told only a few people where I was staying, and why I didn't want to accept other monks and novices coming here to live with me. I wanted to keep things

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<sup>1</sup> (*Pālī*) 'Solitary Buddha.' One who, like a Buddha, has gained awakening without the benefit of a teacher, but who lacks the requisite store of *pāramī* to teach others the practice that leads to awakening. He is described as someone frugal of speech and who cherishes solitude.

<sup>2</sup> (*Pālī*). A person incapable of awakening. Human in physical appearance only.

the way they were for as long as I could. The owners of this land on account of their faith even wished to offer it to me, but I did not accept it initially because of the resolution I had previously made. Though I did think one day in the future this place would be established as place for Dhamma practice.

Before entering the Rains Retreat of 1991, some laypeople donated a twenty-nine-inch gilded Buddha statue<sup>1</sup> in the style of the Buddha Chinaraat to be the principal image in the hall. Shortly after the statue had been placed on the altar it began to rain heavily for about five minutes before suddenly stopping – an auspicious sign.

In September, 1991, I saw a *nimitta* of Luang Pu Mun walking in meditation. He showed me three types of walking meditation: walking slowly, walking at normal pace, and walking quickly. In all three types his heart remained peaceful and still. I looked upon this as being an auspicious sign.

Towards the end of 1992, Mr and Mrs Boon and Seeam Jenjirawatana and family formally offered this land of approximately eighty acres to the *Sangha*.

The sixteenth of January, 1993, was the day of the royal cremation of Luang Por Chah. Once the funeral ceremonies had finished, a number of monks and novices requested to come here to practise. I therefore asked my main lay supporter if it would be convenient to build more *kuṭis*. She and her family expressed their delight and willingness to do so. And so, since 1993 I've committed myself to making this a place of practise.

In 1995, Mr and Mrs Boon and Seeam Jenjirawatana and family offered an extra sixteen acres of land to be the site for the *Uposatha Hall*, the future kitchen and the adjacent toilet block.

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<sup>1</sup> In Thailand, Buddha statues are measured in inches by the span between both knees.

On the eleventh of September, 1997, Mr Boon Jenjirawatana passed away, at the age of sixty-nine. His son, Suwat, inherited the land adjacent to the monastery. Later he offered a further eight acres to increase the total size of the monastery to 104 acres (42 hectares).

On the twenty-fourth of November, 2003, The National Office of Buddhism declared this place an official monastery named Wat Boonyawad.

On the twenty-first of May, 2004, The Ecclesiastical Council of Thailand appointed Venerable Akaradej Thiracitto, aged forty-eight with twenty-six Rains Retreats, the first official abbot of Wat Boonyawad.

The entire land area of this monastery originally belonged to Mr and Mrs Boon and Seem Jenjirawatana and family. Together they have performed the meritorious act of kindly giving all this land to the monastery. Presently, this family still faithfully supports the monastery with the four requisites to the best of their means. In this present day and age, it's so hard to find a family with such faith and generosity as this.

In the years subsequent to the monastery's inception there has been a steady flow of monks and novices from all directions, both near and far, wanting to stay and practise here. Wat Boonyawad has grown and prospered dependent on the faith of the laity. They have donated the four supports of life and all the buildings, so as to support and perpetuate the Lord Buddha's dispensation long into the future.

With just this much, may I conclude this brief autobiography.









The stupa and Uposatha Hall at Wat Boonyawad, Chonburi





The stupa and Uposatha Hall at Wat Boonyawad, Chonburi



Dhamma Teachings  
Of  
**Luang Por Akaradej Thiracitto Bhikkhu**  
**(Ajahn Dtun)**  
Wat Boonyawad, Bo Thong, Chonburi



# The Power of Virtue, Concentration and Wisdom

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Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 29 May, 2011

Delusion, or an unawareness of the true nature of things, has been dominating our minds for an incalculable number of lifetimes. The Lord Buddha compassionately taught all sentient beings by pointing out to them the path to be practised for the realization of true happiness. If he had never been born, we would never know the path that transcends all discontent and suffering, thus achieving true happiness. All Buddhas, whether past or future, attain full enlightenment here in the human realm. Never has there been a Buddha who attained to full enlightenment in a hell realm or as an animal, a ghost, a demon (*asura*), a celestial being, or as a *Brahma* god. Therefore, we can consider the human realm to be truly the most excellent of all realms. Once having taken human birth we all have the ability to cultivate the mind so as to make it pure like that of the Lord Buddha and his *arahant* disciples.

Since time-without-beginning ignorance has gained mastery over the mind by making it subject to the *kilesas* of greed, aversion and delusion. What then must we do to stop the mind from being enslaved to the defilements, or to its thoughts and emotions? When the *kilesas* of greed and aversion, or satisfaction and dissatisfaction, are controlling the mind, or sexual lust is prevailing within the mind, we will consequently think, speak and act in ways that are directly influenced by these defiling emotions. The mind is so tremendously versatile that it is constantly changing to conform with whatever the defilements dictate. This can only happen, however, if we are lacking *sati-paññā*, which serves to protect and care for the mind. Without *sati-paññā*, the mind is unable to oppose the mental defilements in any way whatsoever.

In this present life our hearts are affected by suffering and agitation. People go about harming and killing one another owing to the influence of greed and aversion. And with delusion manipulating the mind we are even capable of harming our parents, *arahants*, or the Lord Buddha himself. Such actions will certainly cause the mind to fall into a hellish state after death. Within our minds we are capable of taking on the ways of hungry ghosts, angry demons and even animals. When we behave immorally it is due to the power of ignorance directing the mind. This behaviour creates the potential for the mind to fall into a lower subhuman<sup>1</sup> realm at the time of death. Whenever we realize that all forms of immoral behaviour cause suffering not only for ourselves, but also for our families and society in general, we must then try to have patience and the self-control to refrain from performing any such behaviour.

Once mindfulness and wisdom begin to function they will bring about within our heart the faith and confidence that the Lord Buddha did truly attain full enlightenment by his own means; that his teaching is for the ending of all suffering, and that his *arahant* disciples were able to purify their minds by practicing the Buddha's teaching and the monastic discipline (*Vinaya*) laid down by him. This is called having the Buddha, the Dhamma and the *Sangha* within our heart. We will also develop the confidence that the performing of good deeds brings good, favourable results, and that the performing of bad, immoral deeds brings only suffering. When we are conscious of the fact that we wish only for goodness and happiness then we must refrain from all actions that are bad or unwholesome, and only perform good, virtuous deeds as much as we possibly can. For a person to be recognized as truly 'good' they have to be observing the five moral precepts. Through the practising of good deeds and generosity, together with the

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<sup>1</sup> Alternatively called the *abpayabhumi*, or the planes of misery. There are four realms, listed in their descending order: Demons (*asura*), ghosts (*peta*), common animals, and finally, hell.

maintaining of correct moral behaviour, we are able to transform our minds by acquiring the qualities that are truly becoming of a human being. When we are born we could, for the most part, be considered as incomplete and as not fully human because the mind does not yet have *sīla* as an integral part of its make up. If we desire to change this status and become good, decent human beings then it is necessary to maintain the five moral precepts. And should we ever wish to further transform the mind to be like that of a *devatā*, then it is necessary that we not only keep the moral precepts, but also develop a sense of moral conscience and a dread of the consequences of our bad actions. Furthermore, if we were to desire to further elevate the mind to resemble that of a *Brahma* god, then we must not only be cultivating goodness and moral virtue, but must also be developing the *Brahma Vihāras*, or the four sublime states, within our hearts.

These four qualities are:

Firstly, we cultivate kind-heartedness or *mettā*, extending this feeling towards both other humans as well as all sentient beings.

Secondly, we develop compassion, or *karunā*. This quality is expressed as the wish to help other beings.

Thirdly, the quality of sympathetic joy, or *muditā*. This is the ability to take pleasure in the happiness and good fortune of others, having no feelings of jealousy or resentment at their joy and success.

Fourthly, equanimity, or *upekkhā*. If we are unable to be of any real assistance to other beings that are experiencing suffering and hardship, then we must know how to let our hearts rest equanimously. Likewise, if our own mind is distracted and restless, we too must endeavour to bring the mind to a stable, equanimous state.

Anyone who cultivates these *Brahma Vihāras* of kind-heartedness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity will be nurturing coolness and peacefulness within their hearts. However, should one wish to develop the mind in a way that will bring the ultimate shift from being an unenlightened person to becoming a noble attained being (*ariya-puggala*), regardless of whether it be at the first stage of stream entry (*sotāpanna*), the second stage of once-returning (*sakadāgāmi*), the third stage of non-returning (*anāgāmi*), or the fourth and final stage of *arahantship*, then actually this is not so difficult to do at all. For laypeople it is possible to attain to either of the first two lower levels of spiritual attainment, namely, the first stage of stream entry and the second stage of once-returning. This is possible because the minimum *sīla* that must be observed at both of these levels is only the Five Precepts. Once having attained to the first level one will have no doubts whatsoever as to the authenticity of the Buddha's enlightenment, or as to whether practicing his teaching truly leads to the transcendence of all suffering. Also, no doubts will be held as to whether the Lord Buddha's *arahant* disciples were able to purify their minds through the practising of his teaching and monastic discipline. In other words, the heart possesses complete faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the *Sangha*. It also possesses total confidence in the existence, and working of *kamma* – that the performing of good deeds yields good, beneficial results, and the performing bad or immoral deeds only brings more suffering. You will also be strengthening the *pāramī* of *sacca* (truthfulness) together with the *pāramī* of *sīla*, through the honouring of your intention to never deliberately break any of the Five Precepts. Your faculties of mindfulness and wisdom will have also clearly realized the harm of performing unskilful bodily actions. Hence, you will naturally abstain from:

-Taking the life of other living creatures.

-Taking what has not been given.

-All actions that are deceptive, or insincere, that would mistreat the heart of another person with whom one has a sexual interest, or already shares sexual relations.

-Taking any type of intoxicating drink or drug.

By maintaining these four particular precepts you are thus subduing your bodily actions. The subduing of verbal actions is brought about by refraining from false speech that is in any way harmful to others. Consequently, all of your bodily and verbal actions are within the scope of the Five Precepts.

For novice monks, their *sīla pāramī*, is further enhanced by the keeping of Ten Precepts which entails that they live a life of complete celibacy. The *sīla pāramī* of fully ordained monks is strengthened even further owing to the fact that they not only lead a life of absolute celibacy, but also have to adhere to 227 precepts, or training rules. These rules provide a moral foundation that will aid in the controlling and calming of all their bodily and verbal actions.

If we aspire to develop the mind so that we become a Noble One, a person who has attained to one of the four levels of enlightenment, we must then develop *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* for this is the path of practice that will abandon all the greed, aversion and suffering that exists within our hearts. Once having been abandoned, the heart will naturally experience a sense of ease and lightness. The power of *sīla* alone is incapable of destroying the mental defilements of greed, aversion and delusion that dwell within our hearts. It can only suppress the defilements by not allowing them to exceed the bounds of correct moral behaviour. It is, therefore, necessary for us to mobilize all the forces of the ‘Dhamma Army’, namely moral virtue, concentration and wisdom so as to rid the heart of the forces of greed, aversion and delusion which collectively form the ‘*Kilesa*



Army'. Individually, the strength of *sīla* is not sufficient because it only acts to subdue our bodily and verbal actions. The mind, however, still remains in an unpeaceful condition. Thus, when we advance the army of *sīla* into the heart, we must also send in the army of concentration so as to take control of the mind. Concentration is developed by bringing mindfulness to focus upon a meditation object (such as the breath or the word *Buddho*) until the mind becomes peaceful and concentrated. Once having achieved a degree of concentration, its peaceful energy will give rise to a new power – the collective force of *sati-paññā*. The hearts of all beings are held in subjection by greed, aversion and delusion, that is, the armies of the *kilesas*. In order to drive these armies out from the heart it is necessary that we send in the joint forces of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*.

