

**“The Gift of Dhamma
Excels All Other Gifts”**

- The Lord Buddha



His Holiness Somdet Phra Yannasangvorn,
The late Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Saṅgha

"I provide knowledge to anyone who is interested in practicing Dhamma and at the same time, I am repaying the kindness of my preceptor by serving His Holiness Somdet Phra Yannasangvorn."



Ācariya Mahā Boowa Ñāṇasampanno

“Por Mae Kru Jarn, means Father, Mother, and Teacher. The novices and monks staying with Luangta Mahā Boowa were treated as if they were his sons while Luangta himself was regarded as both father and mother to them.”



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My Way

An Autobiography

by Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto

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CONTENTS

<i>Chapter One ~ Growing Up</i>	1
Early life	3
School	6
The Question of Converting to Christianity	8
Discovering the Dhamma	9
<i>Chapter Two ~ The Worldly Life</i>	11
Earning Money for Studying Abroad	13
An Overseas Student	15
The Fruits of Merit	16
My Feelings after Graduation	18
The Life of an Ice Cream Shop Manager	20
<i>Chapter Three ~ Approaching the Dhamma</i>	23
My First Approach to Studying Dhamma	25
The Fascination with Dhamma	30
The Movie Trailer	31
Resigning from My Job	33
My Resolution after Resigning	35
<i>Chapter Four ~ The Lay Meditator</i>	39
My Self-Meditating Life	41
Fighting against My Desires	43
Becoming Confident in My Dhamma Practice	47
<i>Chapter Five ~ Becoming a Monk</i>	51
Searching for a Temple for Ordination	53
Requesting Permission for Ordination	58

<i>Chapter Six ~ A Monk's Life</i>	61
Starting My New Life as a Monk	63
The First Test as a Newly Ordained Monk	65
Changing My Perspective	69
Monastic Life at Wat Pa Baan Taad	73
Enhancing My Dhamma Practice	
by Reading Luangta's Books	79
Listening to Dhamma Talks by Luangta	85
The Western Monks Listening to Dhamma of Luangta	90
A Good Meditation Teacher	92
Eating to Live	93
Fasting to Defeat the Defilements	95
Luangta Giving Advice without Me Asking	102
Beating the Fear	103
Physical Work vs. Spiritual Work	104
Putting the Right Person on the Job	107
Appropriate Time for Meditation	109
Fear of the "Tiger"	110
Reprimanding Students with Loving-Kindness	113
Using Anger to Trick Students	116
The Strictness of Luangta	118
Refraining from Sleep	122
Frugality of Luangta	123
Behaviors of an Arahant	124
Healthcare of Luangta	124
Dhamma Therapy	125
Luangta's Personal Attendants	127
Memory and the Truth	128
Knowledge Excluded from Tipiṭaka	129
Isaan Funeral Ceremony	131
Fighting without Retreating	133
No Other Interest except in the Dhamma	135

<i>Chapter Seven ~ Moving to Wat Yannasangvararam</i>	137
Goodbye to Wat Pa Baan Taad	139
Staying at Wat Yan	142
History of Wat Yan	143
Buildings in Wat Yan	144
History of Meditation Residence at Chi-On Mountain	145
Somdet Did Not Recognize Me	148
Repaying the Kindness of My Preceptor	148
Meditation Center on Chi-On Mountain	149
Routines and Responsibilities of Monks at Wat Yan	151
Meditation Center for Laymen	153
Observation of Myself	154
Bitten by a Snake at Wat Yan	155
Luangta's Visits to Wat Yan	157
Funeral Rites for Our Teachers	158
The Substitute Teacher for Luangta	159
Conclusion	160
 Dhamma on the Mountain	 163
 Addendum	 181
Daily Life Schedule of Phra Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto	
 Glossary	 183



Chapter One

Growing Up



Early Life

THIS LIFE BEGAN ON NOVEMBER 2, 1947.

My father came from Suphanburi and met my mother in Bangkok. He didn't go to school because my grandfather passed away when dad was still young, and my grandmother could no longer afford to send him to school. Because of this lack of education, my dad had done all he could do just to earn a living. Wherever there was a job offered, he moved to work there. Because my parents had jobs that required them to move around frequently, it was extremely difficult for them to take care of me, so when I turned two years old, my dad took me to stay with my grandmother, who lived in Suphanburi, so that she could look after me.

Living with my grandmother was an enjoyable time in my young life. In fact, since I only saw my parents when they visited once or twice a year, I really didn't miss them. In fact, I hardly knew them. As we know, children just take life as it comes to them, and my life with grandmother was where I felt the most comfortable—

it was my home. Reflecting on the influence that people have had on my life, I realize that my grandmother was an important figure as I grew up. She was a strict vegetarian, and I grew up eating a mostly vegetarian diet. When I craved noodles with meat, she suggested that I eat plain rice porridge with peanuts instead.

Grandmother sold vegetarian dumplings to be offered to ancestors or Chinese gods, and I often accompanied her, wearing white clothes and watching traditional Chinese plays at vegetarian festivals. Spending so much time with an elderly person had a great deal to do with shaping my personality. My tendency to seek solitude is undoubtedly partially influenced by my grandmother. My temperament is best described as kind, friendly, and reserved—all most likely formed during my early years with my grandmother.

I feel I was a relatively normal kid, usually spending time hanging out with my friends, playing sports and the games country market kids usually play. Yet there was a limit to what I did, based on moral and ethical considerations—that is, I never broke the precepts. Because I disliked killing animals, I always refused to go fishing. I also refused to steal others' property; it felt uncomfortable to do so. I learned early on that lying to others just leads to discomfort due to the fact that deep in your mind you are aware of your own deeds.

During the time that I lived with my grandmother, I would sell pork buns, dumplings, or Pa Thong Go (Thai-style Chinese crullers), and lists of lottery winners to earn the money to buy toys and snacks for myself. Again, I just took this in stride, seeing opportunities to make a little extra spending money and actually enjoying thinking up ways to come up with the money.

I only have one sibling: a younger sister born nine years after I was. Because of this age difference, she did not live with me while I was with my grandmother, and by the time she was born, I was already off to school in Bangkok. And later, when I went to the U.S. to study, she went to Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. These circumstances help explain why we never developed a close sibling relationship. Her knowledge and understanding of the Dhamma are limited because it isn't something that is genetically transmitted by parents, but from Kamma that each person has accumulated. We were both born from the same mother and by convention are called brother and sister, but spiritually we are not true siblings.

School

When I reached the age to enter school, I started First Grade at a local public school in Suphanburi, but after only one year, my grandmother, following her Chinese cultural background, moved me to a Chinese primary school. The only drawback I encountered there was that they placed me in the First Grade again.

I completed Third Grade at the age of nine or ten, and after school was over that year, since my parents had gotten steady construction jobs in Pattaya, I went there to live with them. While life with my grandmother was good, it was also great to be living with my parents again as a family.

Not long after moving to Pattaya, my father got to know a teacher from the Seventh Day Adventist School (a Christian school offering English courses), and she suggested sending me to study at their school in Bangkok. Dad and mom discussed this opportunity and decided to send me to Bangkok when the new school year began. Despite the fact that I was supposed to go into the Fourth Grade according to my age, because my previous school taught in Chinese, I was again subject to starting over again—in the First Grade. Compared to kids my own age, I was way behind them because I had to study in the First Grade for three years.

My progress in school changed, however, after my first year. After one year, I was eligible to skip to Third Grade, and then after that year, to skip Fourth and

Fifth Grades and go on to Sixth Grade. This helped me close the gap in age with my classmates.

During the time that I was a student in Bangkok, my parents ran a restaurant in Pattaya, and I would come back home on weekends and summer breaks, working as a waiter and assisting customers and even sometimes guiding tourists. Looking back, I see that this was a good opportunity to learn about the realities of working life.

While the school in Bangkok was a Christian school, I found that their religious beliefs and teachings on abstaining from unwholesome deeds were similar to the five precepts in Buddhism, such as not killing animals, not stealing property, and not lying. And the school provided only vegan food, a diet followed by many Buddhists. But even though there were many similarities, there were some fundamental differences, especially the potential for meditation to end all forms of suffering that is the centerpiece of Buddhism.

Just when I was beginning to feel as if I was on track with my education, a school inspection by the Thai Ministry of Education revealed that the school failed to meet legal requirements, and it was closed for about three months. When the school reopened, one of the changes I remember was not in the curriculum but in the dress code. Previously, students had been allowed to wear whatever outfits they wanted, like many foreign schools, but the new dress code required a white shirt with the student's name on it and trousers just like the vocational students.

The Question of Converting to Christianity

During my time at the Seventh Day Adventist School, the school gave an incentive to students to pay only half of the tuition if they converted to Christianity. I was almost convinced initially to take this opportunity to help my family by cutting my expenses. And since I wasn't into Buddhism (my folks had never taught me about religion or even gone to a temple), I gave a great deal of thought to converting.

I didn't immediately respond and when later asked whether I would agree to convert to Christianity, I decided not to. The financial advantage to my family couldn't override my inability to believe in God, as well as other doctrines of Christianity. After considerable thought and vacillation, I had to be true to myself. I had to say no. There was something about committing to a religion for monetary benefit that felt like too big a compromise—as if I was, in a way, lying.

Discovering the Dhamma

I discovered the Dhamma when I was very young—about twelve years of age. It was a life experience that was so powerful that it changed the way I saw life and death. One of my classmates at the Seventh Day Adventist School passed away, and the funeral ceremony had an open casket so that we could pay respect to the deceased. What I saw spontaneously and distinctly imprinted on my mind throughout the ceremony that I would be just the same as him in the future—as would my family members and literally everyone.

So I kept thinking about death long after I left the ceremony. I had not fully accepted death yet and still feared it to some extent, but I had begun the process of seeing it as a normal, natural occurrence, something that all of us would eventually face. What struck me was that I didn't feel sad at all. I analyzed it logically, much like a scientist who, for example, analyzes the economic ups and downs with an unbiased mind.

Consequently, this discovery led to overcoming attachment and craving. However, my attachment and craving couldn't be entirely eliminated because the mind was not able to contemplate and stay focused on a continuous basis.





Chapter Two

The Worldly Life



Earning Money for Studying Abroad

AFTER GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL in 1966, I didn't go to college or university in Thailand right away. Because the Seventh Day Adventist School I attended had not been accredited by the Ministry of Education, the students were not eligible to take entrance examinations for any university in Thailand. The only option to further my education was to study overseas, and this applied to most of my school friends. As for me, knowing that my parents' financial situation would not enable them to send me abroad to study, I moved back home to find a job and begin the process of saving money.

I got a job near U-Tapao airport working as a typist, and while that was my official job, I was also assigned additional responsibilities such as translating for Westerners, driving, and purchasing. And even though I worked at a variety of tasks from 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday, it wasn't too taxing. So I would also work on Sunday, being paid double time. Being able to borrow my father's Mazda pickup truck was helpful in cutting down my commuting time.

My desire to go overseas and seek new experiences gave me the motivation to keep up this seven-day work week so that I could save sufficient funds for my studies abroad. Something in my nature made me sympathize with my parents and I knew how difficult it was to make ends meet, so right from the start I was committed to trying to earn the money for my studies without asking them to sacrifice.

After about a year, I had saved 30,000 baht, which I naively figured would be enough for my studies abroad. Then I began the process of finding and applying to schools and buying a plane ticket.

I never expected to be able to rely on my family at all. I planned to rely on myself using my savings to cover the first portion of my stay in the States and then to study and work simultaneously. It didn't matter if I graduated or not, assuming that even if I failed to finish my degree, what I learned and experienced would be better than not going abroad at all. My thinking was that even if I were only able to stay for two years, I wouldn't regret it. In fact, going overseas let me gain experience from inside and outside the classroom—opening me up to experiences and ideas that I would never have been exposed to in Thailand.

Approaching my 20th birthday, I said goodbye to my parents on the departure day in fall 1967 and told them that I didn't mind if they didn't send me money. But as parents tend to do, they saved what they could and each month transferred money that helped cover about half my expenses. By working during vacations

and even sometimes during the academic semesters, I was able to make up the difference. While I didn't live comfortably, I managed to get by.

An Overseas Student

One advantage of having studied at a high school that offered international programs was that my language proficiency was advanced enough to enable me to avoid long remedial language instruction when I entered junior college in the U.S. After two and a half years there, I transferred to California State University, where I spent another two and a half years working towards a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering. The choice of major was based on the fact that I was always more interested in mathematics than in the humanities.

The usual four-year university study extended to five years for two reasons. Working to pay for school and expenses, I was not always able to focus fully on my studies and had to retake some courses in which I had not performed well enough. Though this might appear to have been a waste of time, it didn't really matter to me. I wasn't in a hurry to graduate and knew that sooner or later I would graduate—knowing that things happen according to conditions over which we have little, or even no, control.

Life as a student in the U.S. was demanding. Between working to support myself and studying, there wasn't much time for anything else. I lived the life

of a poor student, even having to skip meals when my money ran out. There were days when I only had enough money for one meal, and I reluctantly took a job washing dishes because both hunger and cold weather made it extremely difficult to focus on my studies.

After graduation, I decided to return to Thailand by traveling through Europe. Taking a flight to Belgium, I boarded a train and visited the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, and Italy. I had wanted to visit the U. K., but I would have had to get a separate visa just to enter.

With my belongings in a backpack, I slept in YMCAs, student dorms that cost US\$1.00 a night, and even on the night train trips between countries. Likewise, I rarely spent more than US\$1.00 on food and even visited some places that offered free food and drink—like a brewery that offered free beer. Throughout the trip, I spent roughly US\$5.00 per day.

The Fruits of Merit

One event that happened on a trip to the U. S. gave me some insight into merit.

I was on a plane from Osaka to Tokyo and found myself sitting next to a flight attendant during a break in her work. Because of some rough weather, she remained in the seat for quite a while, and we had a nice chat. I told her that I was going directly to the U. S. for my studies

and wouldn't have a chance to visit Tokyo. She said that it was unfortunate that I wouldn't get to see this amazing city and if I were to be staying, she would be glad to give me a tour. Even though she knew I was just passing through, she gave me her address anyway.

Due to bad weather, I missed my connecting flight from Tokyo to Hawaii and because the standard rooms typically reserved for passengers were all occupied, I was put up in the Okura, a luxurious, five-star hotel. It was already 10:00 p.m. when I reached the hotel, but I decided to see if I could get in touch with the nice person who had generously offered to show me her city. I asked the receptionist how I might contact her and she offered to help me send a telegram with my hotel and room number in the message. Amazingly, at 8:00 a.m. the next morning, there she was, ready to show me the city. We spent the whole day seeing the sights, with her pointing out places of interest and explaining their significance.

I had, by chance, been put up in a free, first class hotel, had my food paid for, and equally by chance had met a nice person who took a day out of her busy life to show a stranger around Tokyo. What could have been a negative, uncomfortable travel delay became a memorable, pleasant experience. It seemed to me that perhaps this was the fruit of merit that I had made in the past.

My Feelings after Graduation

After my studies were over in the U. S., I had no motivation to work for money. I was solely in search of true happiness; it seemed like there was fuel to light the fire of spiritual life. I had wondered what the key to happiness actually was but never had a clue. All I knew was that it definitely wasn't gained by working, having a family, or being wealthy.

I'd always been fond of peace and solitude and wasn't really into socializing with others even though I occasionally joined my friends when necessary. I loved to go to the forest, the mountains and the beach and was the happiest when I was surrounded by nature.