When we frequently practise meditation in either of the formal postures of sitting or walking, we are trying to train ourselves in developing the skill of making the mind peaceful. Once we are capable of doing so, we will be able to maintain mindfulness throughout the day. This will enable us to keep control of the mind, watching over it regardless of whether we are standing, walking, sitting, lying down or doing some other activity. The constant application of effort into developing mindfulness and concentration will also aid in giving rise to the faculty of *sati-paññā*, the combined working of mindfulness and wisdom. With stronger powers of mindfulness, we are able to keep a watch over all the thoughts, moods and emotions that move through the mind. Initially, the mental defilements that can be most readily perceived are the gross forms of greed and aversion, or satisfaction and dissatisfaction, towards forms, sounds, odours, flavours, and physical contacts. If mindfulness is focused upon what we normally believe to be the mind<sup>1</sup> we will be aware of

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<sup>1</sup> Here the Venerable Ajahn is referring to the awareness we normally have of our thoughts, moods, and emotions. In truth they are merely contents of the mind, but not the mind itself.

everything that arises within it, whether it be a thought or emotion of greed or aversion, all will be known. When we cultivate this path to true liberation we are leading the Dhamma Army of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* into our hearts. *Sīla* is comparable to the army's provisions, while *samādhi* could be considered as the army's strength or fighting potential. *Paññā* when combined with mindfulness will function as the army's armaments. Together they will take up the fight with the *kilesas* that are residing within the heart. As a consequence, the control previously exerted by the *kilesas* of greed, aversion, and delusion will be diminished.

Whenever greed arises within the mind we can now keep a tight rein on it, owing to our commitment to not break any of the moral precepts. If people do not live by a code of correct moral discipline it is well within their capability to compete ruthlessly with others in order to get what they want. Some will even go as far as harming or taking the life of other people just to obtain the objects of their desire. However, if a person observes correct moral principles, they would never take something that they knew to belong to someone else, no matter how much they may covet that particular object. The strength of mind achieved through the practise of concentration will also be helping to restrain any emotions of greed by enabling us to patiently bear with the emotion and maintain our self-control. Mindfulness and wisdom will take up the task of contemplating the emotion so as to abandon it from the heart. It will reflect upon the particular feeling, or situation at hand, thereby allowing us to be content with what we already have. We can then patiently go about acquiring the things that we need in honest ways.

The defiling emotions of aversion and ill-will have had power within the heart for uncountable lifetimes. And just like with greed, when people get angry or have feelings of ill-will and vengefulness, they will argue or physically harm one another. For some they will even go as far as taking other people's lives.

Nevertheless, once we position the forces of *sīla* within our heart then no matter how angry or displeased we may feel we will never physically harm or take the life of another person. Instead, we will have patience, endurance, and self-control owing to the strength of mind that we have attained through the development of concentration. Mindfulness and wisdom will then serve as a weapon to strike back at the aversion by cultivating thoughts of friendliness, goodwill and forgiveness as a means to remove the aversion from our heart. Wisdom will always be working, looking for skilful means that may be of use in eliminating, or alleviating, any feelings of aversion that exist within the heart.

The observance of moral precepts creates a strong foundation upon which we can establish our concentration practice. The strength of concentration in turn gives rise to *sati-paññā*, mindfulness and wisdom. We then use mindfulness to keep a watch on the mind, observing all of its thoughts and emotions. The emotions most easily noticed are the coarser defiling ones of pleasure and displeasure that we feel towards forms, sounds, odours, flavours and bodily sensations. When the eyes see forms, or the ears hear sounds, there will always be a consequent feeling of either pleasure or displeasure arising. However, once mindfulness is firmly established in the present moment, *sati-paññā* will be able to reflect upon and see the impermanence of any emotion that has arisen. The mind, as a consequence, lets the emotion go from the mind. By having mindfulness securely founded in the present moment we are able to keep the mind free from all emotions, therefore abiding in a state of detached equanimity. No matter how subtle or strong the pleasure or displeasure may be, our mindfulness and wisdom will be aware of the emotion, contemplating it in order to abandon it from the heart.

Once the mind has gained a firm basis in concentration, it naturally follows that mindfulness becomes more sustained. As a result, we will have the wisdom to reflect upon all of the sensory

impressions that contact the mind and their resultant emotions, seeing them in the very instant that they arise. Nevertheless, we are still not able to completely rid the mind of all its moods and emotions. This is because, even though we may have been successful in relinquishing all the emotions of desire and aversion that have arisen in this day, tomorrow, our eyes will meet with new forms, and we will experience sounds, odours and flavours again, the body will contact cold, heat, softness and hardness again. There will forever be feelings of pleasure and displeasure arising within the mind. As a result, our *sati-paññā* will always have to contemplate all of our daily sensory contacts as they arise.

Owing to the power of the mental defilements, the mind foolishly attaches to one's own body in the belief that it is one's 'self'. This will cause us to look upon the bodies of other people as being objects of beauty and attraction, and we will also view material objects as having ownership, that is, being owned by some 'self' entity, especially with regards to our own possessions. This state of ignorance will subsequently give rise to further greed, aversion and delusion within our minds. If we wish to counter this habitual flow of the mind and turn back the tide of the defilements, it is necessary that we develop the practice of body contemplation, especially the contemplation or analysis of our own body. We cultivate this practice with the intention of seeing the body's impermanent nature, and that it is completely without any entity that could be called a 'self' or one's self.

The strength of our moral virtue and concentration helps mindfulness and wisdom to be firmly maintained in the present moment. Mindfulness and wisdom will then set about investigating all emotions that arise so as to see their transient nature and selflessness. Mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom work together in contemplating the emotions that have arisen, regardless of how many there may be. Whether they be feelings of desire, aversion, pleasure or displeasure, they will each be

reflected upon with the aim of gradually letting go of all attachment and clinging within the mind.

Whenever the mind is free of thoughts and emotions, and with mindfulness and concentration securely established in the present moment, we should then take up the contemplation of our own body. The purpose behind this contemplation is to seek out the truth as to whether the body and the mind are one and the same or not. The complete path of practice – *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* – will now begin to come together within the heart. Mindfulness and wisdom investigate one’s own body by contemplating upon either of several themes:

-Contemplation of the thirty-two parts of the body; that is, the simple constituent parts that form a human body.

-Contemplation of the *asubha* (unattractive) nature of the body.

-Contemplation of four primary elements that make up a human body – earth, water, air, and fire.

The contemplations are practised with the aim of seeing the body’s impermanence and the non-existence of any entity that could be called a ‘self’ or ‘oneself’. As a result, the mind gradually begins to let go of its attachment to the body.

The transcendent paths to liberation (*ariya-magga*) can only become a reality once the forces of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* have united into a single unified force, which has increasing degrees of intensity depending upon the stage of the path that is being developed. The first of these noble, or transcendent, paths is the path to stream entry (*sotāpatti-magga*), which ends with the initial breakthrough to enlightenment. At this stage of path development frequent contemplation of the body is necessary, so as to see its impermanence and absence of self. When this is

clearly witnessed, even if only once, the heart will feel sobered by this realization. This feeling will, however, transform into joy (*pīti*) as the mind temporarily releases its hold on the body. All doubts as to the way of practice will subsequently fall away. One will now know with confidence that when *sīla*, moral discipline, is firmly upheld it creates the supportive conditions needed for establishing concentration. Once mindfulness and concentration have been developed to the degree that their calm, focused awareness can be sustained even outside of formal meditation practice, they will in turn serve as a basis for mindfulness and wisdom to go about their work of contemplating all the emotions of greed and aversion, or pleasure and displeasure, with the aim of letting them go from the mind. Mindfulness and wisdom will also be put to the use of contemplating one's own body with the intention to clearly see the body's impermanence and absence of self. The body must be contemplated over and over again until the mind can clearly see that the body is not the mind and the mind is not the body. This penetrating insight will cause the mind to irreversibly let go of the first of three portions<sup>1</sup> of attachment towards the physical body, because the mind mistakenly identifies with the body as being oneself.

Having perceived clearly with wisdom that the body is impermanent and devoid of self, the mind will naturally give up the coarsest portion of attachment that is dependent upon the body. Consequently, the defilement of greed is weakened and the strongest properties of aversion, that of ill-will and vengefulness, are completely abandoned – never to arise again. The mind will nevermore be fearful of illness, or unnerved when faced with

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<sup>1</sup> When describing the letting go of the mental defilements, the Venerable Ajahn generally speaks as if a pie-chart had been divided into four equal portions. The successive attainments of enlightenment, or path fruitions, each abandon one portion of the defilements. The first three portions are dependent upon the mind's deluded attachment to the physical body as being oneself. The fourth and final portion is dependent solely upon the subtle delusion, or attachment, that the mind has toward the stream of mental events (feelings, memory, thinking, and consciousness) as being products of a self.

death, because it has gained insight into the truth by seeing the breaking apart of the body before it actually breaks up; that is to say, one thoroughly understands the reality of death before death actually comes. Whoever cultivates the mind until achieving insight to this degree, where the coarsest portion of attachment to the body has been cut off, is commonly called a *sotāpanna*, or a stream enterer.

If, however, one is not content with this level of attainment, and wishes to further cultivate the mind to a higher degree of purity, then one must continue practising the path of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. The next stage of path development is called *sakadāgāmī-magga*, the path of practice that leads to the attainment of once-returning.

What then are the objects of contemplation for a *sotāpanna* who is walking the noble path at this level? With the forces of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* being positioned within their heart they will engage the forces of greed, aversion, and delusion in combat upon the battlefield of the heart. The battle is waged by continuing with the contemplation of both the body and the mind. Within their mind there are defilements still remaining, although these are more subtle than before the attainment of *sotāpanna*. Greed, or desire, has diminished on account of their having contentment for the things that they already have. Ill-will and vengefulness have been completely removed from the heart leaving the defilement of aversion to be experienced in the form of displeasure. Their mindfulness and wisdom is, however, able to contemplate any feelings of displeasure and easily let them go. The feelings of pleasure or displeasure with forms, sounds, odours, flavours and bodily sensations have weakened in strength owing to the ease with which mindfulness and wisdom are able to see that whatever arises must, by nature, cease – they are all impermanent and absent of self. When cultivating the path to once-returning, the practice of body contemplation must become more detailed.

The body must be frequently investigated with an aim to see its impermanent and selfless nature. The means used to accomplish this are either using the *asubha* reflections on the unattractiveness of the body, or by contemplating the four primary elements that constitute the physical body. The contemplation must be performed again and again, probing deeper than in the previous stage, until the truth behind the body is seen with greater clarity. As a result the mind will let go of the second of the three portions of attachment towards the body. The deluded perception as to the true nature of the body is further diminished. Greed and displeasure will, as such, be further reduced in force. The mind has now made the transition from *sotāpanna* to *sakadāgāmi* – the once returner.