So, after returning to Thailand, I was worn out from the grind of studying and working and wasn't really very enthusiastic about finding a job. I questioned whether life was about long hours hustling to make money. I had just spent several years working long hours to save money to get to the U.S., then spent five years studying and working, and now being faced with the prospect of finding another job that I would labor at for 30 years until retirement made me seriously question if there was nothing more to life than that.

Luckily, I had saved enough money from my work in the States to enable me to live for another year without being forced to seek a job. I felt that I needed, and deserved, a well-earned rest. I enjoyed swimming, sun bathing, and reading books. Sometimes I got books from people

I knew; sometimes I exchanged them with tourists. Often, though, I just read books at a bookstore so that I didn't have to buy them. I read novels about the philosophy of life, gaining insights into the choices people make in their lives. Some went along with the crowd, working and getting married; others led spiritual lives in the forest seeking the truth of life, but my questions about life went unanswered.

Eventually, I realized that I had to find a job to support myself, but in looking for one, I decided that I would only take a job I liked. Just before I ran out of money, a friend came to Pattaya to design an ice cream shop for a Western owner, and when I found out that he didn't have a manager, I offered my service and described my previous experience in the ice cream shop in the States. After a meeting with the owner, I was given the job and began work that I was comfortable with.

So, here I was, an engineering graduate working in an ice cream shop. I had made up my mind that I didn't have the desire to do engineering work because dealing with calculations would keep me thinking and prevent me from having a peace of mind. Because a career was not what I was looking for, and being rich wasn't a priority, I figured that I'd just do what was easy and relaxed. I had made up my mind that a stressful, hectic job was the antithesis of what I wanted in life. A job that enabled me to live simply—managing an ice cream shop—was just the ticket.

At this point in my life I had come to the conclusion that money, and the things that it buys—expensive car,

gourmet food, a luxurious house—created a circular pressure to continue to earn more money to pay for them all. To me, a simple life with a cup or two of noodles and minimal expenses just seemed to be more reasonable. I found myself quite content to work at the shop a short distance from my house and live on 20 baht a day.

The Life of an Ice Cream Shop Manager

Working for a Western entrepreneur, I found the job quite easy. Since he wanted to serve ice cream like it was served in the States (with flavored toppings—something quite uncommon in Thailand at that time), I just applied what I had learned in my job while I was a student. I was in charge of setting up the operation, hiring and training staff, and ordering supplies for the shop. What was ironic about this job was that it paid a higher salary than that of an engineer in Bangkok—where I would still have to rent a house and commute. In Pattaya, I could live at home, take a one-baht minibus to work, and make a higher salary doing relatively easy work.

As things progressed, I found that I didn't have to work all day long and just made sure that things were running smoothly. After that, I could read the newspaper, have some coffee, or even take a swim in the sea. And when the shop got busy, we'd all pitch in and help each other. Since weekends were high volume days,

the weekdays were often relaxed, providing me with a comfortable lifestyle. During this period I was quite contented with the way things were going along.





Chapter Three

Approaching the Dhamma



My First Approach to Studying Dhamma

MY FIRST ATTEMPT AT MEDITATION was a slow process of reading and waiting for the motivation to commit to actually meditating.

After working for two months, by chance I was chatting with a tourist in Pattaya. He found out that I was interested in Dhamma, so he gave me a Dhamma book, which was the first English Dhamma book I read. A small book of about 20 pages, it was originally from Tipiṭaka (the Pāli Canon) and translated into English by a Western monk. The book focused on Anicca, known as impermanence, and the comparison between the Buddha's teachings and those of philosophers from the West. As I read through it, I found the book enlightening.

Apart from Anicca, the Lord Buddha also taught about Magga, referring to the Path for dealing with uncertainty. From the book, I realized the significance of meditation. It would calm your mind so that you would

be capable of accepting any changes or conditions. If you didn't have peace of mind, you would not be able to accept the changes in your life. But if you were mindful, you would not be affected by uncertain situations.

Then I wrote a letter to Sri Lanka requesting more Dhamma books, and they sent back the books of The Three Basic Facts of Existence, *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (The Wheel of the Dhamma), and *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (The Four Foundations of Mindfulness). I relied most heavily on *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, taking it as my teacher and my guide to practice meditation.

In this Sutta, the monks are taught to start with sitting meditation and find a quiet place under a tree, in the forest or on a mountain. The book suggests sitting crossed-legged with eyes closed and consciously watching the breath throughout the practice. When the meditation is over, a monk must continue to be aware of four body postures: standing, walking, sitting, and lying down. Another meditation object is repulsiveness towards 32 body parts. Also, he needs to contemplate corpses in various states of decomposition. It is required that a monk contemplate *Vedanā*, or feeling, when it arises in order to understand whether it is a pleasant feeling, a painful feeling, or neither a painful-nor-pleasant feeling. Moreover, he should contemplate the nature of arising and vanishing in the feelings. Then, contemplating *Anicca* (impermanence), *Dukkha* (suffering), and *Anattā* (not-self), he simply lets go, not clinging to anything.

I had been reading the books for nearly three months without practicing sitting meditation until one day I asked myself, “Why don’t I just start meditating?” Once I was conscious that I was wasting my time, I immediately started sitting meditation, and that was the beginning of my virtue practice. If I didn’t start doing it, I would end up not practicing and would be distracted by other issues all the time. I would be procrastinating or postponing the practice to next week, next month, or after getting other things done.

At the very beginning of the practice, I felt restless and distracted from breathing exercises, so I recited Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta in English while sitting, which took approximately 40 minutes before meditating.

Therefore, for new practitioners, if you are distracted, you can resort to chanting, instead of saying “Buddho Buddho,” or visualizing breaths. Chanting is another form of meditation practice. To follow this approach, it’s not necessary to have palms joined at the chest or to sit sideways. You can sit with legs crossed, like when doing sitting meditation, and keep chanting. The key is to be mindful when chanting. The longer you do the chanting, the longer you can sit and maintain the inner peace. Reciting the Buddha’s name, “Buddho, Buddho,” tends to leave a gap between words, enabling strayed thought and disturbance of body aches; however, being attentive to chanting produces less pain because the mind is concentrating solely on chanting and disregarding feelings created by the body. After the chanting session of about 30-40 minutes, you will feel lighter.

When chanting Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, you will understand the Lord Buddha's teaching. The Lord Buddha taught us to be mindful by contemplating the body, feeling, mind and phenomena. The meditation of body awareness comes in several strategies. To exemplify, we should be mindful of the four postures. A person should be mindful when walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. Alternatively, other meditation objects could be the contemplation of the 32 body parts, or awareness of the present actions and activities of the body, such as speaking, facing to the left and to the right. These techniques could help foster mindfulness. In the presence of mindfulness, thoughts are under control, adhering to breaths or the words "Buddho, Buddho" so that the mind would not wander.

Next, I concentrated on my breath where my mind would attain happiness and tranquility. Though my mind didn't go deep, it wasn't restless. It only went deeper when experiencing bodily pain while sitting. At that moment, I automatically realized that I had to depend on a meditation object, so I chose to recite the words "Anicca, Anicca", which I did not have to do for long. After doing so, the pain immediately disappeared, allowing the mind to stay in peace. I was amazed by the potential of the meditation object to change the state of mind. At first, the suffering in mind occurs when experiencing unbearable pain. You would like to get rid of the pain and want it to vanish. At that particular moment, if there is nothing to control the mind, you will no longer want to bear the pain or continue sitting. Reciting the mantra only for a short time will cause the pain to vanish and let

the mind become cool and calm. Just let the mind stay in that meditative state until it withdraws from that state before you get up to do other things.

Always be mindful when standing up. Even before standing up, you should be mindful that you are going to stand up and try to be present all the time. To demonstrate, you can practice contemplation of the body (Kāyagatā-sati) through the four body postures. You will be constantly mindful when you are going to do sitting meditation, as well as when standing, walking, and lying down. When walking, you may feel like chanting which is another approach to help bring the mind back from wandering. The chanting could be applied through four postures: walking, standing, sitting, or lying down.

For me, the Dhamma was easily understood because I read Dhamma books in English, which did not contain royal or hierarchical terms, but only simple words. For instance, the word “eat” is being used when communicating with the Lord Buddha or a beggar, and all classes of people comprehend this term, no matter who they are. It was easier that way. I usually got confused by royal or holy words because I was not familiar with those terms. Those with good English will find the English version of Dhamma easier to understand.

The Fascination with Dhamma

In terms of Dāna (giving), since I didn't have many possessions, there was no need for me to contribute much, yet I always helped those who were in trouble. When I was a layman, I had never given foods to monks during the morning alms round or been to a temple even once. Also, I had no clue about how temples or monasteries functioned. I only learned about Dhamma from the books. The reason why I did not make merit was that I had nothing to give. All I had was just enough to support myself. However, I wasn't concerned about not contributing because I had been helping people all along. When I could, I was more than happy to help those who were in need; I had never been selfish. I knew that I already had Dāna within my heart as I was never possessive or clinging to my belongings, and I didn't have a lot of money or material things with me.

Regarding the five precepts, I never killed living beings, told lies, or stole. I always kept precepts in mind as I never dared to commit a sin. It just wasn't in my nature and would only make me feel bad if I did.

The only thing lacking was meditation. All I would do was meditate and develop mindfulness as an attempt to keep the mind calm and to contemplate *Ti-lakkhṇa* (the Three States of Impermanence, Suffering and Uncertainty) with total attention. Thus, I gave it a try by practicing little by little until I felt I was doing fine with it. The more deeply I went into it, the more clear it became that everything was totally meaningless.

The Movie Trailer

Having peace of mind is better than getting millions of dollars because a peaceful mind is considerably better and more valuable than wealth. Peace of mind cannot be purchased, no matter how much money one has.

Formerly, I was not interested in religion. A liberal who considered religion as being old-fashioned, I was hesitant to believe because I found religious people were superstitious. They foolishly believed in what couldn't be proved. Some religions make people believe without proof, but Buddhism is different.

The Buddhist teachings are provable, teaching that the root cause of suffering is actually **desire**. The way to stop suffering, therefore, is to abandon one's desires. I followed the teachings, and once I stopped my desire, the suffering (Dukkha) was just gone. As a consequence, I became convinced that the Buddhist teachings were real and accurate, and always helpful when being attacked by suffering.

When studying a religion, one must take notice of the mind in order to determine the effectiveness of the teachings towards one's mind. If it can lessen the suffering, then it is effective. However, when observing the ability of each religion to completely remove suffering, the majority of the religions appear to only help reduce the suffering at some level, while Buddhism is the only religion that is capable of entirely eliminating it.

Before I decided to quit my job, I had already observed the **movie trailer**—a hint of the profound power of Buddhism. Otherwise, I absolutely couldn't have made such a decision. The **trailer** for Buddhism refers to the state of mind where the pain was completely dispelled by the method of recitation. When the aches occurred, recitation of mantras was constantly performed and it took only a short time for the pain to disappear. This resulted in the feelings of lightness, relief, and comfort. Previously I underwent enormous suffering due to great pain, but reciting incessantly led to overcoming the pain.

However, a preview was just a guide or sample. It was not the whole movie. It was more like offering a sample for me to know what the fruit of meditation was like, and that I was on the right track. This was what I had been searching for throughout my life and never realized where it was **hidden**. Once I had found it, I learned that it took time and dedication to successfully attain the fruits. Realizing the truth, I decided to follow this path.

I looked forward with full hope in the Dhamma path, which I believed I was able to follow to the fullest. Whoever becomes fond of Dhamma practice would see that being a monk is the best life path. The Lord Buddha created the path for us to follow. Monks' sole duty is to meditate. If one studied the path taught by the Lord Buddha, he would be aware that his principal teachings are referred to merely as Bhāvanā, or meditation, which could be achieved through the cultivation of Sīla (morality), Samādhi (calm and stability of the heart), and Paññā (wisdom).

Resigning from My Job

Before making a decision to resign from my job to undertake meditation, I already had some experiences of Samādhi, or mental concentration, where physical pain or muscle soreness gradually arose when practicing sitting meditation. After reciting the word “Anicca” (impermanence) for a while, I felt free from the pain and hurt I was holding on to. At this point, the mind had entered a deep mental stage where the pain here and there no longer persisted. I was surprised at how little time it took for the agitated mind to become calm. Hence, I came to understand that all existence was subject to change and decay.

Without concern for money or material things and being content to eat street noodles or food at a hotel, I was able to concentrate on that which concerned me: my mind which was restless, unstable, and emotionally responsive to interferences, and needed to be improved.

Once I started meditating, I was happy and knew that I was on the right track. My goal was to achieve happiness. I did not want anything else on earth because I had seen wealthy people who were not really happy with their lives. They were faced with chaos and numerous problems. I never ever wanted to have an issue with anyone. All I wanted was freedom where I could be myself and live my own life, so I assumed that this path seemed to suit me best.

However, when I was not practicing meditation and became involved with business, turbulence occupied my mind when unsettled issues arose at work. In my head there were endless thoughts, which made it hard to keep my mind calm. Therefore, I learned that work was an obstacle and a hindrance that caused restless mind. If a practitioner sought tranquility and happiness, he would need to give up his working life.

However, if he had to work to support himself, it would be necessary for him to save enough money for future expenses. When he earned enough money to sustain his life, the option of leaving a job was then feasible.

In my case, after six months of working, I saved up about 6,000 baht, which, I believed, would be enough for a year of living, so I quit my job.

When I submitted my resignation, the owner of the ice-cream shop thought that my reason for leaving the job was to negotiate a higher salary. He asked me if I wanted a higher salary or not. I denied it and told him that I had a chance to study Dhamma and practice meditation. I found out that work and meditation were totally contradictory, and I was determined to cultivate a more meditative life. I had been through numerous work experiences, had observed secular happiness, and had traveled a lot already. However, I hadn't found the serenity that I expected, and I was yet eager to experience more. This led to my decision to resign from the job. I planned to commit to meditation practice for one year, to give it a try and see how it would turn out,

and also to see if I could progress on this path or not. If the outcome was promising, I would enter the monkhood. And if it didn't go well, I would return to work and give up meditation. I could only choose one.

Practicing meditation along with working was just like mixing hot water with cold water. It was neither hot nor cold—just warm. That was the same scenario as being sort of progressive in meditation and still having a job at the same time. The attainment of Dhamma wouldn't be as successful as it should be because these two factors were totally poles apart. It was time for me to choose, so I decided to quit my job and take one year off to undertake meditation practice.

I notified the owner in November, which was one month ahead of my resignation. My last day of work was on December 31, 1973. I had worked for the company for six months in total.

My Resolution after Resigning

I resolved that I would not satisfy my sensual desire. My intention was not to seek happiness through the five physical senses; the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, and the body. I would dedicate myself to meditation only and cultivate my awareness based on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

At the early stage of my practice, I did sitting meditation on my own. After practicing for a while, I felt

calm and stable, so I was determined to do more meditation. In November, when I had made up my mind that I would resign at the end of the year, I made a commitment to myself to practice meditation for a year and not to do any irrelevant duties. I would also limit the food to a single meal before noon. My daily schedule mainly consisted of doing walking and sitting meditation, and reading Dhamma books. I would no longer seek happiness from the outside world like I used to. Formerly, after I woke up, I just had to leave home and go to the beach, or anywhere else as long as I could go outside. However, I made a decision not to do that anymore. I would just stay home and meditate. If I did go outside, it would be to find a peaceful and quiet place in a new environment for me to meditate. The place could be a quiet corner along the beach, or I might stay overnight on an island. I was determined to try to sustain this regimen for about a year.







Chapter Four

The Lay Meditator



My Self-Meditating Life

AFTER RESIGNING FROM THE JOB, I started by locking myself up in my place on January 1, 1974. I was fortunate that my parents had a vacant town home located near Na Kluea market, and it was like living in a temple because I was alone in the house. I spent most of my time there for the better part of a year. Apart from my place, I might spend a night on an island or elsewhere from time to time, but generally I lived alone at home.

After getting up in the morning, I started my day with sitting meditation. I chanted the Sutta and practiced breathing meditation before washing my face and doing everything else that needed to be done. Then I came down to practice walking meditation, read Dhamma books and do sitting meditation alternately.

Regarding the food, I sometimes cooked for myself or would dine out for one meal per day. I also observed the eight precepts which kept me away from sensual pleasures, consisting of visible objects, taste, scents,

sounds, and tangible objects. I basically stayed at home and cleaned up my house. However, I never went to a temple; I just practiced as I was guided by the books.

Practicing by myself, spending five baht a day was already enough for me since I only had one meal a day. In those days, it cost 3 baht for a plate of rice and 2 baht for a single bowl of noodles. Having a dish of rice and a bowl of noodles once a day was more than enough for me. There was no need to use much money for my life.

Even before engaging in Dhamma practice, I was never that particular about food and ate anything that I was served. Also, it was unnecessary for me to go to restaurants recommended by a food expert. Street noodles were fine as long as they could satisfy my hunger. When I just came back from the U.S., I was selective with restaurants and usually went to an air-conditioned restaurant with food service staff, but that changed as I became centered on a meditative existence.

I loved to be free, so I voluntarily lived an impoverished life. I didn't want to work under anyone, especially negative people who had the power to command others just because they were richer. Eventually, I settled into a monk-like daily life, living simply, avoiding distractions, and concentrating each day on the Dhamma.

Fighting against My Desires

I still got defeated by the Kilesas, or defilements, now and then. For example, when doing sitting meditation, the pain had increased and become so unbearable that I needed to adjust my sitting postures. Sometimes I resisted it. Sometimes I grew tolerant. Sometimes I was weak and discouraged. Sometimes I was inclined to surrender. These were normal scenarios that could happen in the fight. I was disheartened when doing something extremely difficult as well, yet I was aware that I couldn't step backwards and just give up the struggle. I had already made my commitment to pursue this path, so I had to carry on in any circumstances. If I was still alive, I would not retreat. Fortunately, I was able to stick with it.

During that first year of Dhamma study and meditation, I did sitting meditation, walking meditation, and Dhamma reading. I tried to curb my desire to go out and not to follow my craving as I knew how it would turn out in the end. Though I would feel joyful going outside initially, I knew I would also end up feeling lonesome and sad once I came back home. I figured that it was better for me to put up with my own desire in the first place and to get over sadness and loneliness within me. I was aware that it was the defilements and emotion created by the mind. If I concentrated on sitting and walking practice for some time, those defilements and emotions would be absent eventually, and I found that was the right way to handle them.

When feelings of loneliness and bleakness came over me, there was a strong internal force tempting me to go out and seek activity just to escape. But my meditation over time enabled me to see clearly the inevitable return of the desperation, leading me to realize both the futility and seduction of the desire to go out.

Eventually, this apparent problem became an excellent teacher. I saw clearly that the feelings were not permanent, and knowing this, I was encouraged to overcome loneliness by not going out no matter how sad I would become. With Dhamma guidance, one would be on the right track to fix the problem because meditation practice would help eradicate such feelings.

During the first year of practice, I found my mind entered Samādhi stage. However, it alternated between feelings of serenity during meditation, and restlessness. When I withdrew from meditation, my mind jumped from one thought to another. Accordingly, I had to resume sitting or walking meditation in order to regulate the mind. When the mind was successfully stabilized, the serenity of heart established itself.

When the mind was left uncontrolled, a few moments later it would start wandering and running around again, which made it necessary to have Samādhi reestablished. It seemed like fighting back and forth between the mind and the defilements.

Sometimes when I had a desire to hang out, I had to get over it by using Paññā, or wisdom, to teach the mind that **going out** meant **falling back**. I felt I had

come so far, like I had climbed the mountain and already reached higher levels. Going out was simply equivalent to returning to the starting point. If I did, I knew that it would mean climbing all over again in order to get to the summit. At the same time, I realized that I would reach even higher levels if I refrained from following the desire in my heart to go out. I had reached the stage of my practice where I preferred to continue climbing up and not following the desire in my heart. I exerted myself to resist my own cravings of going outside until they vanished. The agitation caused by the desire to go out, which resulted in an extreme frustration and suffering in my mind, was slowly softened by Sati, or mindfulness, and when the mind knew that the desire wouldn't be fulfilled, it stopped asking for it. As a result, the mind came into peace. I constantly practiced this until one day I asked myself this question:

"I have never remained seated in one place at all. Why don't I give it a try today?"

Then I got a comfortable chair for myself to sit on, and placed some water within my reach. I intended to do nothing. I would neither watch nor listen to anything, and I would either meditate or investigate Dhamma. If there occurred muscle fatigue due to prolonged sitting, I would stand up or go to the bathroom. Apart from those mentioned, I would never leave the chair.

I started sitting late in the morning after breakfast, and I made up my mind that I would be sitting there till dusk. When the light needed to be turned on, I would get out of the chair. I had to resist the desire to do this

and that—to move just for the sake of moving. I fought my cravings by using meditation, reciting “Buddho”, and contemplating Dhamma. Nonetheless, I would not be reading or listening to anything. All I did most of the time was just to battle with my own desires.

Alternatively, I might be watching my breath, gazing at the body, investigating 32 body parts, contemplating corpses, and contemplating the five sensual pleasures (visible objects, taste, odor, sound, and tangible objects) and perceiving them as *Ti-lakkhaṇa* (the Three Characteristics of Existence - Impermanence, Suffering, and Not-Self). I kept practicing like this, contemplating and strictly following the Dhamma.

Since I realized that desires were identified as *Dukkha*, or suffering, I no longer searched for, watched, listened to, and indulged in visible objects, taste, odor, sound, and tangible objects. I consumed only the things necessary for the body. For instance, it was necessary to eat for health, and I just ate anything that was available. Also, I only drank plain water, not any other beverages.

Becoming Confident in My Dhamma Practice

My practice of Dhamma based on a book on the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta continued without any advice from teachers or mentors. I took this book as my teacher throughout one year-long commitment to self-meditation. I had never doubted the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha regarding their existence at any stage. As I was reading the Dhamma book, it seemed like the Lord Buddha was teaching me the Dhamma directly. Despite the fact that his teachings originated 2,500 years ago, they remained genuine just like I was listening to the teachings straight from his mouth, giving me confidence in them.

Apart from doing meditation and attaining mindfulness, I also worked on contemplative wisdom, or Paññā, in accordance with the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. I mostly dwelled observing the body. I also continued the constant battle with the Vedanā (feeling) and tried to overcome the desires within me. The previously mentioned struggle with the desire to go out and have fun was not easily overcome. Such feelings occurred as a consequence of inconsistent meditation practice. It became apparent that the calmness when the mind entered into Samādhi was not going to be permanent, and that my meditation was going to have to strengthen before the long-hoped-for steady calmness would establish itself. It also became clear that expecting permanent peace was, at this stage, unrealistic.

However, I looked deep within and knew that this battle with desires was at the core of suffering, that the sense of loneliness and sadness would reassert itself, and that I had to take immediate action right at that moment to establish awareness, contemplate the Dhamma, or meditate to calm the mind. Otherwise, the thoughts would turn to be overwhelming in the passage of time. It was essential to carry on combating the desires, and keep it up incessantly until there was no room for the mind to think of anything futile and irrelevant. By following this, the mind would be developing and progressing as a result. Throughout the day, I would alternate walking and sitting meditation, or I would read Dhamma books. Of course, there were times when I had to do necessary household chores: cleaning the floor, washing clothes, cooking food, or eating. I had to make sure that I was mindful in whatever activity or duty I was doing so that the mind wouldn't wander.

After completing the chores, the practice session was to continue as I might be switching between walking and sitting meditation. I gradually came to the point where I could see that at the moment that my activity changed, the mind would create an opportunity to insinuate a feeling—often a distracting one. I sharpened my awareness so that I would not be absent-minded or buzzing with reminiscences or sweet memories as this could potentially trigger lonely feelings and make me sad about missing my friends. Even though I was sometimes absent-minded, I quickly began sitting or walking meditation practice right after I was aware of it in order to prevent daydreaming or distracted mind.

When Sati, or mindfulness, is discontinuous and one is not aware, the defilements, quickly take over the mind. If one is unable to realize it in time, it will generate intense pain within the mind, requiring a huge amount of effort just to bring the mind back into the Samādhi stage again.

It was natural for the mind to be in pain and misery, yet it wasn't terrible since there were also advantages. When the pain was gone, it was like being saved from the devil. Being released from the control of the defilements was truly a relief, even a joy. The heart was free from distractions and delusional seductions. It could be happy even when it didn't have anything to do. This was a truly rewarding experience.





Chapter Five

Becoming a Monk



Searching for a Temple for Ordination

FOR ME, I WASN'T SURE IF IT WAS DUE TO my past good deeds or not that unexpectedly there was always a way for me to go. I had never thought of becoming a monk due to my non-religious family background. As mentioned earlier, I attended Christian school, and I almost converted, but eventually changed my mind. Also, the Dhamma books that I got were from a Western tourist in Pattaya, not from any temple. Prior to my Dhamma practice, I had never gone to a temple or known any teacher as I self-studied.

Since the very beginning of solitary practice, as a layperson, I had never even wished to be ordained at all. I thought if I had come from a rich family with a lot of money, to sustain my life, I certainly would not have become a monk. I would be a layman practicing Dhamma in my way. As my budget was adequate for a year of Dhamma practice, I chose to do it at home for that time period only.

When the end of the year arrived, I asked myself what I was supposed to be doing next. There were two options for me. The first one was to continue living as a layman and find a new job. As I saw it, a day's work would take me eight hours. I would then have to spend two more hours per day commuting to the workplace. Added to that, I would end up being very tired when I arrived home. Thus, there wouldn't be much time left for the intense practice, day and night, which had become such an integral part of my life over the past year. It became quite clear that if I wished to continue meditation like I did for a year, I would need to be ordained.

I was in a dilemma at that time. I didn't want to be a monk. I was still attracted to the defilements, which include sensual pleasures derived from the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body and the freedom to travel around. The reason behind this was that I perceived being a monk was parallel to being imprisoned, so I was in fear at the moment. Added to this conflict, I was frustrated at my indecisiveness.

After careful consideration, I finally decided to become a monk so as to have time for Dhamma practice. Plus, I would no longer have to be worried about earning money. After having made up my mind, I felt immensely relieved. In fact, being ordained wouldn't be a problem since I had been experiencing living like a monk meditating all year long, and I had avoided being exposed to the sensual pleasures. Each day, I was immersed in reading Dhamma books, sitting meditation, walking meditation, and taking one meal per day.

Since I didn't own a lot of property or have any money, my circumstances made the transition relatively smooth. It was like I brought nothing with me to this world when I was born and had nothing with me when I left for the monkhood. I also did not have attachments to anything, so there was nothing that could potentially take me back to the lay life.

I decided that I had to look for a quiet and peaceful monastery where there was no emphasis on Pariyatti (the study of the Scriptures), ritual performances, and invitation of monks. Moreover, the monastery I sought should be a place where funerals or meritorious events were never held and where there was no involvement in any other activity that would interfere with meditation. In my reading of the Tipiṭaka, there was no mention of such work which is currently widespread. At the time of the Lord Buddha, according to the principle of Dhamma, monks were taught to practice meditation in the forest right after being ordained. For these reasons, it was essential for me to find a monastery that solely emphasized meditation practice.

I studied the types of temples available in Thailand before my ordination. It was coincidental that I got a book written by an American layman named Jack Kornfield, who had once become a monk. His book, "A Guide to Buddhist Monasteries and Meditation Centers in Thailand," covered the monasteries that concentrated on meditation practice in Thailand.

He made a visit to every single important monastery across the country. He was remarkably eager to learn

and acquire knowledge and obtained detailed information of each monastery in regard to the teaching styles of the senior monks, the food, and the total number of the novices and monks. His guidebook was similar to a travel guide listing the sightseeing highlights of each country, containing suggestions of monasteries, especially those of the Thai Forest Tradition and Dhamma practice-based ones. I was able to learn where many of the best monasteries for meditation were located, but I had to wait until I became a monk before I could go there.

After I decided to enter the monkhood, I went to ask for advice from a monk at Wat Chonglom, located in Naklua District, Chonburi province. It was a renowned temple of the Dhammayut order with strict discipline, earning much respect among the local residents. During that time, Phra Khru Viboonthammakit or Luangpor Buagate Pathumsiro served as the abbot and was in charge of being the preceptor of this temple. Whenever there was no ritual or ceremony at the temple, he usually went to study Kammaṭṭhāna, the way of meditation practice, from disciples of Venerable Ajahn Mun Bhūridatta Thera (Luangpu Mun) in the Northeastern part of Thailand. At that time Luangpor Buagate had just come back from visiting Luangpu Fan.

I went to inform him that I wanted to be ordained, but when I told him what kind of monastery I sought, Luangpor Buagate kindly told me that there was no Dhamma practice session provided at his temple since it was a Pariyatti temple, emphasizing the study of Scriptures. In addition, the monks there were obligated

to study the Buddha's teachings, chant verses, partake of a forenoon meal, participate in domestic rituals, and accept invitations from the laity. Also, there was a cremation site at the temple. If ordained there, it was required that I stay under his guidance for five years, according to the Buddhist disciplinary code.

Thus, Luangpor said that if I was willing to be a monk and practice meditation, he recommended that I study with one of the followers of Luangpu Mun in Northeastern Thailand: Luangpu Chob, Luangpu Fan, Luangpu Thate, Luangpu Khao, Luangta Mahā Boowa, or Luangpu Chah.

Luangpor Buagate suggested being ordained by Somdet Phra Yannasangvorn (Somdet) at Wat Bowonniwet Vihara (Wat Bowon). After the integration period, for any monks aiming for Dhamma practice, Somdet would give his permission for them to shift from this temple to study with another senior monk in the Thai Forest Tradition instead of staying with him for five years corresponding to the Buddhist disciplinary code.

That was the first time I ever heard the name of Luangpu Mun, because I only read the book from Sri Lanka throughout the time of self-meditation. The book contained the English version of discourses derived from the Sutta, so I had no knowledge about the monks in the Thai Forest Tradition at all.

I went straight to Wat Bowon though I didn't know Somdet. I knew there were foreign monks residing there, so I decided to go. Once I arrived at the temple, I ran into

one British monk who had been ordained for ten years (currently left the order). We had a Dhamma conversation in English and I informed him of my intention to be ordained at Wat Bowon. He volunteered to inform Somdet regarding my request.

After the monk informed Somdet, I was told to meet with him. He asked me whether I knew anyone at the monastery or not. I answered that I didn't know anybody because it was my first visit and that I just happened to encounter the Western monk who had informed him about me.