What must the practitioner now do if they wish to further reduce the defilements still remaining within their heart? When growing rice the farmers sow the seeds in a paddy field. Once the seeds form shoots, they pull them up and then replant the seedlings throughout all their fields. And when the time is right they will harvest their crop. The following year the farmer must plough the fields in preparation for the sowing of seeds, sow the seeds, pull up the shoots and replant the seedlings... The farmer is always working the same land. Similarly, the noble path leading to the attainment of non-returning (*anāgāmi-magga*) is also cultivated by contemplating the body just as before. The contemplation now aims to remove the last remaining subtle portion of attachment to the body. Any practitioner who wishes to make the transition from *sakadāgāmi* to *anāgāmi* must, however, strengthen their *sīla* by increasing the number of precepts that they permanently observe from Five Precepts to Eight Precepts. For novices and monks they will continue to maintain their Ten and 227 Precepts respectively. The path factors of moral conduct, concentration, and wisdom have been progressively intensifying along the way. At this third stage of path development, *anāgāmi-magga*, the practitioner's moral conduct is unwaveringly constant. And



on account of the weakening of the mental defilements, their concentration has deepened and become even more subtle. Consequently, their mindfulness and wisdom are growing sharper, and are being used to focus upon the mind by observing the arising and falling of all of their mental impressions, emotions and thoughts. Subsequently, the emotions of greed and aversion, or pleasure and displeasure, towards forms, sounds, odours, tastes and bodily contacts will be lessened. Mindfulness and wisdom will constantly see that all of one's thoughts and emotions are merely fleeting phenomena and completely devoid of any self-identity. The mind will, accordingly, remain objective and equanimous towards everything that arises within it. Further, whenever the mind is free from thoughts and emotions, the combined strength of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* will take to investigating one's own body. The method of contemplation used may be either reflecting upon the unattractiveness of the body, or analysing the four elements of, earth, water, air, and fire. The investigation must probe very deeply, so much so that when contemplating upon the unattractiveness of the body, one's mindfulness and wisdom will penetrate right through the meditation object and enter into the emptiness of the mind. Likewise, when contemplating the four elements, mindfulness and wisdom must analyze the elements to their subtlest degree which will cause the mind to temporarily let go of the body and thereby enter into emptiness. As long as there is subtle attachment to the body still remaining, the mind must continue to use its faculties of mindfulness and wisdom to repeatedly contemplate the essential nature of the body. In due course mindfulness and wisdom will see the impermanence of the body of the past; the body of the present that will transform into the body of the future will also be seen to be impermanent and totally devoid of anything that could be called a 'self'. Whenever this truth becomes clearly manifest the mind will completely let go of the last of the remaining subtle attachment to the body; that is, it finally surrenders the third and final portion of its attachment for the body.

As a consequence, all greed, aversion and sexual desire finally, and permanently, die out.

The mind is at last free of all attachment and clinging, not only for one's own body, but also the bodies of others and all material objects. It is attached to absolutely nothing in the world; moving peacefully along the golden mean – never again to be swayed by attraction or aversion. The mind, as such, will perceive the world as being completely empty. Even if the total land surface of the Earth were to turn entirely into gold or diamond, the mind wouldn't perceive them as being any different from sand or stone. Everything will be seen as being just elements that comply with the laws of nature; whether it be human, animal or material, all share the one same nature of being formed from earth, water, air, and fire. Upon realizing this, the mind will begin to partially access its own true natural state of being an element<sup>1</sup> that accords to its own entirely distinct nature. The greater the extent to which greed, aversion, and delusion have been reduced within one's heart, the greater is the corresponding true happiness that will arise accordingly.

The mind of an *anāgāmi* (non-returner) has given up all attachment to the physical body. And as a result, it has also let go of its identification with the past and the future. Yet in spite of this, the mind is still attached to the present because the mind mistakenly takes the present moment knowing of sensory impressions to be the actual mind itself. The united force of their moral conduct, concentration and wisdom has succeeded in irreversibly driving the defilements of greed, aversion, and sexual

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<sup>1</sup> This is a reference to Dhamma-element or *Nibbāna* element, or alternatively, the purity of mind that becomes partially manifest when the mind totally relinquishes all attachment to the world of materiality. Only then can the mind begin to access the Dhamma-element which is an immaterial element having its own unique nature from that of the material world. It is a state of non-arising and non-ceasing – it is the Deathless. The Dhamma-element is fully accessed upon the attainment of *arahantship*.

lust from their heart. But, the king of the mental defilements is still concealing himself deep within the mind. He is none other than delusion of an extremely subtle nature. If an *anāgāmi*'s mindfulness and wisdom are not refined enough they will never stand a chance of rooting out delusion so subtle as this. Their practice, therefore, is to continue cultivating the noble path of moral virtue, concentration and wisdom, making these factors even stronger than in the previous stages. Moral discipline is by now an integral part of their character, whereas concentration needs to be developed to deeper levels so as to bring about subtler faculties of mindfulness and wisdom. The path at this stage is called *arahatta-magga* – the path that leads to the attainment of *arahantship*, or full enlightenment. If an *anāgāmi* fails to bring the spiritual practice to a completion before their death, their mind is certain not to take rebirth in the realms of hell, or in the animal world, the ghost world, the realm of demons, or even into the human realm. The possibility also no longer exists for their mind to be born into any of the celestial realms or even in the lower levels of the *Brahma* worlds. Their mind can only take rebirth into one of the higher *Brahma* worlds called the *Suddhāvāsa* realms, or the pure-abodes, and it is here that they will ultimately attain to *arahantship*.

For the *anāgāmi* who aspires to completely uproot the remaining mental defilements within their heart, in other words, remove all traces of delusion, it will require that they possess highly-developed faculties of mindfulness and wisdom in order to thoroughly analyze the various workings of the mind. At this stage of the practice body contemplation is no longer of any purpose because the mind has given up the final portion of attachment for the body. The focus of an *anāgāmi*'s practice is solely upon the domain of the mind. Mindfulness and wisdom must therefore turn to examining the delicate workings of the mind, namely:

*Vedanā* – the feelings of the mind. Mindfulness and wisdom must probe to see that even the very subtle happiness that permeates the mind is only a condition that arises, and thus naturally ceases.

*Saññā* – memory. The act of recognition, association and interpretation of one’s personal perceptions is mistakenly held to be the mind. Once mindfulness and wisdom have developed in precision they will see that *saññā* is just a mode of the mind that arises and ceases.

*Sankhāra* – thinking and imagination. The mind foolishly holds to all of its mental formations, believing them to be the mind. The thoughts of an *anāgāmi* are, for the best part, truly wholesome with only a slight few that could even be considered as mildly unwholesome. The incisiveness of their mindfulness and wisdom will see that all mental formations – without exception – are impermanent phenomena that arise and cease.

*Viññāna* – sensory consciousness or knowing. Owing to the corrupting influence of delusion, the mind identifies with consciousness – or as many prefer to call it, the ‘knower’ – as being the mind itself. Mindfulness and wisdom will notice that the ‘knower’ is merely a function of the mind that is impermanent and totally devoid of any entity that could be called one’s ‘self’.

All of these mental functions are simply modes of the mind. They are not, however, the actual mind itself.

It is therefore the work of mindfulness and wisdom to repeatedly contemplate *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra* and *viññāna* to see that in truth they are all merely activities of the mind that arise and subsequently cease. Once mindfulness and wisdom finally overcome all doubts as to the true nature of these four mental *khandhas* they will by nature of their sheer subtleness discern that

one's own mind is actually home to, and governed by, *avijjā* – the king of all defilements. The delusive powers of *avijjā* trick the mind into taking *avijjā* as being the 'knower'. *Avijjā* has therefore been able to succeed in assuming the role of the 'knower'.

It is with reference to this particular matter that a number of enlightened meditation masters have variously made statements, such as:

- 'If there is a point or center of the knower anywhere, that is the nucleus of existence.'

- 'Look to see what lies behind the "knower".'

- 'That which thinks is not the mind; rather, it is that which does not think – that is the mind.'

- 'The truth is still and has no voice; things that speak<sup>1</sup> are not the truth.'

- 'Do not attach to the past, nor to the future; let go of the past, let go of the future, let go of even the present.'

The *anāgāmī* must, therefore, use their finely-honed faculties of mindfulness and wisdom to destroy the mind that is governed by *avijjā* – fundamental ignorance. In truth, *avijjā* is simply a condition of the mind, that's all it is. In acting to destroy the *avijjā* – controlled mind, mindfulness and wisdom are actually liberating the mind by separating it from the five *khandhas*. Once mindfulness and wisdom finally realize with absolute clarity that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, the mind will naturally let go of everything. The great meditation masters have each called this state the 'Dhamma-element' or the state of

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to *sankhāras*, one's thoughts or 'inner voice'.

pure knowing, for it arose within their hearts upon the complete extinction of all greed, aversion and delusion. The Lord Buddha himself said: ‘There is no happiness greater than peace’, with *Nibbāna* being the highest goal of his teaching.

And so today I have talked on the practising of Dhamma from its beginning to its very end. You may not fully understand everything that I have been saying, or you may well be completely in the dark as to what it is you have been listening to. Nevertheless, I offer you this teaching solely as a guide for your practice, so that you will know the path that must be developed in order to realize *Nibbāna*. Therefore please take what you have heard and reflect upon it, putting it into practise to whatever extent your wisdom and ability will allow you to.

May I end this talk here.



# Not Veering Off to the Left or Right

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Māgha Pūja (2003)

This evening we've come together for the *Uposatha* (the recitation of the monks' *Pātimokkha* rules). In the time of the Buddha, as we already know, *Māgha Pūja* was the day on which 1,250 *arahants* came together to hear a teaching of the Buddha without any prior notification or appointment. Such an extraordinary event happens only once in the lifetime of each Buddha, with the size of the gathering, whether it is greater or lesser in number, depending upon the *pāramī* (spiritual perfections) of each Buddha. That such a large number of *arahants* should come together without any prior appointment is something so extremely hard to find in this world.

In the past, those who gave up the household and family life, their work and responsibilities, left them behind so as to conduct themselves and practise in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha. The people of those times had a sense of purpose, practising in order to go beyond suffering. Having put on the yellow robe, they had just one goal: to practise for the realization of *Nibbāna* within their own heart. They put their faith in the Lord Buddha and his teachings. Consequently, they have given rise to a lineage of *arahant* disciples, incalculable in number, extending into the present day.

There are those of us who still have *kilesas* in our hearts, making it necessary to train and develop the mind - bringing about cleanliness and purity - by following the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha said: 'When the *Tathāgata* has passed on, the Dhamma and the *Vinaya* (the monks' rules of discipline) will be your teacher.' Therefore, as sincere and determined practitioners of the Dhamma, we must hold to the principles of *Dhamma-Vinaya*

as our model, our guideline, because all *arahant* disciples have practised according to *Dhamma-Vinaya* with no veering off to the left or to the right, nor doing anything out of the ordinary. When we wish to go beyond suffering, or realize *Nibbāna*, then we must have faith in the practice. In truth, taking up this yellow robe isn't for seeking out wealth, respect or praise. Rather, it's for realizing *Nibbāna*.

Everyone knows of the suffering of birth; and what then follows is completely full of suffering. When there is birth, a whole range of suffering follows: sickness, ageing, and death; plus many other kinds, all of which create suffering in one's heart, with no end to the journeying through *samsāra* (the perpetual cycle of rebirth, ageing and death). As a consequence, we must be heedful. The Lord Buddha once asked *Ananda* (his chief attendant) how many times a day he contemplated death, to which *Ananda* replied, 'seven times'. For some disciples it was more than this, for others less. However, the Buddha said he himself contemplated death with each inhalation and exhalation; that is, he had constant mindfulness of every in-and-out breath, thus making him one who is truly heedful. And so in the days and nights that have passed by, have you given any consideration to death or not? Or have the days been allowed to pass by unproductively?