The next question was about my parents because he thought I was homeless. I told him that I still lived with my parents. Then Somdet told me to bring them to meet him, and an appointment was made. I then went back and told my parents about the appointment and took them to meet and pay respect to Somdet.

Requesting Permission for Ordination

Once I encountered Dhamma and experienced meditation, I became so fascinated with it that I just went with the flow. I had neither an issue to be concerned with nor a problem about leaving anyone behind. I was still single at that time and, therefore, didn't have to take responsibility for anybody. Also, my parents were not having problems that required my help. I made my

commitment to this journey without any involved planning. It was simply the way my life was supposed to play out. Besides, I didn't have any set idea of how long I would be ordained. I was not very attached to anything and didn't have precise expectations of specific outcomes. My approach was simply to carry out an action first before evaluating the result. Then I considered the result to see how to improve my performance. For example, if I acted in a certain way, I would see if there was any obstacle in the way. If so, I would try to sort it out, make improvements, and learn from it.

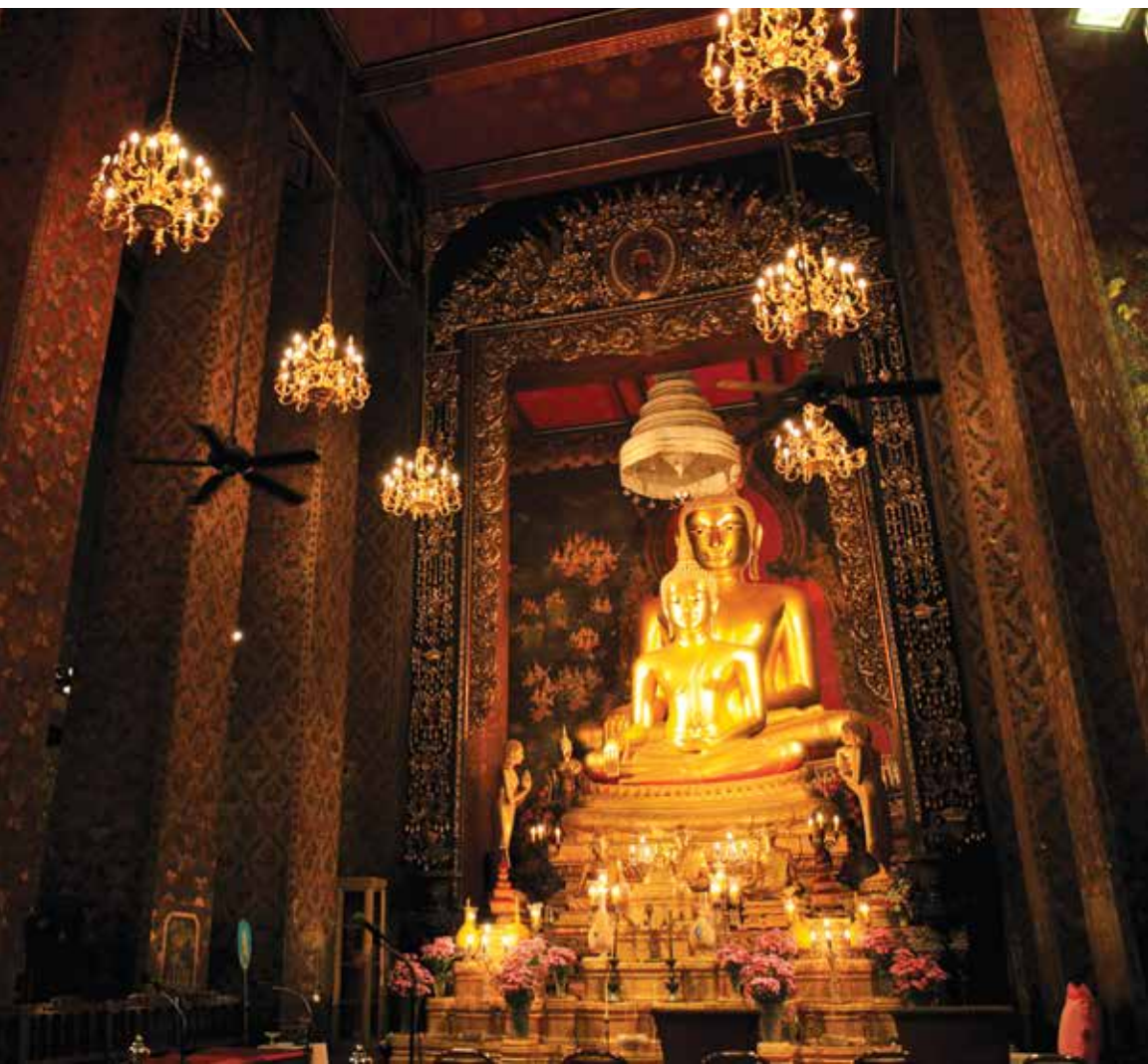
When I requested permission to be ordained, my mother congratulated me on this, but my father disagreed as we had different points of view. My father thought that I had come to a stage in life where I felt I had nowhere to go, so I had to be a monk to support myself. His perspectives were just like that. He thought that those who became ordained were hopeless people, but he was sure that I wasn't that type of person. In his opinion, I was well-educated and knowledgeable, so he wondered why I turned out to be so discouraged about life. He perceived ordained monks as being dispirited and dejected about life, failures in fighting for their lives, and he wanted me to stay and fight to overcome my problems without feeling discouraged.





Chapter Six

A Monk's Life



Starting My New Life as a Monk

ON THE DAY OF THE APPOINTMENT, I took my parents to meet Somdet Phra Yannasangvorn at Wat Bowonniwet Vihara (Wat Bowon). Somdet discussed my decision with my parents and scheduled the date for the ordination on February 19, 1975. Also, he would be my preceptor. In the ceremony, I would be ordained together with the son of a general who had recently finished his Master's degree from the U.S. His ordination was to be temporary: only for 15 days.

There was 3,000 baht left in my savings which was just exactly the right amount of money to buy the eight requisites for monks consisting of the upper robe, the lower robe, the outer robe, an alms bowl, a razor, a needle, thread, a belt, and a water strainer. Thus, I didn't need to ask my parents for the money.

On the ordination day, approximately 100 attendants of the other family went to the ceremony. In contrast, only four of my family members which included my parents, my sister, and my cousin attended because I didn't tell other people about this. I liked to keep things

low-keyed, with as little fanfare as possible. I didn't even let anybody know when I was resigning from my job. Moreover, during a year of meditating alone at home, I didn't tell anyone about it either. I didn't see any reason to tell other people about my private life and this also helped me avoid being bothered by others. Literally, there was one other person who knew about my ordination—a fellow who sent me a telegram asking me to come to work for him. I declined, explaining that I was about to take my vows as a monk.

During my stay at Wat Bowon, there were some Western monks heading to Wat Pa Baan Taad who told me about the existence of some well-known Thai Forest Tradition monasteries in the Northeast of Thailand, which included the monasteries of Luangta Mahā Boowa, Luangpu Thate, and Luangpu Fan. They reinforced what I had read in Kornfield's book of these respected Forest Monasteries, and I planned to make a trip to those places starting with Wat Pa Baan Taad of Luangta Mahā Boowa.

As I didn't know anyone there, a Western monk told me that it was required to write a letter to Ajahn Paññā for permission in advance before going there. Ajahn Paññā was a British monk, so foreign monks would approach him when contacting the monastery. He then would inform Luangta of the request for permission to stay in the monastery. If Luangta gave his consent, they were eligible to go.

I, therefore, wrote a letter to Ajahn Paññā. He took my request to Luangta, and Luangta then gave me the permission to stay.

But first there was my training. Throughout the six weeks of my monastic life at Wat Bowon, I was instructed on the correct way to wear the main robe, walk alms round, handle my requisites, and travel without being uncomfortable or concerned about wearing the robe. When I talked to Somdet regarding my departure and asked for his approval to stay with Luangta Mahā Boowa at Wat Pa Baan Taad, he approved my request, but said it really depended on Luangta whether or not he would be allowing me to stay there. And, since I had already gotten approval, I prepared to leave.

My departure from Bangkok was in early April, a couple of days before the Chakri Memorial Day. Traveling by train in the evening, I arrived at the destination in Udon Thani very early in the morning. Luckily, with the help of the monastery, a Buddhist devotee picked me up at the railway station and drove me to the monastery.

The First Test as a Newly Ordained Monk

I had chosen to go to Wat Pa Baan Taad upon the recommendation of a foreign monk. I had no intention to stay there for long, but I just wanted to see what Wat Pa Baan Taad was like and whether I would like the place. At the same time, I also understood that even if I liked it there, I could not be able to stay if I was not granted permission. I did not have much expectation. I was

simply seeking a quiet place that allowed me to have time to practice to the fullest—my only goal. Furthermore, at first, I did not think that having a teacher was essential and assumed that Dhamma books would be sufficient to guide me in this path.

All I knew was that I had to go there. I did not know any highly respected teachers in Thailand or how to find them because I had never read books about the practice of Dhammayuttika-nikāya monks. Most of the books I read were about Bhikkhus (Buddhist monks) mentioned in the Tipiṭaka (Buddhist Pāli Canon).

When I arrived, I went directly to the meeting hall, and it was time to go for alms round. Luangta had just come down and I went to pay respect to him. Luangta then said that I could not stay there for long. I could only stay temporarily because the Kuṭīs (monks' dwellings) were all occupied. Luangta did not say anything else. I quickly prepared my requisites and left for morning alms round.

I felt like a newborn baby who had just been introduced into the new world of monkhood. On the first day of my arrival at the monastery, I realized how incapable I was.

At Wat Pa Baan Taad, the walking pace on the way to the village was relaxed, but after alms round it was very fast. I had never walked that fast before. On the way back, as soon as we went past the last devotee's home, a monk would immediately help carry Luangta's alms bowl, and everyone else would then speed walk back to

the monastery. It was like a speed-walking competition in the Olympics. I walked with alms bowl full of sticky rice and it was very heavy. Furthermore, the bag sling for my alms bowl was not tightly secured, and it fell off halfway along my way back to the monastery. I also had to secure my main robe as it had also slipped off my shoulder. I was so disordered that by the time I reached Sālā (meeting hall), everyone else had already started arranging the food collected from the alms round.

Luangta must have noticed my disorderliness, yet he showed Mettā (loving-kindness) and did not make any comments. For those who were new in the monastery, Luangta appeared to be lenient, even pretending to be indifferent. Only when a new monk seriously misbehaved would he reprimand directly. Luangta's attention was on the monk's determination to practice. For other matters such as being slow but still being able to perform one's duties correctly, Luangta would not say anything.

Typically about one month before the beginning of Vassa, or the rains retreat, Luangta would decide which monks would be the Vassa residents, that is, who would dwell permanently throughout the three months of the rainy season. He would usually accept about fifteen to sixteen monks. When it came to my turn, Luangta asked me, "You remember, on your first day here, you agreed that you could not stay here for long, that your stay was only temporary, therefore, you would not be allowed to spend the Vassa here?" After hearing Luangta's words, I did not know what to do. I did not say anything and was undecided about what to do next.

After that Luangta gave a Dhamma talk for almost two hours. When it ended, all monks paid respect to the Lord Buddha all together.

Then, Luangta surprised me by turning to me and giving me his permission to stay. He announced, “For the monk who came from Wat Bowon, if you would like to stay here, you are allowed to do so.” All other monks who had been staying there started to congratulate me because Luangta did not accept monks to stay with him easily. There were many monks whom Luangta did not permit to stay at the monastery. Luangta wanted us to see the value of being allowed to stay with him. He wanted us to have the determination to practice meditation. For anything that is easily obtained, we have the tendency to take it for granted, and for anything that is obtained with difficulties, we would have a greater appreciation. For this reason, I was allowed to continue to stay.

A rule practiced at the monastery was that monks who had less than five rains retreats were not allowed to go anywhere, except for emergency reasons. According to the Vinaya (Monastic Code of Discipline), new monks are not allowed to be without a teacher’s guidance. Luangta would not allow monks to travel here and there, unless the five-year rule was completed. For example, a monk with a two-year rains retreat wanted to go for Dhutaṅga wanderings. In addition to evaluating the suitability of the proposed wanderings, Luangta would consider whether it was beneficial to do so. If he felt that it was not beneficial, Luangta would not give permission to go. There was a monk with two to three rains retreats who wanted to go for Dhutaṅga wanderings, and had

asked for permission several times, but Luangta did not allow him to go. When he asked again for the last time, Luangta told him that if he went, he would not be allowed to come back.

Luangta considered the mind of each monk to be more important than the number of Vassas he spent. Sometimes, a monk, after spending five years of rains retreat, wanted to leave the monastery, but Luangta thought that it was inappropriate for him to go. His practice might deteriorate, or he might even leave the monkhood. If this was the case, Luangta would try to hold him back. At least, if he stayed in the monastery, he could continue to learn from the Teacher.

I stayed there for five years before leaving on even a short trip.

Changing My Perspective

My experience at Wat Pa Baan Taad as a monk very gradually caused a shift in my perspective about monkhood and meditation practice. Before, I had never thought of seeking teachers to lead me on the path to enlightenment. Besides, I had studied another religion during my school years and continued my studies in other parts of the world. Why could I still come along the path to inner peace in spite of these circumstances? It was because I did not feel I belonged to any of the places where I lived and worked. Moreover, I went to the U.S. as part of my responsibility for studying. After

fulfilling my student role, then I thought I had the right to choose my way of life.

For successful practice, it requires the combination of a supportive environment, knowledgeable and experienced teachers, and strenuous exertion. This is a cause-and-effect relationship. One of the causes is having a right perspective. Skilled and experienced senior monks play an integral role in establishing and guiding practitioners to the right understanding. Practitioners need to be diligent, strong-willed, forbearing, and courageous. A suitable place for practice with the absence of extraneous disturbances to distract them from meditation, such as construction work and merit-making events, is also essential. The absence of distractions would encourage practitioners to develop walking and sitting meditations and undergo practice in seclusion. Also, they could obtain the techniques from those teachers whose practice has successfully come to fruition. Such teachers are able to help inexperienced monks develop a more mature practice more rapidly than if they practiced alone.

As an ordained monk staying at Wat Pa Baan Taad, I realized that being ordained wasn't analogous to imprisonment at all—as I had always seemed to view it. Becoming a monk never crossed my mind when I initially started to practice meditation. I thought that Dhamma practice would make me happy as a lay person. However, after practicing for some time, I found that staying in the lay life was in complete opposition to living the Dhamma life.

The lay life couldn't go hand in hand with inner peace. Learning the truth, I no longer thought that becoming a monk was synonymous with being captive. Before I had ordained, there were some defilements remaining somewhere deep down in my mind that defeated my determination to be ordained. I had thought that if I had enough money to sustain my life without working, I would probably not become a monk but continue living my lay life and keep on practicing meditation. But now I realized that there would have been many disadvantages due to the lack of supportive factors such as having senior monks as my teachers and living the monastic life with my peers. Moreover, as a monk, I came to realize that I wouldn't have been capable enough to achieve the ultimate goal independently. The delusion of attaching to a lay life would have always been lurking.

There are some lay people who think that they are competent, which implies that they are tremendously deluded. I used to think that way too before entering monkhood. However, I eventually came to value the precious opportunity to be with the excellent senior monks and among other monks in the great monastic order. Also, having a chance to stay in a wholesome place was extremely helpful to my practice.

Living in Central Thailand before I had gone to stay with Luangta Mahā Boowa, I never had the opportunity to encounter those highly revered monks, but I only saw the monks in the city who appeared to be undistinguished. At that time, I was dependent on

reading Dhamma books as I felt that reading could be a guide to self-discovery.

However, when I got a chance to stay with a highly revered monk, I came to realize the difference. Reading is like having a map taking one out of the forest, and staying with a highly experienced monk is like having a qualified hunter providing the same guidance. The two approaches are really different from each other and lead to very different results.

The attempt to follow the map is sometimes likely to yield mistakes. On the other hand, if there is an experienced person taking a practitioner to the destination, he will only have to follow that person and do whatever he is told to do. In that way, the practitioner will not waste his time with possible faults or misunderstandings in every single step throughout the meditation practice.

Practitioners who do not get to stay and study Dhamma with highly experienced monks will not realize the value of following the strict monastic observances. Their practice would simply follow their feelings and thoughts which are literally based on defilements. In the case of people who have not yet attained Nibbāna, or enlightenment, and persist in self-meditation, they are most likely to be trapped by their delusion or waste a lot of time.

Monastic Life at Wat Pa Baan Taad

The novices and monks staying with Luangta Mahā Boowa were treated as if they were his sons while Luangta himself was regarded as both father and mother to them. Therefore, these novices and monks called him “Por Mae Kru Jarn,” which means “Father, Mother, and Teacher”.

During my early monastic life at Wat Pa Baan Taad, Luangta accepted only about seventeen residents. Whoever was the eighteenth person was ineligible to stay and was required to leave. Luangta gradually increased the number of the residents later on due to the rising number of people wishing to study with him. However, the senior monks who could help him teach and train younger monks had grown much older and declined in number. Therefore, Luangta needed to bear an excessive burden, which subsequently affected the quality of the monks.

The increasing number of the resident monks also disturbed the peace of the monastery. When there were several monks who did not follow Dhamma in the monastery, this could probably lead to disengagement among the rest of the monks. And as might be expected, having a small number of qualified monks at the monastery could potentially enhance the environment of Dhamma.

That was the reason why Luangta would consider Dhamma engagement of each monk when accepting the new residents. He would make sure that those accepted were really interested in Dhamma practice. He would also see whether they were mindful or not. The presence of mindfulness implied the alignment with Dhamma of the monks. On the other hand, the absence of mindfulness manifested that the monks didn't embody the Dhamma. Without mindfulness, they wouldn't be able to achieve anything from their Dhamma practice. If careless mistakes still occurred, it showed that they were not consciously aware of themselves and their actions, and this was easily observed and noticed by Luangta. Hence, he became selective when it came to choosing the incoming monks to stay with him.

There were times when those accepted to study Dhamma with him would be dismissed after their short stay at the monastery. Luangta said that he wanted to give some other monks, who were also dedicated to the Dhamma, an opportunity to come study with him.

Rules and regulations of Wat Pa Baan Taad during my stay were as follows. After waking up, each person would complete his daily morning washing-up and then join the group at the meeting hall where monks would need to rush to be on time. Any monks getting there late would be considered selfishly taking advantage of others. When arriving, they would be arranging seats, food containers, or any other items. Before leaving for alms round, they would clean the floor. Luangta would come down to the meeting hall to watch over the monks while they were working. Meanwhile, Luangta would also be

stretching so as to make the most out of his time by doing his routine physical activity along with keeping an eye on the monks. He preferred doing so instead of working out at his dwelling and letting the monks complete the cleaning tasks on their own at the meeting hall because those hard-working and diligent monks would be cleaning extensively, whereas those who slacked off wouldn't be doing anything. However, when Luangta showed up, everybody would cooperate and help each other.

Sometimes Luangta also had to clean up since there were some clueless monks from other places who were unaware of their duties and responsibilities. For example, in the morning session when the monks were to clean the meeting hall, once in a while, there were some monks from Bangkok standing around and doing nothing because they had never experienced cleaning the meeting hall before. Thus, Luangta needed to do those tasks by himself so as to make them realize what they should do.

The floor of the meeting hall was coated with tallow candles, boiled with kerosene and applied to the wooden floor of the meeting hall. As a result, each footprint would be left when stepping on the floor, so it was necessary to clean the floor using coconut shells every morning and evening, and every monk had to cooperate to help clean it. After cleaning, all of them would then sweep the floor together. Finally, when all the cleaning tasks were finished, the monks would prepare for alms round.

One year, the weather was very cold as the temperature hit six degrees Celsius. Although it was extremely cold, the monks still had to go on alms round as usual. The road in those days was paved with lateritic gravel instead of asphalt. When walking on the gravel road, it felt like stepping on ice cubes. It was extremely torturing because we needed to walk barefoot, but it was great practice and I never felt discouraged at all.

There were a couple of lay people from Udon Thani province partaking in almsgiving to monks on Saturdays and Sundays. The major portion of the food was collected from alms round, and more was gathered from the kitchen hall and the fruit grown in the monastery, such as bananas, pineapples, and mangoes which were available in a particular season.

After finishing the meal, each monk would wash his own food bowl before gathering for the cleaning session at the meeting hall. After that, they would go back to their dwellings to practice meditation. At 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon, there were tea, coffee, and other Pana drinks prepared to offer the monks. Afterwards, we would sweep the floor and clean up the meeting hall together. Then we would take water from the well and push a water cart in order to pour the water into earthen jars arranged in the restrooms, at monks' dwellings, and other spots before going back to our dwellings for a shower and meditation.

During my stay with Luangta, he would normally give a Dhamma talk to the monks every four or five days, which lasted at least two hours. During the rains retreat, he would do it more frequently. His Dhamma teaching

was remarkably intense because at that time he still had a lot of energy. His Dhamma flowed out rapidly like a flash flood. Sometimes the Dhamma flowed faster than he could put into words. He would talk faster and faster. Every time I listened to his talk, I was highly motivated and energized. I felt like a caged fish released into the river.

Luangta regarded the training assembly as very important and beneficial for the monks. Regarding the training, when I did not listen to his Dhamma talks for a certain period of time, my mind seemed to gravitate towards worldly thoughts or matters. In contrast, after being exposed to his teaching, my heart would turn to the spiritual way of Dhamma. Listening to his Dhamma made me feel inspired just like a tree absorbing water. Subsequently, I grew so enthusiastic that right after the meeting, I could continue practicing the walking and sitting meditation throughout the night. Instead of feeling drowsy, I felt warm. I was convinced that my revered master and Nibbāna, or enlightenment, were very near me.

When there was no gathering of monks for 4-5 days, the enthusiasm in my mind declined over time. Concurrently, the defilements kept on gaining more power which caused me to be lazy when meditating. After only a few steps of walking, I became bored because my mind failed to follow the Dhamma path, unlike the mind of Luangta. His mind was consistent and full of Dhamma all the time, whereas my mind was more likely to go the other way round. I was still thinking about this and that. Also, by thinking about secular matters,

my energy and power to practice meditation declined. Listening to Dhamma talks gave me great encouragement and energy to practice.

For these reasons, studying Dhamma by oneself couldn't be compared to staying and studying with a great master. Luangta was like a doctor while Dhamma books were comparable to medical textbooks, so they were not the same in terms of effectiveness. Given that we, as patients, informed the doctor of our symptoms, the doctor would be able to reach a diagnosis of a disease so that he or she could explain to us the treatment, inform us how to track the signs and symptoms, and then prescribe the right medicines for treatment. Were we only to have medical textbooks to rely on, with many diseases and conditions, we would need to search for a specific of treatment suitable for our diseases and conditions. Such a process would take a long time, and we might be prescribing wrong treatments or medicines. It is much easier to have a doctor giving us a hand. Similarly, highly experienced monks were regarded as doctors, and those Dhamma books were like medical books written by the doctors.

Actually, my original and primary purpose of going to Wat Pa Baan Taad was not to approach any spiritual teacher. I only meant to find a proper place for my meditation development. I was not disrespectful, though. But, of course, this naive idea was seen for what it was after I was fortunate to stay in a wholesome place and study with one of the greatest meditation masters. These two crucial factors substantially accelerated my meditation practice and made it progress more

smoothly because I encountered an appropriate path. All I needed to do was just follow the provided path, where I could unexpectedly attain the fruitful outcome in the end. It was the result of religious virtue and past good deeds of each individual. A lot of meritorious deeds in the past and spiritual development would ultimately promote and push a person towards the Dhamma path that would lead to the desired destination.

Enhancing My Dhamma Practice by Reading Luangta's Books

When I was very new to the monastery, there were still no audio cassettes of Dhamma teachings available back then. I could only read from the books written by Luangta one hour each day, which was like listening to his Dhamma Desanā because they flowed from his mind as he expounded his pure Dhamma. Reading his books allowed me to achieve inner peace. Whenever there was no gathering session, I resorted to his books instead. The Dhamma derived from the books kept reminding me to exert myself to the utmost in my Dhamma practice. That was why listening to Dhamma talks was very crucial for those who did not know much about Dhamma and meditation, the tricks and techniques in practicing, and the problems that might arise at every single step of practicing. After reading, practitioners would gain additional knowledge which would be beneficial for their practice.

I didn't study Dhamma directly from the Tipiṭaka, or Buddhist Scriptures. Rather, I was exposed to them by listening to Dhamma talks of meditation masters. Also, I learned it by reading books containing certain selections from the Buddhist Scriptures. Actually, I didn't really read directly from the Buddhist Scriptures because they comprise an enormous and complicated variety of texts, which were too much to read. Also, some topics covered in the texts were not what I wanted to know. However, when reading the books containing Dhamma talks by highly respected meditation masters, their words were straight to the point of practice where I had a problem or wanted to learn more. Finding a decent book like those of the highly revered meditation masters provides important insights into Dhamma practice and is effective for practitioners.

During my early stay with Luangta, whenever I didn't practice meditation, I would read his books for an hour every day as part of my daily routine. Eventually, I ended up reading almost all of his books. I usually read in cross legged sitting posture just like when listening to his Dhamma talks, which made my mind attain calm as I read. Plus, it generated wisdom and understandings as well.

There weren't many books available in those days. The ones available during that time included *Paṭipada - Venerable Ācariya Mun's Path of Practice*, *Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhūridatta Thera- a Spiritual Biography*, *the Dhamma Teachings of Ācariya Mahā Boowa in London*, and *Wan Duang Jai*, which was the thickest one. *A Set of Dhamma Books for Self-preparation* hadn't been printed at that time yet.

This *Set of Dhamma Books for Self-preparation* was great because Luangta taught mainly about Dhamma practice method for the ultimate aim of attaining Nibbāna, or enlightenment. Luangta didn't discuss Dāna (contribution) and Sīla (precept rules) in the books, but he taught mainly about meditation. Additionally, this set covered abandonment of Taṇhā (cravings, delusion) and detachment from the body.

The book is a collection of talks given to Mrs. Paow-panga Vattanakul, a lay disciple who suffered from terminal cancer. The doctor told her that there was no treatment or therapy available to cure her and that she had only six months left at most. Therefore, she approached Luangta to receive spiritual guidance. She asked Luangta for permission to stay at Wat Pa Baan Taad so that Luangta could teach her to cultivate her mind. She hoped Dhamma practice would help eliminate the pain and suffering of death. Luangta told her that if she would like to come for meditation, she was allowed to do so. However, if she had to bring along a doctor or medicine with her, then she'd better not come. She was fearless and went there without taking anything with her as she truly and sincerely wanted to learn meditation practice. Luangta noticed her mental toughness and saw that she was seriously determined to rely on him, so he finally agreed to teach her so as to provide her the mental shelter.

Luangta delivered these Dhamma talks in 1975. I went to stay at the monastery in April while Khun Paow-panga went there after the rains retreat at the end of October or early November. With his great mercy,

Luangta literally taught her every night. Ever since the establishment of Wat Pa Baan Taad, he had never taught anyone every night in the kitchen and dining hall. That was the first and the only time he actually gave his talk every night. Unless he had something else to do, say, to teach monks or go out for his personal business, he would go there to teach her. He gave the Dhamma talks well over 90 times within four months and commented later that he had never taught like this to anyone before. As far as I knew, she finally achieved the ultimate goal in her Dhamma study and practice there.

This account shows that Dhamma is what everyone is able to practice and accomplish no matter who you are, whether a monk or lay person, female or male. What is important is having an experienced teacher to guide you, and you, as a student, must be truly determined to study and be committed to practice. I can guarantee that the successful outcome will definitely emerge.

After Luangta had completed the series of Dhamma talks for Khun Paow-panga, M.R. Songsri and her sister made repeated requests to Luangta to publish the discourses he gave. Luangta finally allowed them to publish “*A Set of Dhamma Books for Self-preparation*” and “*Where Is the Religion?*” as requested. Luangta mentioned that this Dhamma set was a difficult read for some people, as it instructed how to get prepared to prevail over Vedanā, or suffering, when death approached. Thus, Luangta didn’t want to distribute them to those who didn’t practice because he was afraid that they wouldn’t benefit from them.

It was like letting children have spicy red curry, and they would be able to take just one bite before turning away. In contrast, for adults who loved hot and spicy food, they would become fascinated with the food after a bite. The books are very useful as Luangta did emphasize the body and how to defeat Dukkha-vedanā, or unpleasant feelings, using meditation techniques. Practitioners need to have their minds fixed on one Kammaṭṭhāna, or meditation object. It can be Buddhānussati, or recollection of the Buddha. In addition, the Paññā, or insight, can be applied in order to realize that feeling is just feeling, and that it is not that severe. It does not matter that there are pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, or neutral feelings within the heart, as all of these feelings are identified as feelings. This is just caused by Avijjā, or delusion, which categorizes that which is good or bad. Without being distinguished, everything is just all the same.

Sukha-vedanā, or pleasant feelings, refers to feelings. Unpleasant feelings, also refers to feelings. Lastly, Upekkhā-vedanā, or neither-pleasant-nor-painful feelings, is characterized as feelings as well. They appear in the mind and simply disappear from it in the cycle of ups and downs of the mind. If the mind is free from Avijjā, or ignorance and delusion creating good and bad types of feelings, there will be no problems at all. This is comparable to water that comes in the colors of green, white, and red offered by lay people. If monks specify what they like or dislike, then it would be an issue. Those who like white water would shake their heads when getting red water. Likewise, those who like red water would refuse to have a white drink. These people are not

different in terms of how their minds function. The difference is just that they have been deluded to like or dislike a certain thing.

The mind is influenced by Avijjā and delusion to resist painful or unpleasant feelings but to seek pleasant feelings. Encountering pleasant feelings would make people smile and desire possessions. As a result, they compete with each other, fight over property or commit adultery, because they crave for pleasant things. However, if they would have to work under difficulties, all of them would refuse to do it. Because people have been taught that way, they appear to have those kinds of responses. Nevertheless, none of us ever realize the fact that we are being misguided. People have been convinced that this is innate knowledge that does not need to be taught by parents. Regarding pleasant feelings and unpleasant feelings, parents do not need to waste their time teaching their children about them as the mind would be automatically aware of these feelings. If people face painful or unpleasant feelings, they would run away. On the contrary, when encountering pleasant feelings, they would go for it straight away.