Having come to ordain as monks or novices, sometimes, after several years, it may happen that we find things rather habitual and so we always have to prompt and motivate the mind by looking for means to bring up the faith to put forth effort so as to give rise to *sati* (mindfulness), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom) within our hearts. If we do little practise, the defilements will dominate the mind, making it disheartened or too discouraged to go about the practice. The defilements are namely: *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion). They exist in the heart, making it distracted, causing it to think restlessly amongst a variety of worldly issues and affairs, all of which will



harm the mind and keep one from being firm and secure in the robes. So we always have to create or look for ways to bring up faith and energy. Really the practice is, having given up the household life, family life, and our external work and duties, that one should have the determination to fight with the defilements. It's not that we go fighting with others or everything in general, but rather we contend with the defilements in our own heart by having patience and perseverance with all the moods and emotions that frequently arise in the mind.

We already know that greed, aversion and ill-will are defilements, so we must try to abandon them, try to let these moods and emotions go from the mind without keeping or holding such adverse mental states in our hearts. Even though we have defilements within our hearts, if we don't have the mindfulness and wisdom to keep a watch over them, the heart will always fall slave to its emotions, being a servant to the defilements. The Lord Buddha, therefore, taught us to have mindfulness present so that we can remain within the bounds of *Dhamma-Vinaya*, having mindfulness watching over and tending to the heart right from the moment of waking. We endeavour to have mindfulness watching the mind, being present in every moment, knowing what the mind is thinking, whether it be good or bad.

Once we are aware that we are thinking about the past - things already experienced, no longer of any benefit - we then set up *sati* and establish *samādhi* so as to cut the thoughts off. When we have thoughts proliferating into the future – next month, next year – which are of no benefit, then we bring up mindfulness and develop concentration, cutting those thoughts out from the mind. When the mind is restless, distracted by all kinds of emotions and thoughts, it's just the same; we bring up mindfulness and develop concentration to cut them off. We make our hearts have firm, solid mindfulness in the present moment; that is, to see the mind, its moods and emotions, and the objects of its awareness. If

we don't have mindfulness guarding over the mind, our thoughts will proliferate out to matters of no good, not giving rise to any benefit. The mind will dart off following the objects of its awareness, unable to see *dukkha* (suffering, discontent), *dukkha*'s cause, its cessation, or know the path of practice that leads to *dukkha*'s cessation.

The Buddha, therefore, taught us to practise *sīla* (virtue or correct morality), *samādhi* and *paññā*. We have *Dhamma-Vinaya* as our boundary. If we have restraint within the discipline, without transgressing or doing any wrong – not even in the minor offences – then this will be a cause of mindfulness becoming more constant. Our only duty is to watch the emotions and thoughts within the mind. When there's free time, go and walk or sit in meditation, always developing *samādhi*. Know how to go against the defilements and how to endure things like the cold, the heat and all other forms of *dukkha*. We have to know how to go against our will when practising. Just as Ajahn Chah would frequently say, 'When you're diligent, put forth effort; when you're lazy, resist it with constant effort in the practice.' So when we feel discouraged and slacken in our effort, we must look for ways to bring about faith and effort. Resolve to walk and sit in meditation everyday without fail. Have mindfulness and wisdom searching for any faults in our hearts, asking: 'Why can't I make my mind peaceful? When they can train monkeys to be tame, subdue the wildness in horses and elephants, why can't I train my own mind to be peaceful?' If we have mindfulness always attempting to take care of the mind, looking for ways to reflect upon any adverse mental states in order to remove them from the heart in each and every moment that *dukkha* arises, then the mind will, as a consequence, have firm, unflinching mindfulness in the present moment.

When one has free time one should always practise *samādhi*; work at it, really develop it. Then the peace of *samādhi* will arise

in the mind. When we have sustained *sati* and *samādhi*, the mind will be quiet, concentrated, thus giving rise to joy and happiness. The equanimity of *samādhi* will arise, being free from emotions and thoughts of the past and future. Mindfulness is rooted in the present; there is peace and equanimity in the heart.

Outside of formal meditation, when the eyes see a form, be it animate or inanimate, it will give rise to feeling – sometimes of satisfaction, sometimes of dissatisfaction. We must have *sati-paññā*, mindfulness and wisdom, contemplating and seeing the impermanence of such emotions in order to make the mind impartial, centred in the present moment. Every moment that defilements arise, be it liking or disliking forms, sounds, odours, tastes, or bodily sensations - everything - we have mindfulness observing the emotions, perceiving whatever is present in the mind. We have to look for skilful means to contemplate and let the emotions of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction go from the heart, being impartial with *sati* established in the present moment. If we continually practise like this, our *sati* and *samādhi* will be sustained. For *paññā* to contemplate and let go of these emotions, we must bring the mind to a point of centre, to neutrality; make it peaceful due to *samādhi* and *paññā*.

Even though we contemplate like this, we're not able to cut all the emotions and mental impressions off from the mind because today we see a form or hear a sound, giving rise to satisfaction or dissatisfaction; we contemplate this emotion, putting it aside or we can cut it off with *samādhi*. Tomorrow, however, we see a new form or hear a new sound, again giving rise to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Therefore we must work at it every day to have the mindfulness and wisdom to reflect upon and remove these emotions from the heart, every day having mindfulness attending to the heart. Even so, all the emotions and mental impressions can't be completely rooted out from the mind, only cut off temporarily. It's like a tree and its branches. We take a knife and

on Monday we cut one branch, Tuesday another. Wednesday we cut off another and so on until Sunday. Come Monday again, the branch we previously cut has sprouted again. Likewise with Tuesday's branch and so on. If we don't uproot the tree it won't die.

The emotions within our hearts are just the same. No matter if we have mindfulness contemplating, letting go of the emotions and the mind's objects in every instant, tomorrow we will meet with forms again, hear sounds again, smell odours again, taste flavours again, the body will contact cold, heat, softness and hardness again. There will always be *vedanā* (feeling) arising in the heart. Consequently, the Buddha taught us to come back to contemplating in a way that destroys attachment and clinging to one's body, for this is the cause, the origin of the greed and aversion that arises in one's heart. In meditation, therefore, once the mind is calm enough to be a base for contemplation, it's essential that we take up the body for reflection. Sometimes in meditation, as soon as there is a degree of calmness, we may become aware of a variety of external things. We may have knowledge into past or future events, or happenings in the present, whatever, but it's just peripheral knowledge; it's not knowledge that will end the suffering in our hearts. So, sometimes, through meditation, we are able to perceive different things, but what's of most importance is that we practise meditation in order to make the mind peaceful so that it gives rise to *sati-paññā*, the mindfulness and wisdom that can contemplate and abandon the defilements from the mind.

Sometimes, when the mind is quiet, we may see *nimittas* (mental images) that reveal the unattractiveness of the body, seeing visions of our body rotting, disintegrating, breaking into pieces; or maybe we see somebody else's body in various stages of decomposition. If we see images of such a kind, we must have *sati* noting and contemplating them, seeing the impermanence and selflessness of

our body or the bodies of others. Doing so will give rise to *paññā*, wisdom that sees the truth. It penetrates to the truth of one's own body and that of others; seeing that they are impermanent and not self. Therefore, in meditation, once the mind is reasonably quiet, we then turn to investigating one's own body. One can contemplate the thirty-two parts of the body, or the unattractiveness of the body, or maybe contemplate the four elements of earth, water, air and fire. Contemplate to see *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*, the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness of the body; it is born, exists, and then ultimately breaks apart. This we must reflect on, over and over, making it clear in the heart. As a result, the mind lets go of its attachment to the body. If the mind doesn't see the impermanence and selflessness of the body, it is unable to uproot its attachment towards the body.

Once the mind has been made peaceful, we then allow the mind to rest for some time in this calm state. Once it begins to think and proliferate again, we then take up the body for contemplation. Sometimes dispassion and rapture arise, or the mind may unify in *samādhi*. Contemplation and *samādhi* are practised in alternation like this. Sometimes, having concentrated the mind, we then take up the body for contemplation; that is, we use *samādhi* to develop wisdom. Or sometimes when we determine to sit in meditation, we apply wisdom by taking up the body for contemplation in order to realize the truth; that is, using wisdom to develop *samādhi*: when we reflect and see the truth of our body, seeing that it is impermanent and without self, the mind may converge, becoming concentrated. This is what's called applying wisdom to develop concentration, *paññā* to develop *samādhi*. These two approaches can be alternated depending upon each individual's character. As a result, this *samādhi* will serve as a basis for *sati* and *paññā* while contemplating our own body, the bodies of others, and all material objects, seeing the impermanence and absence of self in everything.

*Samādhi* is also the basis for *sati-paññā* to contemplate the emotions within the heart. The mood may be one of greed or aversion, attraction or aversion towards forms, sounds, odours, tastes and bodily sensations.

*Sati* and *paññā* contemplate, letting go of any attachment and clinging in the mind, little by little. In the beginning, a more coarse defilement that can be readily perceived is that of satisfaction: the taking pleasure in forms, sounds, odours, tastes and bodily sensations. *Sati-paññā* must contemplate and investigate any moods and emotions so as to free the heart from them. We then step up the practice of developing *samādhi* in order to have mindfulness and wisdom investigate within the body, seeing it more and more clearly.

With regards to greed, as monks we have already given up our external material objects. Actually, there's not much to it, there just remains a more subtle greed towards the four requisites of a monk: robes, alms food, dwelling place, and medicines for sickness. While we still have this body, as monks we must depend upon these four requisites in order to go about the practice. *Sati-paññā* must reflect, seeing the truth that the robe is just the four elements - earth, water, air and fire - that come together for a short time only. The user's body is just the same, comprised of the four elements. Likewise with alms-food, one's dwelling place and medicines, they are just the four elements. Both the user and all four requisites are merely elements according to nature. We reflect like this so as to prevent the arising of defilements, not allowing desire for the four requisites – everything we depend on – to arise. All the *arahants* at the time of the Buddha, and the lineage of esteemed teachers that have passed down since then, all practised without any concern for the four requisites. The requisites weren't always in abundance. Sometimes there was only a small amount or even shortages, yet they only depended upon them for going about the practice.

In the past, sometimes, there was little cloth. They would use discarded cloth, having no ambition to wear fine, delicate materials. They would make use of shrouds found in cremation grounds or thrown-out rags; taking the cloth, washing it, then sewing and patching it into a robe used solely for practising Dhamma - just to cover the body. For alms they relied on three or four houses, getting just enough to eat for one day so as to practise Dhamma. They didn't eat in order to have a bright complexion or a big, strong body. When making use of a dwelling, sometimes they would live under cliff overhangs, in caves, at the foot of large trees, or in simple grass-roofed huts - just that much. Their dwelling was solely for protection against storms, wind, rain, and sun. All the *arahants* say that any dwelling that offers enough shelter so that in a storm one doesn't get wet knees while sitting in meditation, then this should be considered a good, even excellent dwelling. The lodgings were used only for meditation and protection against the elements. They didn't need a dwelling that was great in any way. Sometimes, the Krubā Ajahns, the forest masters, in the course of their practice, gave no concern for medicines. They went and practised in the forests, the mountains and caves. They were sometimes troubled by illness or the bodily elements were out of balance, so they would use their Dhamma practice as medicine by contemplating the painful feelings that had arisen. Using *samādhi* along with mindfulness and wisdom, they contemplated and analyzed the body, seeing that it was just merely elements of earth, water, air and fire. They contemplated to see that feelings are just a condition of the mind, but not the mind itself. The mind is one thing, the body another, and feelings yet another; they are separate, not interacting (this can be directly seen while in *samādhi*). The Dhamma medicine was all that they had.