Listening to Dhamma Talks

by Luangta

When listening to Dhamma talks, Chanda (desire to practice Dhamma) and Viriya (effort to practice meditation continuously and with perseverance) would arise. With proper Chanda and Viriya, practitioners would no longer need to stay close to Luangta throughout their Dhamma practice. Instead, they would find a solitary place for their meditation. However, when Dhamma seemed to fade away from the heart, then they would go to see Luangta again and listen to his Dhamma talk before getting back to continue their Dhamma practice in isolation. Therefore, it was crucial that meditation masters train the novices and monks who stayed with them on a regular basis.

During my early stay at Wat Pa Baan Taad, the training period for monks by Luangta really depended on his availability. The training session was normally arranged every 4-5 days at dusk. Luangta would tell a monk who served him to notify the rest of the monks to attend the Dhamma talk session without hitting the drum, the bell, or anything else.

Afterwards, the informed monks would then spread the word. Right after the notification, all the residents would rush immediately to the assembly no matter what they were doing at the moment. They would simply get a sitting cloth, a flashlight, and the upper robe, and

quickly head to the meeting to avoid being late because Luangta would already be sitting there waiting for them.

A microphone wasn't yet provided at that time, but since there were only about ten monks and a few novices sitting in front of him, Luangta spoke loudly enough for all of them to hear.

The Dhamma talk was divided into two parts and lasted approximately two hours. The first part of the Dhamma talk took about 45 minutes or one hour, and then he would take a short break to have some water or chew betel nut. After the break, he would tell the story about the time he stayed with Luangpu Mun and about his practicing experiences, for instance, about the time when he underwent sitting meditation all night.

I was highly motivated throughout the session. When I got back to my place, I would become so much more diligent as I was enthusiastic to practice the sitting and walking meditations for a long period of time. It was like a catalyst that kept stimulating me to practice endlessly without being negligent at any stage.

Listening to Dhamma talk is, therefore, essential for practitioners to do on a regular basis. **“Kalena Dhamma Sawanang”** –listening regularly to Dhamma teaching—would help to transform one's mind for the better. Once listening to Luangta's teaching, I was so heartened that sometimes I meditated all night till dawn. I felt like Luangta filled me with motivation.

When one had the opportunity to stay with a great meditation master like this, it was considered as being

blessed and extraordinarily meritorious, because practitioners were barely self-motivated in general. On top of that, they tended to lack Dhamma to motivate themselves to practice and had nothing to show for their practice. Great meditation masters were skillful in Dhamma practice. Having reached enlightenment resulting from their meditation, the masters would show the way to practitioners so as to inspire them. It was like they had glamorous diamond rings to show practitioners so as to send the message that they, practitioners, would be getting these kinds of rings if they gave their best effort in their Dhamma practice. Seeing magnificent rings would simply engender their desire for those rings, and they became encouraged to practice correspondingly. Besides, meditation masters would be giving hints about how to progress in their practice, how tolerant they were required to be, and how to dedicate themselves for effective practice. All of these clues potentially widened their knowledge of their Dhamma practice as a result.

Exposure to the Dhamma of Luangta on a regular basis helped to raise awareness and made practitioners realize which path to take to reach the destination. The mind of practitioners oftentimes fell into traps throughout the practice. Once being able to attain Samādhi, they tended to become addicted to peace and tranquility, and got stuck at this very state. When meditating, they would exclusively aim to enter the state of calm where they could enjoy the feelings of bliss. After withdrawal from Samādhi, they didn't carry on with their investigation and contemplation of Dhamma. Instead, they resumed their worldly activities and their

mind ended up becoming restless. When this scenario happened, they would re-enter Samādhi, yet they failed to develop their Paññā, or wisdom.

For this reason, Luangta needed to regularly warn his followers that it was necessary to investigate with Paññā right after withdrawing from Samādhi. He recommended that they were supposed to start off with contemplation of the body by investigating unattractiveness of the body, known as the Asubha practice, so as to eradicate sensual cravings. Apart from the five external parts of the body including head hair, bodily hair, nails, teeth, and the skin, there were also internal constituents hidden under the skin, such as muscles, tendons, ligaments, bones, and other organs. Therefore, practitioners should contemplate those body parts with Paññā, or wisdom, due to the fact that humans were unable to look through the skin. However, with Paññā the practitioners had ability to investigate those body parts since they could visualize the pictures of such organs in the body as part of the contemplation.

The meetings were held less often later on due to his increasing obligations and his health problems from time to time. Sometimes, there would be an interval of a month without any gathering sessions. One of the reasons was that at the time there were plenty of audio recordings of his Dhamma talks available. All the monks could listen to the talks by themselves, so Luangta wasn't worried as much about the training of the monks.

Modern technologies and equipment were useful for Dhamma teaching. For instance, like the monks,

his followers could just listen to his Dhamma talks whenever they wanted and didn't have to go see him in person. Most practitioners tended to absorb only a small amount of Dhamma contents. When Luangta said 100 words, they might be able to grasp or understand only 10 words. That was because their mind on that particular day was at a low level of perception. As their meditation practice progressed, their ability would be increased a bit more. Listening to the same talk again was like listening to a new one. They would feel as if they had never listened to that talk before and might even wonder if it was the same as the one they had previously listened to. They were often able to grasp something new in the second listening, which they hadn't caught the first time around.

Therefore, practitioners should not think that listening to the repetitive Dhamma talks is boring or that there is nothing new in them. Actually, there is something new, but they just do not realize it. It is recommended that they alternate between listening to Dhamma talks and practicing meditation. The point of approaching meditation masters is not getting to see them, but listening to their Dhamma discourses so that practitioners can practice further on their own after learning something new from the Dhamma talks. Anything mentioned in the talks by the masters that practitioners still fail to attain or comprehend are their assignments to analyze and investigate. When they are able to complete an assignment, the issue will be cleared up. This is an ideal way of approaching highly revered meditation masters.

For the laity, when you go to the temple or monastery and cannot get the front seat, you don't need to be fussy about it. If the quality of audio or sound equipment is good enough and can reach everyone, then that is fine because it is like you are sitting close to the meditation master already. The main purpose of going to the temple is to seek Dhamma as the masters' mind fully contains it, and you don't need anything else from them. You don't need their snack bars, their smiles, or their greeting. You'd better take those impressions as something extra. It is similar to going to a gas station where you receive any giveaway the station provides, such as a towel, a pen, a pencil, or a notebook. However, the point of going to the gas station isn't to get these free gifts but to refuel in order to reach the destination. Similarly, when you go to see a meditation master, it means you are seeking Dhamma, which is analogous to the fuel driving the mind to Nibbāna, or enlightenment.

The Western Monks Listening to Dhamma of Luangta

When I arrived at the monastery, there were three western monks including Tan Paññā, Tan Cherry, and Tan Ian (Tan Ian has since left the monkhood). In the following years, more western monks went there, so there were 4-5 of them in total. For those foreign monks staying with Luangta, if there were any profound contents of Dhamma, they would need help with translation.

Tan Paññā was responsible for translating the Dhamma to other Western monks. After Luangta gave his Dhamma talk, he would tell Tan Paññā, “*So, Tan Paññā, explain this to the rest of your friends!*” Then Tan Paññā would spend about 10 minutes summarizing the talk.

Meanwhile, Luangta would be drinking water and chewing betel nut, and other Thai monks would be practicing meditation while waiting for Tan Paññā to finish translating the Dhamma explanation. Later on, Luangta would continue the conversation sharing his Dhamma practice experiences, telling about his life while staying with Luangpu Mun and other stories for about 45 more minutes.

During my stay in the monastery, I also helped translate some Dhamma books for other foreign monks to read. Apart from the books, I also explained some of the Dhamma talks given by Luangta in a translated version.

Because Dhamma is subtle and abstract, using body language to explain Dhamma is inadequate for understanding. Dogs do not have an opportunity to grasp Dhamma because they lack merits. They need to be born human. The Lord Buddha was human. Being able to be born human, meet the Lord Buddha, and encounter Buddhism, is the most wonderful luck that one can ever ask for. This phenomenon does not easily happen at all. In the next life, being born as human, one may not find Buddhism.

A Good Meditation Teacher

Having an excellent meditation teacher was great, despite unfavorable food. The Western monks staying with Luangta had never eaten local food before, but they still could take it. Also, they had never stayed in such humble dwellings, but they were able to tolerate it. Western monks were born in a comfortable place and got everything that made life convenient, like heaters, air-conditioners, running water, and electricity. Still, they could leave those things to find something more valuable.

The person who can provide them with this precious thing is a meditation master. Therefore, it is crucial that a practitioner be with an agreeable person, such as a proficient and intelligent meditation teacher. If practitioners cannot find one, then they will need to associate with fellow monks, with whom they can practice Dhamma. If the fellow monks are smarter and cleverer than practitioners themselves, the monks and practitioners will all benefit. However, there may be a situation where the practitioners lack the knowledge and commitment to the Dhamma and their friends might initiate chitchatting or ask the monks to do irrelevant activities, which can waste their time.

Accordingly, it is essential to select the friends to be with due to the fact that it is impractical to stay alone all the time. In the monastery, there are many types of people staying together. When encountering people who are less likely to practice meditation, one should avoid them if possible. If it is not required to participate in the

monastic duties together with them, then it is better to find a secluded location for meditation.

At Wat Pa Baan Taad, Luangta normally had the monks live separately in order to prevent them from gathering as a group. After finishing the daily duties, they would disperse. In the afternoon, all came to have hot drinks before separating. Since talking while drinking was not allowed, Luangta would come and ensure that silence was maintained.

Eating to Live

On a regular basis meditation masters ate from the alms bowl containing the combination of food and dessert once a day as a certain portion of food was just enough to meet the body's needs. Having more than one meal indicates that one cannot withstand the strength of the defilements and is still attached to the flavor of the food. For picky eaters, mixing all the food in the bowl before eating is a way to suppress the defilements. They only need to employ this method until the bad eating habit disappears or until they can eat whatever is available. Eventually, they would not even have issues with rice mixed with only fish sauce.

The monks at Wat Pa Baan Taad were not allowed to choose the food they ate. Each monk would dish out the food into every monk's open bowl after receiving the plates passed on from Luangta.

When I was newly ordained, I dealt with my picky eating habit by putting the food, dessert, and fruits altogether into my bowl and mixing them well. That was because ultimately all the food would be combined in my stomach anyway, which did not cause me any problem. In fact, the body is the one who consumes, and it does not even have trouble with the food taken. The mind does not consume the food, yet it becomes fussy and demanding. The mind does not eat it, and the body is actually the eater. The mind is like the mother while the body is like the child. The mother might have trouble selecting the food for her child and ends up forcing him or her to eat the mother's favorite food. In this way, the child is trained to eat anything available, and for the monk, the body can consume whatever food is provided. This is how the training is supposed to be.

If you would like to make progress in your Dhamma practice, you will have to be frugal and contented. That is to say you should live with less and be content with what you have. Therefore, you have to eat whatever food available. On condition that you cannot force yourselves to eat such food, then it's your opportunity to fast so as to combat the defilements. If you skip a meal, you find when you eat the next meal that because you are hungry, you will be able to take the food that you have never had or that you dislike. Even the rice mixed with fish sauce can turn out to be delicious. If you do not implement this approach, you will not be able to reach higher levels of Dhamma. Given that you continue living the same old repetitive lifestyle, your practice will fail to move forward. It's a must to suppress your defilements by using a variety of techniques.

The Lord Buddha prescribed the 13 ascetic practices (Dhutaṅga) for monks so as to make the Kilesas, or defilements, suffer, such as the practice of eating alms food and doing alms round. Those were the means of oppressing the defilements. The defilements love eating but they do not like going alms round. The observance of eating once a day is designed to shake off the defilements, which are fond of eating all day. The ascetic practices are the tricks to inflict pain on the defilements, which will help make the mind progress and subsequently eliminate the defilements. It is parallel to draining pus from an abscess as it wouldn't be able to drain on its own if not treated. The pus is required to be drained so that the wound would heal fast and effectively. Practitioners who wish to be progressive in developing their mind are required to have the courage to use these strategies.

Fasting to Defeat the Defilements

After ordination, I didn't really experience much suffering because ever since I stayed with Luangta, I became steadily immersed in meditation all the time. At that time I attacked the defilements first, instead of letting them trample all over me. I fought them by fasting in order to make the defilements intimidated. In the evening, if I didn't fast, I would always think about food and wanted to have something to eat. However,

if I fasted, I wouldn't be obsessed with food at all. When fasting, I could not stay still but focused on meditation relentlessly. Whenever I stopped meditating, the mind would suddenly be careless and unguarded. It would think about food again and again, and I would eventually end up feeling hungry. When I kept practicing sitting and walking meditations, the mind would be calm and thoughts about food seemed to just disappear.

Having a chance to stay with my fellow practitioners at Wat Pa Baan Taad allowed me to observe diverse tips and tricks for Dhamma practice, one of which was fasting. Throughout my time of self-meditating, I had no idea about fasting at all. Even during my early stay at the monastery, I didn't realize that some monks were fasting. There were times when some of the monks were absent, and I thought they had gone off on some business. However, when I asked one of them, he replied that he was actually fasting.

Fasting was pretty new to me as I had never fasted before. At first I thought that eating once a day was already extreme enough. Apparently, after I saw other monks fast for many days straight, I became enthusiastic about trying it as well. Fortunately, fasting suited me well, and I found that it was a very good way of motivating me to do meditation. Because of the extreme hunger, as you would expect, I would end up thinking about food all the time, which made me suffer enormously. By resorting to meditation, I eradicated my suffering.

Meditating when hunger arose, I managed to stop the flow of thinking and successfully subdue the mind.

Subsequently, the hungry feeling resulting from such thoughts also disappeared. Thus, I learned that hunger mainly arose in the mind. The thoughts about food caused an intense suffering in the mind. Sometimes if I happened to think of my favorite food, I would immediately crave those dishes even after I had just finished the meal. My desire to eat was still strong although I was full.

During fasting, a monk wouldn't be required to join the group, participate in monastic activities at the meeting hall, attend morning alms round, or get together for cleaning. He would only be responsible for cleaning his own hut. Luangta strongly encouraged fasting monks to stay in a secluded place to avoid exposure to sensual pleasures. Practitioners who were fasting would be reminded to focus exclusively on meditation.

It is very common for practitioners to feel pressured when fasting because they suffer from hunger. In this case, the following two solutions can help fix the problem. They can either go find the food to eat or try to eliminate the feeling of hunger that is created by the wandering mind. During the fasting periods, they will not get the food to eat. Therefore, the only way to overcome hunger is meditation to calm down the mind because for the most part, hunger is generated by the mind, not the body. In other words, the body causes only 10% of hunger whereas the wandering mind contributes to 90% of the hunger. Thinking of food always makes people drool. Therefore, when a practitioner fasts, it is similar to fighting in the boxing ring in order to knock down the rival which is the defiled cravings, not just practicing with the sand

bag as usual. Therefore, practitioners can no longer simply relax, but must practice sitting and walking meditations intensively. If they happen to feel exhausted due to prolonged sitting meditation, they may probably want to switch to walking meditation. Similarly, once they get tired from walking, they can change back to do sitting meditation again. This is meant to force them to keep practicing. And just as the boxer in the ring is not supposed to just stand there clumsily, but must use all his skills to defeat the opponent, the one who fasts must always be using his or her skills to battle the cravings.