In the past they didn't have any abundance of the four requisites, yet our esteemed teachers could practise to make their minds know and see the Dhamma, or be the Dhamma, owing to their total determination and dedication. They sacrificed everything,

even their own life, for their longing to know and see the Dhamma. We, as a consequence, should endeavor to have determination in the practice, abandoning greed from the heart. Once we have such determination we won't have any worries or concerns, only using the four requisites with moderation, stepping up the practice of working to refine the heart, lightening and relieving it from greed, aversion, and delusion. Then it is important to bring into our practice any general daily practices or any of the *dhutangas* (ascetic practices) that are suited to our character and of use in going against the defilements in the heart, so as to destroy these defilements.

When the heart still has aversion, vengeance, ill will and displeasure within it, then everyday, we monks must cultivate *mettā*, a boundless loving-kindness towards all creatures. We develop the feeling that we will destroy this aversion and displeasure, ridding the mind of it and not keeping hold of it, for this is a cause of suffering. If we have mindfulness and wisdom, and the intention to wipe out or abandon the defilements from the heart, then we will see that any defilement that has arisen in the heart is merely a cause for more suffering. And so we will look for a way to find the source of this suffering. We already know that aversion is suffering, so we must cultivate kindness and forgiveness towards one another, not allowing aversion to arise in the mind. Even though moods of aversion and dissatisfaction will arise, it is our task to find a way to eliminate them or let them go from the heart as quickly as possible. Therefore, we must always be cultivating kindness and forgiveness towards one another. It's important that we try to care for our own heart; there's no need to go attending to the hearts of others. We just take care of our own, relieving it from greed and hatred, weakening the delusion toward the physical body and all the emotions that come into the heart. If we have *sati-paññā*, mindfulness and wisdom, frequently contemplating like this, then any thoughts or emotions will subside and weaken.



Once the mind is free from thoughts and emotions, we then develop *samādhi*. With continual practise, calmness will arise while in sitting meditation. When we break from sitting meditation, regardless of whether we're standing, walking, sitting or doing some other activity, we maintain *sati* while performing our external duties. When we come to walk in meditation, the mind will be calm and concentrated due to having mindfulness and wisdom continually contemplating, removing any unwholesome or defiled emotions from the heart. When we're finished walking meditation, whether we stand, walk, sit, or do something else, we have mindfulness caring for the heart. When we come to sit again in meditation, taking up one's meditation object, the mind is empty of any emotions due to constant contemplation with mindfulness and wisdom. When we establish mindfulness upon the in-and-out breath, the mind will be calmed. Or when we bring mindfulness to the meditation word '*Buddho*', the mind will have firm, unwavering mindfulness and concentration. Every day we practise like this, no matter whether we are standing, walking, sitting, lying down, or doing something else; mindfulness and wisdom will arise in one's heart in every posture. From the peacefulness of sitting meditation we continue making the mind peaceful while in walking meditation, or peacefulness may arise outside of formal meditation regardless of one's posture or activity. Peacefulness will always be present in the mind. Mindfulness will see the emotions in the heart, enabling it to reflect upon them, constantly wiping them out or letting them go from the heart in each and every moment.

While contemplating the body - seeing its impermanence and lack of self - we must depend upon a foundation of *samādhi*, concentration. When the mind is unable to reflect and see the body as being foul, unattractive or consisting of elements, then we should establish *sati* and develop *samādhi*; every day really work at it, cultivate it in order to have the strength to calm the mind. Once the mind is quiet, then again try reflecting upon the body.

If mindfulness and wisdom gradually see the body more and more clearly, then the mind will slowly let go of its attachment to one's own body: greed and aversion will diminish and delusion towards one's own body will gradually weaken. Contemplation is alternated with developing *samādhi*, gradually removing attachment to one's body, little by little, until one sees clearly that the body is only elements in accordance with nature. We see the body of the past, or that of the future, as being a natural condition: that having come into being it must ultimately break apart. We must have mindfulness knowing the present moment: knowing that the body is merely elements according to nature, thus letting any attachment go from the mind. When the mind relinquishes all attachment toward the body, then greed and aversion will cease. Any delusion regarding the body and all material objects – that are merely elements in compliance with nature – will also cease. When seeing a form, it's just a form. When hearing a sound, it's just a sound. All phenomena are merely elements following nature: having come into being, they change and ultimately break apart - completely devoid of any self. The mind as a consequence, will be centered, without swaying to either extreme of attraction or aversion.

Once the heart lets go of its attachment toward one's own body, the bodies of others and also all material objects, then peacefulness and tranquility will arise. This is happiness - true happiness - coming forth from the peace and calm of *paññā*, wisdom that has relinquished defilement in the initial stages: namely having ceded all attachment toward the body.

There are, however, defilements stemming from the subtle delusion that still remains in the heart. This is delusion towards: *vedanā* – feelings in the mind; *saññā* – memory; *sankhārā* – mental formations, involving thinking and imagination within the mind; and *viññāna* – consciousness or deluded clinging to the mind's 'knowing' as being the mind. To deal with defilements on this

subtle level, it first requires that one has relinquished all attachments to materiality and form. In other words, one has relinquished all attachment to the body, enabling one to walk this stage of the path and further continue one's contemplation. In truth, this stage of the practice is *Arahatta-magga*: contemplating the mind and Dhamma at the most refined level.

Once material form and the body have been let go of, all that remains is the subtle stage regarding the *citta* (the heart/mind) and the dhammas that arise within it. When delusion is still present in the mind, we must have mindfulness and wisdom contemplating its subtle emotions. The mind still has attachment for *vedanā* of the mind. Though there is happiness, with only a speck of *dukkha*, it's all being experienced right here in this heart. The happiness in the heart is immense, while *dukkha* is almost imperceptible due to the mind having abandoned the more gross defilements. *Sati-pannā* must then contemplate the remaining refined defilements, seeing the impermanence of this happiness, or the *dukkha* of still having defilements in the heart. As for one's memory, the mind deludedly clings to it as being the mind. Likewise with thoughts, the mind attaches to them, be they productive or not; there is thinking and conceptualizing about a variety of wholesome things, believing them all to be the mind.

The Buddha therefore taught us to contemplate the *vedanā* of the mind, seeing that it's impermanent and devoid of self. Or we have mindfulness and wisdom contemplating: memory - seeing its impermanence and lack of any self; mental formations - seeing the fleeting nature of our thinking and conceptualizing, recognizing it's all without any self; consciousness or knowing - seeing that it's only a mode of the *citta*, but not the *citta* itself. Those who are practising at this stage of the path use mindfulness and wisdom in their contemplation, gaining a broad understanding into the nature of feelings, memory, mental formations and consciousness. All the wise sages say that once contemplation has brought about

this deep understanding, then one should turn the contemplation and investigation onto one's own mind for it still has *avijjā* (fundamental ignorance) residing within it. Contemplate so as to destroy the mind's attachment to its thoughts, for the mind will, as a rule, mistakenly cling to them believing that the formations that come out of the mind is the mind itself. The wise ones, therefore, teach us to destroy attachment within the heart - everything - with no remainder, keeping nothing in reserve. Contemplate so as to destroy the *citta*. Even the very thing that we cling to as being the *citta*, one's heart or mind, must be scrutinized to see its impermanence and absence of any self. Contemplating the mind and contemplating the Dhamma are therefore subtle things.

When contemplating Dhamma, all dhammas that we know and perceive should be reflected upon, seeing that they are *anattā* – devoid of any self. ‘*Sabbe Dhamma anattā’i*’ - all dhammas are not self. With contemplation and investigation, remove all attachment - everything - from the heart, hence giving rise to purity.

Therefore, in the beginning, all practitioners must practise Dhamma by staying within the limits of *Dhamma-Vinaya*. By holding to the fundamental ways of practice of the Buddha and all the *arahant* disciples as our role model, we won't go straying off to the left or the right. If we practise in accordance with the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, following the teachings of the Buddha, then we will have no wish or expectation for material gain or veneration, nor for any of a host of external things available. Instead, we are resolute in our aspiration, giving up everything in the quest to go beyond suffering: the realization of *Nibbāna*. We are prepared to sacrifice our very lives in order to know and see the Dhamma, to have the heart be one with the Dhamma. All of our esteemed teachers have had hearts unwavering and resolute, not lax or discouraged with the practice like we are. We therefore have to

constantly turn the mind around so as to give rise to faith and effort. Even though we are discouraged and struggling, we must have the determination to someday triumph over the defilements.

Actually, for those intent on the practice, there's no need to go doing a great deal, just give your life to practising Dhamma. If there is still breath and sensations in this body, then we will practise right until the very end without being disheartened. We give up our wealth, our life - everything - in order to know and see the Dhamma. Really the practice isn't so difficult; it's not beyond human capability. If it were something so difficult, the Buddha probably wouldn't have taught us to develop ourselves in *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* in order to gain clear insight and the realization of *Nibbāna*, thus bringing a final end to the greed, aversion and delusion in our minds.

As a consequence, we should resolve to practise Dhamma every day. Don't be discouraged or lazy. Even though there may be discouragement or laziness, we must go against this tendency and do the practice, for we depend upon the four requisites given by the laity. There has to be the awareness in one's heart that we must apply ourselves to the practice, for our lives are unpredictable: once born, it's not long before the body must break apart. Therefore, every day and night, we should resolve to practise the Dhamma, always having mindfulness and wisdom taking care of the heart, thus bringing about the peacefulness, tranquility and happiness that comes from *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*.



# This is The Path

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18 May, 2004

Born into this human realm are all Buddhas. They are men of amazing qualities, truly phenomenal, or they could even be called ‘Great Men’, for every Buddha had to build up a tremendous amount of *pāramī* before finally attaining enlightenment, thus becoming a Buddha. Such a being is so extremely hard to find in this world. Second to the Buddha were his *arahant* disciples who were also truly very rare. If we try considering the life or practice of the Buddha, or the *arahants*, we will see that their lives were lived out with integrity and virtue. They staked their very lives in the course of the practice. Within their hearts, they gambled their life – their all – for the perfecting of the *pāramīs*. Having made the aspiration to be either a Buddha, or an *arahant* disciple, they never relented in their effort as long as the Dhamma had not yet been seen or realized by them. The practice of the Lord Buddha or the *arahant* disciples can therefore serve as a beautiful role model by which to direct our Dhamma practice.

The Buddha lay down the principles of the Dhamma (the teachings of the Lord Buddha) and the *Vinaya* (the monks’ rules of discipline), being that which steers the heart towards peace and coolness. The *dhutangas* (austere practices) were also set down by the Buddha as tools for wearing away at the *kilesas* (defilements or impurities), making us put up a fight in order to conquer the *kilesas* within one’s own heart. We must persevere and endure everything, such as the heat and the cold, for our esteemed teachers from Tan Ajahn Mun down through to the present day, all had to endure and go against everything. They developed their practice in the solitude of the forests and mountains, or in the silence of caves. They made every effort to seclude themselves

by seeking out suitable places to develop and cultivate their minds (*citta bhāvanā*) so as to do battle with the *kilesas* of greed, aversion and delusion that existed within their hearts, until subduing them, bringing their presence to an end.

If we look within our lineage of *Krubā Ajahns*, meditation masters, their biographies tell of how each one practised with complete single mindedness. They sacrificed everything so as to know and see the Dhamma – being one with the Dhamma. We should recollect the Lord Buddha and his *arahant* disciples, or the *Krubā Ajahns* as our ideal, recalling how they applied their minds, hence realizing the Dhamma. Therefore, always resolve that if we haven't brought an end to the defilements within the heart, we will not ease off in our effort of practising *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* (virtue, concentration and wisdom) for the burning up of the heart's impurities. One must be patient and persevering in doing the routine duties and practices, for this goes against the *kilesas*. Doing so allows the heart to have some victories over the defilements, for it has been their slave for countless lifetimes.

In this present life, we have this good opportunity to come and take up the brown robe, ordaining as disciples of the Lord Buddha within his teaching and dispensation; thus, we must make ourselves worthy of our teacher. We each adamantly resolve to conquer the *kilesas* within one's own heart. Even though at times we may feel disheartened, beaten by the *kilesas*, we still have to constantly find the mindfulness and wisdom (*sati* and *paññā*) to contemplate in order to give rise to faith and energy within the mind. Sometimes our body may feel weak, so we rest to regain our strength. Sometimes the mind is lacking in strength: *sati* and *paññā* cannot keep pace with all the mental and emotional activity, being too slow for the *kilesas*. Whoever wishes to eliminate the *kilesas*, ridding them from the mind, must have the mindfulness and wisdom to detect them, recognizing one's thoughts and emotions as being the heart's enemy. We must

therefore resist and endure, being determined that we will defeat the *kilesas*. Today we lose. However, tomorrow we must win.

We have to build up and strengthen the mind by developing *samādhi bhāvāna* – just as we monks normally do. Even if we have spells of being too easy with the monastic routine, observances, and with one’s personal practice, being too relaxed in our effort, nevertheless we must always be building up the confidence and the faith to put forth the effort that will take up the fight with the *kilesas*. Don’t be daunted or lose heart. Always remember the resoluteness of the *Krubā Ajahns* and the extent to which they sacrificed their lives so as to know and see the Dhamma. In practising the Dhamma, we can’t be forever lax, slack in our effort; it may be so only during some periods when the heart is unable to fight with the *kilesas*. However, when there is a chance, an opportunity to get the better of the *kilesas*, we bring mindfulness and wisdom to do battle with them. We must train the mind, making sati and *samādhi* arise so that *paññā* can contemplate to see the true nature of the defilements that are within one’s heart.

Ajahn Chah would always say that in practising the Dhamma, there isn’t anything much at all: there is only the contemplation and investigation of this very body to see that it is impermanent and without self, together with the contemplation of the *citta* – contemplating the emotions and thoughts within the mind to see the impermanence and selflessness of this mind that we cling and attach to along with everything within it. There are only these two topics to be investigated: the body and the mind. To narrow this down even further, we contemplate the mind only, for this is where greed, aversion and delusion are born – thus being the very place where they must be destroyed or abandoned.

To contemplate something as subtle as the mind, however, we must first start by contemplating something that’s more gross, such



as the physical body, because the mind is forever clinging to the body as being oneself, one's own. As a result, greed, aversion and delusion arise within the mind. Therefore, once we have settled the mind, having firm, grounded mindfulness, we take up the body as our object of investigation. Contemplation probes to see the impermanence of the body and its absence of self. One may investigate the thirty-two parts of the body, examining any part, or use any of the *asubha* contemplations for reflecting upon the unattractiveness of the body. Alternatively, one can investigate any of the four elements to realize the impermanence and selflessness of this body. *Anicca, dukkha, anatta* – impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not self are its true nature. We always have *sati-paññā* contemplating to make the mind see this more clearly. Once seen, even if only briefly, the mind will temporarily put down its attachment towards the physical body and the mind will enter and rest in *samādhi*, concentration. Once the mind withdraws from this peaceful state, it will have the strength and energy to further contemplate the emotions within the heart.

When outside of formal meditation, regardless of whether one is standing, walking, sitting, lying down or doing some other activity, we have *sati* observing the mind and its emotions - knowing whatever arises within the mind. When mindfulness perceives emotions, be it greed or aversion, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, then *paññā* takes up the task of investigating to see the impermanence and selflessness of that emotion; always using skilful ways and means to abandon the emotions – which are *kilesas* – from the mind. The mind will, at that time, be empty and free of emotions. When *paññā* sees the impermanence of emotions and that they are *anattā*, without any entity that could be called one's self, the mind will have a foundation of *sati* and *samādhi* firmly established here in the present moment – even if only temporarily.

*Sati-paññā* will always be investigating and contemplating the coarse emotions, or defilements, of greed and aversion – pleasure and displeasure towards forms, tastes, odours, sounds and bodily sensations as they rise so as to let them go from the heart. As a result, there will be equanimity of mind. When we contemplate like this, over and over, the mind will gradually put down its grasping and attachment for forms, tastes, odours, sounds and bodily sensations. Even if it only puts them down temporarily, it's still good. *Sati*, *samādhi* and *paññā* are firmly established in the here and now due to one's frequent contemplation, laying down the more coarse emotions. Mindfulness and wisdom probe into the physical body, seeing it more clearly, repeatedly investigating within the range of the body.

Once the mind has settled, we then take up the body for reflection to see the impermanence and selflessness of the body until the mind unifies again in concentration. When the mind withdraws from *samādhi*, and we wish to practise further, we then take up the body for further investigation. Contemplation alternates between the body and the emotions within the heart, hence weakening them. Greed and aversion will ease off due to the arising of skilful means within the mind. The skilful means and methods used will, however, vary from person to person. We must find ways and means to contemplate that will free the heart of greed and aversion – satisfaction and dissatisfaction – every time that these emotions arise. We have to destroy the *kilesas*, destroy any emotions: in other words, we let them go.

Practise like this in each and every moment that *kilesas* arise. If there are no defilements present and the mind is free of emotions, then bring up the body for investigation until seeing each part clearly. For example, head hair is clearly seen as something that is inherently dirty, so the mind lets go of any attachment towards it. As for skin, we reflect upon it so as to remove or let go of any doubts about its true nature. Teeth and bones are investigated by

*sati-paññā*, they too being let go of once clearly seen and understood: what has been let go, falls away. If any doubts still remain regarding the body, then mindfulness and wisdom must further investigate on a more refined level, requiring the breaking down of the body into the elements of earth, water, air and fire, or taking the contemplation further on into the body's innate emptiness. When the mind sees the unattractiveness of the body and that it's comprised merely of elements, it will gather in *samādhi*. The heart will be free of attachment and clinging towards the body, even if only temporarily.

It becomes apparent to the heart that this is the path, the way leading to the realization of the Dhamma, for it enables one to let go of all attachment and clinging from one's heart. Therefore when *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* coalesce into a single force, there will be the seeing of one's own body as being impermanent and without self. One will also start to see that all material objects are inconstant: having come into existence, they must, as a consequence, break apart. The mind gives up attachment to its conventional view of reality. Dhamma of the first level thus arises. The *kilesas* are being cleansed away, little by little.

One constantly contemplates the body and the emotions of one's mind until the body is truly understood. If one's own body and those of others are truly seen as merely being elements complying with nature, then the heart will completely let go: putting down its attachment for one's own body, the bodies of others and for all forms and materiality by recognizing that they are just elements according to nature. Everything in this world, whether it be the lives of humans, other sentient beings, or material objects, all will be viewed objectively, with equanimity. That is to say, the mind looks upon them as being mere elements in compliance with nature – all broken up and scattered in pieces. Regardless of whether it is one's own body, those of others or all other material objects, all without exception come into being, exist, then break

apart, being merely elements of earth, water, air and fire. Within the heart it is seen vividly, in its entirety. The heart lets go: in seeing, it just sees; in hearing, it just hears. Greed and aversion cease, delusion towards the body ceases; lust and sensual pleasure have come to a final end. This is the first stage in giving up *upādāna*<sup>1</sup> – attachment and clinging towards the body. Throughout the day and night, the mind has only peace and tranquillity.

No longer remaining is the suffering that arises from greed. Gone is the suffering that stems from aversion. Sensual desire causes suffering no more because it's finished – exhausted. Such a mind is free – free from attachment to one's own body, the bodies of others and all material forms. In the heart there is peace, happiness and tranquillity owing to the absence of any *dukkha* (suffering, unsatisfactoriness) that would normally arise due to one's attachment to the physical body and material objects. The mind is now free from the human realm, the deva worlds, or from the lower *Brahma* worlds<sup>2</sup>. The mind will never appear in these realms again, for there is no longer any home (form/body) for it to take birth into.

There is a more refined type of becoming (wishing for existence) still remaining in the heart: that of the *citta* deludedly clinging to the more subtle activities of the mind; they being, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *vinñāna*. All these are just conventional names for the mind's activities.

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<sup>1</sup> The second and final stage that still remains to be abandoned is the *upādāna* one has towards the modes of the mind – feelings, memory, thought, and sense-consciousness.

<sup>2</sup> This sentence refers to the mind of one attained to the level of *anāgāmi*, the non-returner. Upon death of the body, if they have yet to bring the mental or spiritual development to its completion (*Arahant*, fully enlightened being), the mind will then only be reborn into a higher *Brahma* world called the *Suddhāvāsa* realms, or pure abodes. Here the mind will ultimately attain to *Arahantship* and enter *Nibbāna* without ever taking rebirth in a physical realm on account of all deluded attachment for the body and material objects having already been completely cut away.

*Sati* and *samādhi* are now automatic, being firmly grounded in the present moment. Even so, there are *kilesas* still present within the mind due to the *citta* grasping at whatever is present in the mind as being the mind itself; thus, it is stuck, deluded in the present moment due to mindfulness and wisdom not yet being refined enough to perceive the *kilesas*. Even though one has put down all thoughts and emotions regarding the past and future, the mind, however, is fooled by the present moment, clinging to it as being the mind.

Sometimes *kilesas* – the villain – can't be detected because the mind is so calm and tranquil. Any sign of *dukkha* (discontent), albeit minute, rarely manifests due to its subtlety. *Sati-paññā* must again analyze and probe even further into the delicate workings of the *citta*, namely:

- *Vedanā* – feelings of the mind, be it happiness, *dukkha* (of which there is extremely little) or indifference. One must see that they are impermanent and devoid of self by having *sati-paññā* contemplating *vedanā* so as to let it go from the mind.
- *Saññā* – memory. The *citta* clings to and takes it for being the mind. When remembering or recognizing things, we understand and believe it to be ‘our’ memory, ‘our’ *citta*. *Sati* and *paññā* are naturally refined and will by their nature contemplate to see the impermanence and selflessness of memory; it arises and ceases and is not the mind. When this is seen clearly and constantly, it will be gradually let go off.
- *Sankhārā* – thinking and imagination. *Sati-paññā* recognizes that we have thoughts about a variety of good, wholesome topics and that they are merely conditions or states of mind. Mindfulness and wisdom investigate seeing more clearly that *sankhārās* are fleeting and without self.

- *Viññānā* – awareness or sense-consciousness. *Sati-paññā* begins to see more clearly being aware of happiness, *dukkha* and other objects of one’s awareness – by recognizing that this knowing or consciousness still has a ‘self’ present and that the ‘knower’ of one’s sensory consciousness still has *kilesas*. *Sati-paññā* must investigate the subtleties of *viññānā* to see its impermanence and absence of self.

Taken together, we reflect upon *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhārā* and *viññānā* to see the *ti-lakkhaṇa* (three universal characteristics of all conditioned phenomena, i.e. impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not self), reflecting upon them in all their subtle details. Finally, we turn the investigation back onto one’s own mind – the mind that grasps to the belief that it is the true, genuine mind, or that it is ‘the knower’. The teaching of the Buddha has us investigate, probing to destroy this ‘knower’ because this ‘one who knows’ is still defiled – ‘the knower’ being no other than *avijjā*, or fundamental ignorance itself. *Kilesas* preside over the mind by letting *moha* (delusion) manipulate the mind into grasping its emotions and thoughts as being the mind itself.