Thus, fasting and the accompanying gnawing hunger was seen as a kind of suffering, and all I could do to alleviate my suffering was develop meditation. I discovered that when the mind dropped into a state of calm, hunger was automatically extinguished, and I was able to do walking meditation very easily. After a while, inevitably, Samādhi began to weaken and the mind started to think about food once again, and I had to go back to do sitting meditation all over again. And gradually, upon attaining the inner peace, hunger would just disappear. As you might imagine, it was difficult and tiring to sit in meditation for long periods, and this is where I learned the technique of switching to walking meditation. It was great to alternate between sitting and walking meditation all day and night so that the mind would always be overseen by mindfulness and wisdom (Satipaṇṇā).

Sometimes, I would contemplate food as unpleasant and loathsome. When I thought of well-presented food on a serving plate, I tried to visualize it in the mouth,

in the stomach, or out of the body after digestion. In this way, I was able to relinquish attachment to food for a while. Therefore, when craving for any food, it is crucial that a practitioner picture it while in the mouth, in the stomach, and out of the body after digestion. As a result, the desire for such food will disappear.

To contain the defilements, it is imperative that practitioners put pressure on the mind in order to spur Paññā (wisdom) and Samādhi (meditative calm and concentration) into action. If practitioners take it easy, the defilements will run amok.

After the meal, I usually felt sleepy once I reached my Kutī. I would be drawn to my pillow first of all since I didn't feel like doing walking or sitting meditation. If I persisted in sitting meditation, only after a short period of time, I would end up falling asleep. That was another reason why I found fasting to be so helpful: it intensified my effort in meditation. It's important to point out that this material body needs to take in food to be healthy, so I would alternate between fasting and eating: sometimes fasting for three days or five days and eating for another two days.

Luangta actually warned the monks to know their own body limit regarding their health condition or sickness during fasting. Over-fasting might cause diarrhea so they needed to be careful. I never had blackout during my fasting period as I began with little steps and gradually intensified my fasting over time. In other words, I gradually cut my food intake to let my stomach adjust itself. For those who had health problems during fasting,

they found that this approach did not suit them well, so they had to choose other ways. In my case, I could fast for nine days at maximum. If the fasting period was extended, it wouldn't be effective anymore, because I wouldn't be practicing meditation but more likely falling asleep instead.

Five days of fasting is just the right period of time for me. The first three days suffering could be quite intense due to excruciating hunger. After that, you might as well not think about it because you know you are not going to eat it anyway, so you just continued fasting. Fasting period could be three days, five days, or every other day. Sometimes, if I had a meal one day, I would not eat anything on the following day. I used this approach for 2 to 3 years because it helped my meditation practice progress rapidly and kept me from being lazy and sleepy.

During fasting, Luangta allowed monks to have some milk. In those days, there were no milk boxes available but sweetened condensed milk blended with Ovaltine. I had a glass of milk every day when fasting so that I wouldn't get too weary. The afternoon was the time to have Pana, which are permissible drinks. Now and then Luangta would give dark chocolate bars to monks. He would particularly give them to those who fasted—rarely for non-fasting monks. Another advantage of fasting was that I wouldn't have to meet the “Tiger” (as we referred to Luangta) at the dining hall. Going to eat each day wasn't easy at all. Monks had to go to the dining hall and meet the “Tiger.” If they were too afraid of and didn't wish to be challenged by the “Tiger,” they had a choice of fasting. Consequently, there were

a number of novices and monks undertaking fasting, and they actually fasted frequently. Especially during the rains retreat, half of the residents didn't show up at the dining hall. Those who did not fast and came out to eat would potentially be **roared at**, or reproved, by the "Tiger." This confrontational tactic was not to intimidate the monks; rather, Luangta just wanted the monks to exert themselves in practicing meditation.

At Wat Pa Baan Taad, if the monks did not fast, they had to go alms round. When joining the group for activities, they had a chance of chatting that could cause the mind to be agitated and slow down, or even derail progress. They would easily forget about their walking path or meditation because there was nothing to force them to practice. Hunger is like the medicine that people never think of when they have good health. When they feel ill, they will always think about it because they want to recover from their sickness. Similarly, fasting makes practitioners only want to do sitting and walking meditations. If not, they will greatly suffer because their strayed mind keeps thinking about food.

After perceiving the value of fasting, I persisted in this commitment until the mind was on the right track, so I no longer needed to rely on the fasting method.

Luangta Giving Advice without Me Asking

Whenever I encountered problems, I never once asked Luangta for help the whole time I stayed with him. His talks already covered everything I needed to know, so I did not have to ask him anything regarding my practice.

The one exception occurred one time I went to serve him. Usually selected monks pulled out his eyelashes. Eyelashes normally grow outward, but his grew inward, requiring regular plucking. One person held a flashlight while the other one pulled them out using a small pincer. In fact, I wasn't responsible for this initially, but there was no one available, so a monk asked me to help.

Before going there, I had a talk with the monk who held the flashlight. I cannot recall what I asked him about. In the process of plucking Luangta's eyelashes, he suddenly told us how to handle such problems. Luangta addressed my question without my even asking. While this was an unusual, even surprising event, for the most part when it came to the field of Dhamma practice, there was almost no need to ask him any questions because Luangta already taught thoroughly. Luangta actually shared every story with the monks. As I had an opportunity to listen to hundreds of his Dhamma talks, this allowed me to understand different aspects of Dhamma he expounded without the need to make any queries.

Beating the Fear

In the old days, to see if their mind could stand the test, meditation masters often sought to live in dense, overgrown jungle areas or mountain ranges abounding in tigers and fierce animals. They wandered in their ascetic practices, or Dhutaṅga, to practice insight meditation (Vipassanā) because they wanted to know the deepest truths of the real Dhamma.

When we develop wisdom (Paññā) in secure environments, we might think that we have already overcome fear. But when we encounter a real fearful or scary situation, we might not know how to deal with it.

I tried to counteract my fear when I was staying at Wat Pa Baan Taad. I was terrified of snakes when walking in the monastery at night, and it became so intense that I knew that this was a challenge I had to confront.

When I saw this truth, I decided not to use a flashlight when walking in the dark. If I stepped on a snake, and if it bit me, I would let it do so. When I thought I was going to be bitten by a snake, I was extremely scared. I knew I had to accept death. When I did, my mind became calm and peaceful. I thought that I was really going to be bitten by a snake and that I was going to die when in fact I was just imagining. I was deceiving myself. But I needed this deception to force me to let go of my life, to obtain peace of mind and to get rid of my fear.

This is the way to test if I can handle fear and the way of getting rid of fear from my heart.

Physical Work vs. Spiritual Work

Luangta used to tell us that His Majesty the King wanted to construct an Ubosot, which is an ordination hall, for him. Even though it was the King offering it, Luangta still refused the offer. Luangta said that his main focus was not on constructing buildings, but on cultivating monks. It was not necessary to have an Ubosot in order to transform men into monks, but secluded places in the forests or on the mountains.

When I had stayed with Luangta, he emphasized that spiritual duty was top priority. He mainly encouraged mental development, or Bhāvanā, among the monks. At the same time, other routine duties in the monastery were to be performed as necessary. Luangta was very careful in assigning routine duties to novices and monks at the monastery. He never emphasized constructing permanent structures. They were only built to serve functional purposes, without dazzling or elegant decorations. In addition, the Sālā, or open pavilion, which had been built since the establishment of the monastery, was still in use to accommodate a large number of people coming to the monastery. As the space of the upper floor wasn't large enough, the floor was raised in order that the ground floor which had more space could be used in daily activities instead.

Before deciding to build a Kuṭī for a monk, Luangta would consider very carefully if it was really necessary. He wanted his monks to focus solely on meditation. At that time, Luangta didn't accept too many monks

for two reasons. With a large number of residents, it would be essential to construct more buildings to accommodate them. Also, too many residents might lead to ineffective teaching and care. Because of Luangta's thoughtful considerations, there was just the right number of Kuṭīs at the monastery. If Luangta had accepted more residents, the buildings would have had to be constructed too close to each other. Subsequently, the existing seclusion in the monastery would be replaced by a congested and noisier environment. If it was absolutely necessary to construct a building, all would gather and rush to finish it as fast as possible. However, the construction work was required to be stopped in the evening so that monks could continue their mental cultivation at night.

Regarding regular routines, all residents of the monastery would complete them together, such as making brooms which was carried out once a year. Monks cut and collected bamboo twigs to make brooms. They also had to plane the heartwoods of jack-fruit trees for dyeing monk robes every 15 days.

As the monastery got more financial support from the laity, monks were no longer obligated to do construction work. The construction of the walls around the monastery was financed by lay devotees. Novices and monks didn't have to be responsible for building them because funding provided for hiring local residents to do this work instead. Luangta inspected the construction work by himself in the morning after finishing the meal, in the afternoon and in the evening. He did not allow the workers to work overtime at night as the noise could disturb the monks' meditation.

Although there were laypeople offering money for building Kuṭṭīs, Luangta never accepted it if he found there was no need to build a new one. He would return the money to them and tell them that it was unnecessary because nothing could be as valuable as spiritual work. Luangta was so protective of his monks that he never let them do extra work, accept invitations, or be involved in construction work in the monastery. The focus was always on meditation.

If there were any quiet and secluded pieces of land suitable for cultivating meditation offered for sale, Luangta would buy them. He tried to support this as they were wholesome places for meditation which would gradually become unavailable over time. Due to increasing population, there would be an increase in deforestation. The reason why he fought for this matter was to sustain forests and mountainous areas for the benefits of meditation.

If the monks do not spend their monkhood in the forest, then it will be hopeless for them to attain Nibbāna. If they dwell in temples with a magnificent Ubosot or splendid air-conditioned Kuṭṭīs, it will surely be impossible for them to reach enlightenment because the way they live is like that of laypeople. The only difference is that they shave their heads and wear monk robes. Perhaps they have a better and more comfortable life style than that of laypeople. Besides, in some temples the monks' dwellings are air-conditioned, carpeted, and full of material items. If so, how could these monks get themselves to practice meditation? They are unable to endure even a little pain or discomfort when doing sitting meditation.

Regarding worldly duties, if practitioners follow their own desires, they would end up constructing extraordinary buildings. You can see that some magnificent and stupendous structures in some temples are nonsense indeed. Constructing physical structures is totally different from creating Dhamma within the human mind. Therefore, practitioners should not be misled or deluded in creating physical structures or accumulating unnecessary worldly material items so that they would have time to cultivate their mind.

To sum up, when making merit, one needs to have wisdom in order to get beneficial results. For those who want to support Buddhism, they should do it in the right way. Instead of building structures they can help to provide suitable places for meditation. Most importantly, they can also support the monks who propagate Dhamma so that it will enable other people to perceive the genuine Buddha's teachings and put them into practice.

Putting the Right Person on the Job

As menial external work was coarse, meditation masters were more likely to support spiritual work.

Those still having coarse minds appeared to be unable to effectively handle delicate tasks. Accordingly, Luangta would assign them to do menial work first. As they could not engage in practicing meditation

just yet, Luangta let them take care of the kitchen and do sweeping and cleaning tasks. Those whom he felt were able to perform delicate tasks would not be given menial jobs. Whenever he saw them work at menial jobs, he would tell them to stop.

It also happened to me during my stay at the monastery when there was a construction of a Kuṭī. Monks gathered to help in construction activity, and I felt like I should also lend a hand. As soon as Luangta saw me there, he told me to go away. However, the way he spoke with me didn't discourage the other monks. He said, "You are no good at this! Don't mess around here!" It was like he signaled me to go meditate instead of doing this work. I was so relieved that I didn't feel bad about not showing up at the construction work the next day.

It was common to take responsibility or contribute when living with others. Luckily, Luangta was merciful. He put the right persons on the job, which resulted in more benefits.

Menial labor jobs are useful but spiritual work is better. After one finishes his or her spiritual work, one can help others to get benefits from his or her accomplishment.

Practitioners should go to a monastery or temple where there are wise teachers, who can differentiate between coarse work and delicate work. These teachers should also be able to distinguish between different types of practitioners. They know some are suitable for a particular type of work while others are not. On the other hand, in a monastery where teachers are not good

at distinguishing between various types of practitioners, if there is coarse work for monks to do, everyone will be obligated to contribute. No matter how far some monks have progressed in their spiritual work, they will have to stop and participate in the menial work instead. Therefore, their inner spiritual work will be abandoned or stagnate, and it will also be a waste of their time.

Appropriate Time for Meditation

There was one time while practicing walking meditation that I was very sleepy, but I tried to keep myself from falling asleep. I forced myself to continue walking and concentrate on the words “Buddho, Buddho” and “Left-Right” along with the practice. After a while, the mind entered the deep state of tranquility. I was suddenly wide awake and felt fresh. I was not unconscious, but totally mindful when I experienced the tranquility.

Before I went to bed, I usually felt very exhausted. When I woke up, after having enough rest, the mind would become refined. The average sleep hours for practitioners range between 4 -5 hours. It is recommended that they wake up at 2:00 or 3:00 a.m., which is the time when the mind becomes the most refined. At this time of day, the environment outside is also wholesome and quiet which enhances serenity of the heart. Of course, there are some differences in people, but in general, this is the best time to meditate.

After practicing meditation in a consistent manner, I was able to practice anytime except after a meal because then I would be falling asleep while meditating. I did walking meditation before switching back to sitting. After that, if I wished to relax, I would take a one-hour break. Then I would continue walking and sitting meditations before sweeping the monastery compound and cleaning my place. After a shower, I would walk until the sitting meditation time arrived and then rest for four to five hours before resuming sitting and walking meditations. It was only when I slept that I didn't meditate. Even when I was engaging in other daily routine activities, I was always mindful. Normally the monks at Wat Pa Baan Taad were not supposed to talk to each other when doing everyday activities; this made it easier for them to maintain their mindfulness.

Fear of the “Tiger”

During my stay at Wat Pa Baan Taad, there was the “Tiger,” which was Luangta. My reaction when I was in his presence helped determine if my fear still existed. If I could continue my work without being terrified or nervous, it implied that Samādhi and wisdom (Paññā) started to emerge within. In contrast, if I was too tense, this showed my inability to gain mastery over the mind and to meditate. At the time of stress, I had to develop wisdom to get rid of fear, with Samādhi only playing the supportive role in fear management.

Through my experiences as a lay person, I learned that harsh teachers were actually kind-hearted. Students would actually obtain more benefits from this type of teacher rather than from one who was lenient. Even when I was a student, I usually looked forward to studying with harsh and tough teachers. Otherwise, I wouldn't be gaining knowledge in class.

Before Luangta was harsh with someone, he would consider whether the monk could be directly reprimanded and would benefit from it or not. Luangta was careful to analyze personal behaviors of individuals to determine to what extent they could accept the criticism, focusing more on advantages and disadvantages that might occur when criticizing his students.

Sometimes, he reprimanded a monk by telling him a story about another person. In fact, he was indirectly criticizing that monk. If that monk was wise enough, he would humbly listen and ponder whether or not it was the story about himself. The listener was always supposed to welcome being criticized as a chance to improve himself without anger and emotion involved. Regardless whose stories they were, each individual was required to Opanayiko, or to humbly reflect on himself.

The master was very wise and knew that humans were varied in temperament. Being taught and reprimanded directly in front of their peers could be unacceptable for some students. They might feel embarrassed and possibly resent or lose respect for their teacher. The master would carefully consider how much each student could take when choosing his words.