The Buddha therefore taught us to come back to having mindfulness and wisdom reflecting to see the impermanence and non-existence of self in everything, removing from the heart that which we deludedly hold and cling to; namely, the emotions, thoughts and conceptualizations which the mind mistakes for being the mind itself. *Sati-paññā* reverts to investigating and probing into this delusion by seeing its impermanence and absence of self until destroying it - giving it up so that pure knowing can arise.

All the *Krubā Ajahns*, the forest meditation masters, conducted themselves and practised for the purification of this very heart. The Dhamma practitioner, as a consequence, must work at the

practice until attachment towards the physical body has been put down, along with attachment towards the emotions and thoughts within the mind until there is no holding or clinging to anything at all.

Even though these matters are subtle, being beyond speculation or guesswork, we all should try to have an adequate enough understanding of the way or direction of practice: we must conduct ourselves and practise in *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, so that the heart will have the mindfulness and wisdom to investigate this body and mind, seeing their impermanence and absence of self, for we've always clung to both of these as being 'oneself'. This is the path of practice for the destroying or the abandoning of the *kilesas* from the heart. Therefore, the fundamental way of practice – that is direct and certain – is that which has been practised by the Lord Buddha and his *arahant* disciples. If we stray from this path, the path of our esteemed teachers, it will be to our harm and detriment, for it will not be the path of practice for the knowing and seeing of the Dhamma – the transcendence of all suffering.

The various daily practices and observances, or any of the *dhutanga* practices, are therefore, the things that wear away at the *kilesas*. We must restrain the mind, always keeping it within the bounds of *Dhamma-Vinaya* in order for one's body, speech and mind to have a degree of calmness. We then must press on with our efforts to develop *samādhi* because one's *sati-paññā* is not yet able to see the defilements that are still remaining within one's heart. Hence, we must develop *samadhi-bhāvanā* so as to make the mind peaceful. As peacefulness arises within the mind, *sati* will perceive the mind's emotions - seeing the *kilesas* that manifest within the heart. It is essential that *sati-paññā* investigates and contemplates the defilements in order to eliminate them, successively from the gross to the moderate until finally uncovering and removing the subtle *kilesas*.

Consequently, we haven't come here to live and practise complacently. Each day and night is passing by so we must be giving our total effort. When tired, take a rest - resting in order to fight again. Once the body is energetic and strong, and with the heart firmly established, we again take up the fight with the *kilesas* in one's heart. Wearing this brown robe – the *arahants*' flag of victory - puts us in a favourable position. We must have the aim and expectation of conquering the *kilesas* - which will require *sati* and *paññā* to defeat the greed, aversion and delusion within one's heart. As long as we still have breath, mindfulness and wisdom, we will never give up trying to conquer the *kilesas*. Today we may be discouraged, so we have to contemplate, searching for ways to give rise to the confidence and effort that can one day defeat the *kilesas*. Take the practice of the Lord Buddha and the *Arahant* disciples for example - they gave up everything. They retreated to meditate in the forests, the mountains and caves, never seeking out any material gain or veneration, only making use of the eight personal requisites of a monk (set of three robes, bowl, waist-belt, razor, needle and water filter) and the four general requisites (robes, almsfood, dwelling place and medicines for sickness) so as to go about their practice for one day and one night.

All of us, therefore, are presently living off the legacy of the Lord Buddha. We have a comfortable existence, being dependent upon the laity who have faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the *Sangha* - supporting and maintaining this supreme dispensation of the Lord Buddha. In one's heart, therefore, one should never forget why one came to ordain. We depend upon the four requisites offered by the laity for practising Dhamma, so we must practise, as is befitting, for the transcendence of all suffering. In each day and night we should put forth effort to the fullest. When tired, take a rest in order to go on to defeat the *kilesas* – that's all. If we do this every day, relentless in our efforts, the knowing of Dhamma will arise in each of our own hearts.



Normally, with regards to knowledge, we've heard and listened to a lot, and studied a lot. This is called knowledge or understanding but it isn't the understanding or seeing within one's heart. From this knowledge we bring about the seeing within one's heart by practising in *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. The heart's knowing will arise when we have mindfulness and wisdom contemplating one's own physical body to see that it's impermanent and devoid of self, together with contemplating the thoughts and emotions within one's heart, recognizing that they are fleeting and without self - each one arises and passes away.

*Sati-paññā* contemplates viewing things like this - constantly seeing impermanence and the non-existence of self - for it to be called 'seeing'; that is, the seeing or knowing within one's heart. Once seen, disenchantment will arise, joy will arise; there is letting go. This is called knowing within one's heart. *Sati-paññā* probes and sees this frequently, until clear realization arises in the heart. This is how it has to be for the arising of the Dhamma that has gradually, little by little and stage by stage, abandoned the defilements.

That which we call the Dhamma is, at the first stage, the fruition of stream entry; at the second stage, the fruition of once-returning; at the third stage, the fruition of non-returning, and at the fourth stage, the attainment of *arahantship*. This is the arising of the Dhamma. If it is *arahantship*, it is the Dhamma in its complete, perfect wholeness. The heart is pure, free of greed, aversion and delusion - the absolute extinction of the *kilesas*. It is supreme happiness, just as the Lord Buddha said: 'There is no happiness greater than peace', meaning the peace of there being no defilements within the heart.

We all, therefore, should endeavour to put forth effort. We have heard and studied the Dhamma, as well as the texts, quite enough already. We know the way of practice, so practise for the knowing

and seeing of the Dhamma, following in the footsteps of the Lord Buddha and his *arahant* disciples.

For tonight I offer just this much for you to reflect upon.



# The Ten Spiritual Perfections

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Today is the thirty-first of December, 2012. It is generally considered to be the last day of the year, or more commonly called New Year's Eve. On this particular day a great many people think only about wanting to have a good time and this they try to achieve by seeking happiness from sensory pleasures and material objects. Furthermore, many people will go out to a variety of places of entertainment because it is regarded by most people in the world that they will experience happiness and enjoyment there.

Everyone who has gathered here this evening, whether monastic or lay, share a common aspiration to transcend *dukkha* and to experience true happiness in our lives. By coming here for the evening chanting and meditation period, we are all cultivating the meritorious actions of observing the moral precepts, practising meditation and finally listening to a Dhamma talk. In choosing to be here, one is also building up the *pāramīs* (spiritual perfections) within one's heart rather than letting one's time pass by in vain. It is important that we always keep trying to strengthen the ten spiritual perfections because when we do so we are cultivating the path of practice that all the Buddhas and their *arahant* disciples followed. They slowly built up and matured all ten spiritual perfections.

It is interesting to look at how the Buddhas and their *arahant* disciples developed the *dāna pāramī*. In every human lifetime their kind nature would incline them to want to make merit by practising generosity. Whenever they had the means and resources they would naturally want to share their wealth

depending upon the strength of their eagerness to give, as well as the suitability of the time and the occasion.

In every lifetime they would also endeavour to strengthen their *sīla pāramī*. We too should do the same. When we have enough awareness and wisdom to see the harm in transgressing any of the moral precepts we will naturally see the benefit of maintaining each of the Five Precepts. For those who see the benefit of observing the Eight Precepts, the Ten Precepts of novice monks, or the 227 precepts of fully ordained monks, then they will do so respectively. One's ability to keep a greater number of precepts will of course depend upon the strength of one's resolve to do so.

To cultivate the *nekkhama* (renunciation) *pāramī* requires that we remove ourselves from our homes, our families and society. In doing so, we put aside all of our work and responsibilities to give more time to developing our Dhamma practice. One may choose to seek out suitable places for practice that are located in either forests, mountains or caves, while some people (just like yourselves) choose to practise in monasteries. One's choice of place is always made with the aim to devote more time to observing moral precepts and cultivating one's mind through the practise of meditation. In coming here to practise meditation we are also practising letting go of the attachment that we have towards other people, our homes, our wealth and everything in general. One actually gets to know how it feels to remove oneself from all of these things. This *pāramī* must be strengthened every time one takes a human birth. The strengthening of the *paññā pāramī* depends upon the arising of the faculties of mindfulness and wisdom. These two faculties help us to see the benefit, or the virtue, of continually performing good deeds and practising generosity to the utmost of our ability. It will also assist us to see the pain and the danger of remaining within samsara, the continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth. If we can see this clearly we will then be able to see and clearly understand the

nature of *dukkha*, both mental and physical, by seeing that regardless of however many times we take birth there is no one who can escape from sickness, ageing, and death. Once we have the wisdom to perceive the danger within *samsara*, then we must use our mindfulness and wisdom to try to find a way out of this cycle. The way out is to let go of our attachment towards absolutely everything. Only then will we free ourselves from all suffering and discontent.

When developing the *khanti pāramī* we need to have the mental strength to be able to endure with the cold, heat, and all other kinds of physical discomfort. The mental discomfort stirred up by our thoughts, moods and emotions must also be patiently endured. The development of the *khanti pāramī* therefore strengthens our hearts so that we can tolerate both bodily and mental discomforts.

To develop the *virīya* (effort) *pāramī* requires that we constantly put forth effort into removing the *kilesas* (mental defilements) of greed, aversion, and delusion from our hearts. With patience and endurance we should energetically apply ourselves to the practice of sitting and walking meditation in order that we can free our minds from all mental impurities.

The *sacca* (truthfulness—being true to one’s word) *pāramī* must be gradually built up and made strong. Whenever we make promises or resolutions we must always attempt to honor them. In every lifetime it is important to practise in this way, never wavering or becoming discouraged. However, for someone who has yet to develop this particular perfection to a strong degree, when they make vows and promises they may not always be able to fulfill them or remain completely true to them. If such is the case, we must then re-establish our intention and try again. And if we fail again, then try again. As the saying goes: ‘If you fall down, pick yourself up and continue walking on.’ We must always keep working at the practice, training ourselves to be resolute and

determined. And as a consequence, our *sacca pāramī* will grow in strength.

The *adhitthāna* (determination, resolution) *pāramī* is all about the establishing of goals and resolutions that we then determine to fulfill, for example: ‘May I transcend all *dukkha* and realize true liberation – *Nibbāna*.’ Some people may express their aspiration in terms of wishing to attain to a particular stage of enlightenment on the Noble Path to Liberation, for example: ‘May I always strive for the attainment of Stream Entry (*sotāpanna*—first stage on the Noble Path).’ Once having set a goal or aspiration for oneself, we must then work to build upon all of the spiritual perfections so as to realize our goal. All the Buddhas practised in this way by making a solemn resolution to become a future Buddha. Their *arahant* disciples also established determinations, such as to take the spiritual practice to its very end and thus attain *arahantship* – full enlightenment. Once having made a resolution they would work to create the causes and conditions that would enable them to perfect the *pāramīs* to the degree necessary to realize their goal. When making resolutions we should aim for the highest: to realize *Nibbāna*—the complete extinction of all mental defilements within the heart thus bringing *dukkha* to its final cessation. Even though at times we may feel that we are so far away from our goals and that they are extremely difficult to achieve, but nevertheless, we must still aspire for the highest. If by the end of this present life we have still not realized our goals, the perfections that we have accumulated will serve as a supportive conditioning to continue perfecting the *pāramīs* in our future lives. It takes many, many lifetimes to build up the spiritual perfections to the degree necessary to attain our goals. It is for this reason that one must always be developing the *adhitthāna pāramī* because it serves to give direction to one’s spiritual practice.

*Mettā* (kind-heartedness) is also another *pāramī* that must be developed. It is a quality that we should always try to have present

within our hearts. Feelings of *mettā* must be directed not only towards oneself, but also towards all fellow human beings and all sentient beings in general. When developed, *mettā* provides us with an antidote for any feelings of aversion, ill-will and vengeance. We must try to cultivate this quality every day until we become skilled at doing so, thus making it habitual or a characteristic of ours. For anyone who continually cultivates *mettā*, wherever they go they will tend to travel safely and experience very few obstacles. And for anyone who can develop this quality until it is boundless in its extent, their heart will naturally dwell in peace and coolness.

Whenever we are feeling unhappy or experience any kind of suffering or discontent, we must practise developing the *upekkhā* (equanimity) *pāramī*. This means that we have to develop the ability to make our hearts equanimous and objective towards all feelings of pleasure and displeasure that may arise in relation to sights, sounds, odours, tastes, and bodily sensations. *Upekkhā* is another spiritual perfection that must be developed until its presence is firm within the heart.

This then is a brief outline of the ten *pāramīs* that must be practised and further enhanced in each lifetime that we take a human birth. All the Buddhas had to cultivate each of these ten *pāramī* to their absolute perfection, thereby creating the necessary conditions for their supreme attainment of self-enlightenment. All *arahants* had to build up all of the ten *pāramīs* in the course of their spiritual practice, ever since distant past lives until their very last life. And when all ten perfections were sufficiently developed they were able to realize *Nibbāna*—absolute liberation. Therefore, we must take this present opportunity that we have to develop ourselves by carefully following in the footsteps of the Buddha and his *arahant* disciples. Every day we must give our care, attention and energy to developing all that is virtuous, together with the ten spiritual perfections.

As we cultivate the spiritual perfections, they will gradually grow in strength to become more and more complete. With the frequent practising of generosity our hearts will grow in strength and we will also be going against any ungenerous tendencies that we may have, until finally we are able to give with a heart that is free from all hesitancy.

Over time our commitment to observing correct moral behavior will also gradually grow stronger. Through our Dhamma practice we will be able to build up the patience and strength of mind that is necessary to prevent us from breaking any of the moral precepts.

To practise renunciation we must do so by having periods of time away from our homes so that we can give more time to cultivating and strengthening our minds through the practice of meditation. If we neglect to develop this particular *pāramī* by never thinking to come and stay here in the monastery or any other quiet and suitable place, then we will tend to become creatures of pleasure that are attached to their homes and all the comforts that they provide. Also, we will remain overly concerned about not only ourselves, but also our families and relations. It is our attachment towards all of these things that makes it difficult for us to distance ourselves from them. If we develop this *pāramī* in each lifetime it will wholesomely condition our minds to be resolute and enable us to easily put down all of our worldly worries and concerns.

The remaining *pāramīs* of wisdom, patient-endurance, effort, truthfulness, resolution, kind-heartedness and equanimity must also be enhanced in each and every lifetime in order to make our hearts strong and resolute. All of the *pāramīs* that we practise and build up will eventually gather into one single force within the heart causing our hearts to be much stronger than those who have never given any attention to spiritual development. Therefore, the



practising of all that is good, meritorious and wholesome greatly strengthens our hearts.

If we have cultivated the strength of the *sīla pāramī* since previous lifetimes, we will not find it difficult in this present life to observe the Five or Eight Precepts. And for some people they will have no difficulty at all in observing the Ten Precepts of a novice monk or the 227 precepts of a fully ordained monk. This is because they have developed the *sīla pāramī* to a strong degree in their previous lives hence finding it comparatively easy to be a monastic in this present life. There are other people, however, who meet with continuous difficulties and obstructions when wanting to live the monastic life. This is due to the fact that they have not accumulated the *sīla pāramī* to a sufficient degree. In truth, there are a great many people who will never be able to live the monastic life in this lifetime. Therefore, if our commitment to practising correct moral behaviour keeps growing in strength over many lifetimes, our *sīla pāramī* will also grow stronger and we will observe the moral precepts with ever greater ease.

When we wish to develop concentration we will often have to do so in combination with the practice of renunciation by going off into the mountains, forests, caves or other places of seclusion so that we can devote ourselves to the practise of meditation. If in our previous lives we have given a lot of time and effort to the development of concentration, it will serve as a supportive conditioning that will carry through into this present life and we will find it easy to develop the meditative calm of concentration. However, anyone who in their past lives did not make the effort to build up the strength of concentration will find it difficult to develop concentration in this present life. If we are aware that our ability to concentrate the mind is weak then we must put a lot of effort into developing concentration in this present life. If over time we increase our effort in the practise of meditation, the calmness and peacefulness of concentration will gradually arise.

The practise of meditation works to strengthen the mind and also supports the development of mindfulness and patient endurance. One's wisdom faculty, often called mindfulness and wisdom, will also gradually grow in strength.

The path of practice that leads to *Nibbāna* is to practise good deeds and generosity in abundance, together with cultivating *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. The cultivation of all these path factors will give rise to *sati-paññā*. It is the development of mindfulness and wisdom that enables us to deeply understand the Four Noble Truths; that is, to understand the nature of *dukkha*, its cause, its cessation and the path of practice that leads to the state of cessation. If we cultivate our hearts according to this path we will be gradually freeing them from all greed, aversion and suffering. As a result, our hearts will be slowly cleansed until they are made pure. This way of practice transforms the mind from the state of being unenlightened to that of a Noble One – a being who has attained to any of the four stages of enlightenment on the Noble Path to Liberation.

To attain to the first stage of enlightenment, that of stream entry, requires that mindfulness and wisdom be powerful enough to clearly see that the body is not the mind and the mind is not the body. This insight will transform the mind by weakening our attachment to the belief in the existence of a self. And as a consequence the emotions of greed and aversion will also be weakened in force. Actually, it is not too difficult at all to follow the Buddha's path of practice. To develop the strength of moral discipline one must always maintain the moral precepts that one has chosen to observe whether it be Five, Eight, Ten or 227 Precepts. Together with this we must also try to make time every day for practising meditation. When we are able to maintain the mental calmness and equilibrium obtained from practising meditation, our mindfulness and wisdom will consequently grow sharper. Whenever sights, sounds, odours,

tastes, and bodily sensations are experienced our faculties of mindfulness and wisdom will easily abandon any emotions of greed and aversion, or satisfaction and dissatisfaction that arise. The mind will constantly see the impermanence of all arising thoughts, moods, and emotions and will therefore be easily made equanimous.

Once we have established a foundation of concentration within our hearts, our mindfulness and wisdom will be able to contemplate the body with greater clarity. When practising body contemplation we place the greatest emphasis on our own body. There are a number of ways or methods that we can use to contemplate the body, and they should be practised frequently. For instance, one may choose to contemplate the thirty-two parts, these being the simple constituent parts that make up a human body, or one may choose to remain within the scope of the five principal objects of contemplation: hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin. Each part should be reflected upon with the aim of seeing its intrinsic impermanence because all parts ultimately break apart and disintegrate. Alternatively, one may choose to contemplate any of the *asubha* reflections on the loathsomeness and unattractiveness of the body. *Asubha* contemplations are, once again, practised so as to see the body's impermanent nature as it goes through the stages of gradual degeneration with a special emphasis being placed on seeing the breaking apart of the body after death. Another way to contemplate the body is to separate the body out into the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire in order to see the body's impermanence and its complete absence of any abiding entity that could be called a 'self' or 'oneself.' The result of frequent body contemplation is that the mind will begin to let go of its identification and attachment towards the body.

Body contemplation is not something that we stop doing after clearly seeing the true nature of the body just once. When the mind clearly sees the body it will re-enter into the peacefulness

of concentration. And, once having let the mind rest peacefully in this state, the mind will re-gather its strength again. This mental strength or energy will serve as a support for one's mindfulness and wisdom to continue contemplating the body again. The contemplation is always performed with the aim of seeing the impermanence of the body and its complete absence of self. Body contemplation must be made into a regular practice, doing so by taking the body apart – over and over again.

Whenever emotions arise, they must be contemplated immediately in an attempt to let them go. If mindfulness is firmly established in the present moment it will be aware of everything that arises within the mind. Whenever memories arise, our mindfulness and wisdom will seek out a skilful means to stop the mind proliferating about the past. Similarly, mindfulness and wisdom will also be aware of the arising of any thoughts about the future and will contemplate the thoughts so as to make the mind free from them. When mindfulness and the mental equilibrium obtained from concentration can be constantly maintained throughout the day, we will have the wisdom to reflect upon the emotions of greed and aversion or satisfaction and dissatisfaction that arise and thereby bring them to an end by letting them go. As a result, the mind will be kept free from thoughts and emotions.

Any time that the mind is free from thoughts and emotions, one should turn to investigating one's body because it is at this time that one's mindfulness and wisdom will be able to clearly see the object of its investigation. Let the mind separate the body out, piece by piece, in order to see the body's inherent impermanence; its nature is to ultimately break apart and disintegrate. With frequent investigation one's mindfulness and wisdom will begin to grow in experience, becoming more and more skilled in the task of contemplation.

Body contemplation can be practised at any time. Whether the eyes are open or closed, we can still focus our awareness on the body with the aim of seeing it break apart and disintegrate. We need to contemplate the body frequently if we are to make the mind acknowledge the body's impermanence and absence of self. As soon as the mind begins to see this clearly it will begin to gradually let go of its attachment and identification towards the body. Our deluded perception as to the true nature of the body will now begin to weaken, and as a result, the defiling emotions of greed and aversion will also weaken in force. The mind will now begin to realize the fruitions, or attainments, of the Noble Path – stage by stage – until achieving full enlightenment, or in other words, *Nibbāna* – the state of true happiness and liberation.

The path of practice is to develop *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. This is the way to gradually bring the mental defilements of greed, aversion and delusion to their complete cessation and thus make our hearts pure. This way of practice will lead our hearts away from all suffering and discontentment, and thereby take us to *Nibbāna*.

The practice, therefore, is to cultivate goodness within our hearts in each and every lifetime. We do this by developing moral virtue, concentration and wisdom, as well as continually building up all ten of the spiritual perfections. Anyone wishing to go beyond suffering must strengthen the spiritual perfections within their heart. When developing the *pāramīs* it is important to never allow the feeling of discouragement to enter into the heart. Also, we must always take advantage of this present opportunity to practise while our health is still strong. If we are ever to realize our desire for true happiness, or the transcendence of all *dukkha*, then we must always follow in the footsteps of the Buddha and all of his *arahant* disciples because the path walked by them leads to the remainderless extinction of all greed, aversion and suffering within the heart.

Therefore, we must be patient and persevere in the practice of gradually developing the spiritual perfections without ever becoming disheartened. As laypeople, you must go about your work, duties and family responsibilities as best as you can. The work of cultivating the mind, however, is a duty that one has towards oneself. This task needs to be undertaken by patiently and persistently putting forth effort into developing *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā* so that we can gradually cleanse our hearts until making them pure. This is how we cause true happiness to arise within our hearts.

Today all of you have made an intention to come here to the monastery. Some of you have been here since this morning when you came to offer *dāna* to the monks, while some of you have come here later on this evening with a wish to observe the moral precepts and practise meditation. In doing so you are gradually strengthening the spiritual perfections within your hearts. This is what it means to have right view within one's heart. And if we can maintain this right view and continue to practise accordingly for the rest of our life, then when we die, we will surely take rebirth in either the human, *devatā*, or *Brahma* realm. By maintaining right view within our heart, we will continue to create the causes and conditions that will bring about a lessening in the number of future lives until ultimately realizing *Nibbāna*.

So for tonight I offer just this much for you to reflect upon. May I end this talk here.