During my early stay at the monastery, I was reprimanded for sitting with my arm resting on the floor. Luangta told me very firmly not to sit like that, and I realized that that sitting posture was improper.

Another time I was **attacked** for not knowing how to properly behave with the master. I did not realize monks were not supposed to ask the master questions unless they were given permission. Until permission was granted, what all the students were expected to do was simply agree with whatever issues the teacher brought up by saying “Yes, sir”, or just remaining silent.

When traveling with Luangta, every single monk would remain calm. They would be watching their own mind and be mindful and would not engage in frivolous talk or conversation. When Luangta was around, it was like he used his magic to make everyone sit still like a stone.

When I was still new to the monastery, seeing a monk shaking while he was in front of Luangta made me wonder if I would act the same. I wasn’t trembling with fear initially because I hadn’t been **attacked** by the “Tiger” yet. Later, after I was reprimanded 2-3 times, I just snuck away whenever I saw Luangta coming.

Over time, I became terribly scared of Luangta as I didn’t wish to repeat my stupidity. After the first reprimand, I would try not to make the same mistake twice. I would keep it in mind because what Luangta taught was straight from his heart, and his teachings were utterly priceless. Even so, people still took his teachings about small things and manners for granted,

causing them to miss the subtlety and refinement of his teaching. Eventually, their meditation was marked by carelessness and lack of progress.

Reprimanding Students with Loving-Kindness

At Wat Pa Baan Taad, Luangta also participated in a Pavāraṇā meeting (inviting admonition or inviting others to advise one). On Pavāraṇā day which usually falls on the full moon day of the eleventh lunar month, the Lord Buddha established a rule giving the opportunity for resident monks within each monastery to invite one another for reprimand at the end of each retreat. This religious practice would start with senior monks. Generally, Luangta would criticize and warn his students. It is the principle of forest tradition that once a monk has entered the monastic community, he has to be prepared for others to criticize his conduct consistently. However, monks generally follow this principle as fulfillment of ritual obligations. In fact, this practice should be seriously observed from the first day of their ordination because monks are supposed to be open to admonition.

As the aim of ordination is to develop self-cultivation, monks need to admit their wrongdoings and correct them. On that ground, it is essential for monks to be reprimanded or criticized for their unbecoming behaviors. If there is the practice of Pavāraṇā in the society, there won't be any problems. Before warning,

the one who reprimands should choose words carefully to see whether they are true and coming out of loving-kindness and compassion, not with prejudice. If the person offering constructive criticism is angry and full of hatred, he had better not warn another person until he feels calm. However, practically, the only persons who can actually admonish other monks are teachers or venerable monks. Otherwise, those who are warned might not be able to accept it. The one who warns should be concerned about his own status because it is possible to offend and cause anger, hatred and bad Kamma in others.

Having a teacher like Luangta is tremendously helpful for the monks. Yet, they have to be respectful, obedient, and fearful of their teacher so that the teachings would be effective in helping them succeed in their meditation practice. However, they shouldn't be so fearful of the teacher that they are nervous and shaking just by seeing him around. Instead, they need to listen to and believe him.

When a teacher reprimands his students, it implies that he is helping his students. Because students do not like to be hard on or restrain themselves, they need a teacher to help control and give them firm direction. As students are generally not receptive to others' reprimands, the only person allowed to scold them is their teacher. Without respect towards the teacher, students will not get any benefits from his admonition. For instance, some monks do not pay attention to the teacher's admonition or obey him. In this case, even if they are still allowed to stay with the teacher, they will

take his words for granted. This is like a ladle in a soup pot, yet it never realizes how flavorful the soup is. Therefore, their stay with the teacher becomes useless.

Most people wanted Luangta to love and be merciful towards them. However, once he told them off, they thought that Luangta wasn't merciful towards them anymore. On the contrary, that was the way Luangta showed his mercy and kindness to people; if Luangta didn't say anything to the wrongdoers, it meant that he didn't care about them and implied that he did not see any benefit in helping right the wrongs or warn the wrongdoers. Monks wishing to practice meditation together under a wise supervising teacher are required to have courage, patience, mindfulness, and wisdom. They should not react to whatever the teacher says under any circumstances. They need to stay still like a stone, and just listen to him in order to think over the reproof to see if what the teacher said is true. If true, they must improve themselves as soon as possible, and never let the teacher warn them again. Because if the teacher has to criticize his students over and over again, it shows that they are intractable and disobedient. Also, they will not make progress in meditation practice due to their uncorrected wrong views.

If their lack of progress is not because of their wrong views, then it means they are too limited and blind to realize their own faults when reprimanded. Wise people tend to lead their lives along the path of Dhamma all the time. In addition to being open to reprimand, they are careful to disregard praise from others. No matter what flattery they receive from others, it's not going to change

anything. It is not necessary to have others tell them how great and wonderful they are because they are already aware that they are living a skillful life. Likewise, if the praises are untrue, it won't make them better as well. Praise is meaningless for sages and wise people. In the society of wise men, they don't really give praises to one another. Only unwise people like to admire, compliment, and reward each other.

Using Anger to Trick Students

Anger is one of the tools that teachers usually use to teach their students by constantly provoking them. Students are aware that they cannot get angry with teachers, so all they can do is keep their anger within. However, they can overcome it and clear their mind ultimately because the teachers help arouse the defilements for them to extinguish.

Some people who successfully attain Samādhī tend to think that they have already become enlightened and that anger no longer exists in their mind. Having listened to a lot of Dhamma talks until they have become integrated in their heart makes them believe that their anger is totally absent. There is one story of a high-ranking lady who listened to Dhamma talks and became engaged in the talks wholeheartedly until her mind was very serene. Her defilements were also calm. She thought that greed and anger were completely extinguished from her heart. When this happened, she happily went to see her

teacher and told him about it. She said, “Ever since I had a chance to listen to your Dhamma talks, my mind has become so peaceful and blissful, and I no longer feel angry with anyone.” The teacher said, “Liar!” Right after that, her anger suddenly manifested.

When people went to visit Luangpu Jia, a venerable master in the Forest Tradition of Thailand, they had to have their mind well-prepared before approaching him. Once Luangpu saw people coming, he would ask, “What are you here for?” Other times, when lay devotees approached Luangta, he would say “Don’t mess with me! What are you doing here?” He would keep telling them to go back home.

That’s the trick of the teachers. They start teaching their students as soon as they step into the monastery, often quickly attacking them before they are prepared for it.

Therefore, what students must know and prepare for is that their teachers will be harsh on them for sure. However, they will grasp Dhamma as a consequence. The innate nature of the defilements is to be fond of being praised, cherished, and welcomed. Thus, whenever people were told to leave, they couldn’t really take it. They were really eager to approach the teacher. Instead of getting a warm welcome as they expected, it turned out that they were harshly asked, “Why are you bothering me?” This kind of question was only meant to examine how their mind would react. Those who could not take it would feel dejected. At the same time, those who were perceptive would have no response and disregard

whatever their teacher said but listen to him because the point of approaching a teacher was to learn from him, not to be welcomed, adored, or praised. The primary reason of going to see a teacher is to listen to his Dhamma talks.

People who seek Dhamma will try to subdue their mind like a goalkeeper whose job is to catch the ball no matter what the circumstance is. He must be able to catch it no matter how hard it comes. Accordingly, there weren't many people going to Wat Pa Baan Taad back then because they were afraid of Luangta. The good thing was that it made the monastery so quiet and simplified daily life to keep the focus on meditation and avoid unnecessary troubles.

The Strictness of Luangta

Because Luangta had a reputation for being very stern and not really open to visitors, the monastery wasn't popular. If they wanted to approach him, they would need to get ready for his unfriendly welcome. People who couldn't take it would choose to go to another monastery instead. However, Wat Pa Baan Taad was most crowded during the Kathina season. There were usually groups of laypeople traveling from Bangkok by bus. They didn't spend much time there, though. After they finished offering and receiving blessings from the monks, they would leave—not daring to spend a night there. During the normal weekends, there were only a few lay people

coming in two or three cars from Udon Thani province to give alms food and offer the food at the monastery.

Due to the relatively small number of lay devotees, after the meal and daily duties were completed, each of us would abruptly go back to our own Kuṭī to begin walking and sitting meditations. If there was any monk wandering outside his Kuṭī, he would be told by Luangta to get back to meditating. If this happened repeatedly, he would be forced to leave the monastery straight away.

Luangta was very strict with the monks. He didn't want them to waste their time taking delight in defilements. He knew the tendency of inexperienced monks to desire food and to feel the need to engage in idle chitchatting and made sure that this kind of behavior was cut short.

At Wat Pa Baan Taad, the monks would gather only when Luangta called for the meeting. Luangta wanted them to practice meditation in seclusion. Oftentimes, there were monks secretly coming out to sit and relax at the beverage Sālā. Accordingly, Luangta made sure to come check the monks every 30 minutes. The first time that a monk was seen lolling around was still fine as Luangta wouldn't say a word. However, if Luangta came for the second time, the monk would have to run away as quickly as possible; otherwise, he would be scolded. Luangta would ask, "Why are you still here? When will you get enough of it? Why don't you get back to your walking meditation path? Why don't you go to meditate?" Luangta always kept reprimanding his monks. He didn't really allow monks to talk with each other. He wanted

them to rush to their Kuṭī right after finishing drinking because talking could make their mind restless, potentially leading to a fight or an argument.

If Luangta happened to see there were two or three pairs of sandals in front of any Kuṭī, those monks would absolutely be reprimanded. When they wished to go visit each other, they had to hide their sandals. Besides, they had to talk very quietly so that their voices would never leak out of their Kuṭī. At that time, Luangta would walk around at night to watch his monks. He did not allow them to socialize or talk with each other. Sometimes, Luangta didn't wear his sandals but quietly walked barefoot so that it wouldn't make a noise. Also, he didn't use a flashlight, which made the monks feel intimidated and become more careful. If any of them did not engage in meditation, they would be harshly criticized for sure.

I didn't like socializing with anyone because I was captivated by meditation. I tended to stay at my Kuṭī alone for a long period of time. If it was really necessary, I might go to talk to some monks—mostly before dawn, during sweeping time or the gathering for monastic duties. I would talk to them for a few minutes and leave and never had any discussion at my Kuṭī. Normally, I went to complete my daily routine duties at the meeting hall and came right back to my Kuṭī. Alternatively, I might go to practice walking meditation in the forest. Staying alone allowed me to feel so delighted and happy. Whenever I practiced until my mind reached bliss, I wouldn't feel like socializing with anyone. When the mind was so blissful, it was like still water. The blissful mind could begin rippling just by talking with others. It would no

longer be clear, refreshing, and tranquil; also, it would be such a waste of time. Besides calming my mind, there was still another duty to fulfill which was even more important. It was wisdom cultivation including investigating the impermanence, suffering and selflessness in the five aggregates (Khandhas).

Ever since I became ordained, I have never been to any ceremonies or rituals such as those of robes offering, Kathina ceremonies, celebrations, or funerals. During the rains retreat, it's part of the tradition where monks have to approach their teachers and request forgiveness. Luangta went to do it by himself as he would never let his monks go anywhere. Luangta never took them to pay respect to other senior monks outside the monastery.

At the funerals of some senior monks or teachers in other monasteries, resident monks were not required to attend. For instance, in the funeral of the Venerable Ajahn Singthong, Luangta only let a couple of senior monks go with him. The residents were not allowed to go outside the monastery. Luangta said that the monks who were still practicing meditation should not waste their time doing other things. Luangta valued the priority of practicing meditation rather than going to help out in the funerals which was only the work of Dāna. Going outside simply prevented the monks from engaging in meditation, and their mind became agitated and restless. For these reasons, Luangta was really protective of them. He didn't want them to get exposed to visible form, sound, odor, and taste because these five aggregates would potentially get stuck in their mind when they came back. When they meditated, they would be thinking of what

they previously saw and experienced, which was very dangerous for the mind.

These are the reasons why I rarely went anywhere. Since my early introduction to Dhamma practice, I never got involved with any rituals. After I was given Dhamma books which suggested concentrating inside the mind, I always practiced in this manner. Nothing could turn my attention away from focusing on the inside of the mind.

Refraining from Sleep

To refrain from sleep, practitioners can focus on three positions: standing, walking and sitting while meditating.

Concentrating on these three positions will prevent one from falling into a long sleep. When I was extremely sleepy, I would sleep in a sitting position for one or two hours before waking up again. Afterwards, I would continue walking meditation until I felt tired and then switch to sitting meditation so that I wouldn't waste my time sleeping. If I was falling asleep, I would make sure to be in a sitting position. If I lay down, I would end up sleeping for too long. Plus, I wouldn't feel like getting up after waking up.

However, Dhamma practice really depends on personal behaviors and preferences of each individual. Some people are good at refraining from sleep, relying on three positions. Others are fond of fasting

or meditating in scary places. Practitioners must be proactive and down to earth. They should not be too selective in their living conditions and food and also be able to sacrifice their life for their achievement by contemplating death on a regular basis. In addition, they have to contemplate that one day everyone has to die, and there is no way to avoid death. Thus, they should take death as a motivation for meditation. Realizing the fact that everyone will die one day, they should be diligent in their meditation while they are still alive. If they don't have a sense of immediacy, death will come and they will have lost their chance to see the truth about existence.

Frugality of Luangta

I heard that when Luangta came to Bangkok, he would take a third-class train with a wooden seat. He didn't fall asleep at night but remained sitting upright throughout the journey. Even though he was offered a sleeper class ticket, he refused to take it. By doing this, he intended to strengthen his mind and subdue the defilements so that they would be unable to afflict his heart. Therefore, it is recommended that we should follow what he did by always being frugal and content with little.

Behaviors of an Arahant

Luangta used to tell his students that what he expressed or did was not out of anger. The forceful tone of his remarks derived from the power of Dhamma. He felt no anger or resentment toward anybody. It was just an act. How about us? Can you act like him? For example, if you fail to get the desired result, will you get upset? Anger is not beneficial at all and it hurts you. If you get angry, it is because you might be too obsessed with what you are doing and forget that you're only acting. When you take things so seriously, it shows that you are still attached to sensual happiness. For instance, when you cannot get what you want to eat, you will get upset. Why not just think you are acting the role of whatever you seem to be in this world?

Healthcare of Luangta

There are a number of monks who meditate regularly and yet never develop osteoarthritis of the knee. Likewise, when Luangta was more than 90 years old, he could still go to many places to perform his duties with efficiency. That's because he knew how to maintain good health by doing yoga exercises, practicing constantly. When he came to watch the monks while they were sweeping and cleaning at the meeting hall, he would be doing stretching poses. Moreover, there were always monks doing massage for him because when his muscles were tight and stiff, rubbing could help release tension.

In the past, Luangta always walked through the monastery to check the monks at night. This was another way of workouts, because sometimes he didn't have time to walk for exercise. Therefore, he walked around the compound to exercise and see if the monks and novices were meditating.

When he was in his 90s, Luangta could still walk very well for his very old age and was considered distinctly healthy. He was active and his movement was still quite spry. In addition, he could still do anything by himself. Compared to Luangta, Somdet Phra Yannasangvorn, who lived in the city, didn't have a chance to walk much because he had to welcome so many guests and lay devotees. Therefore, his health gradually declined faster with old age.

In brief, as our body is impermanent, you had better try to do what benefits others, as well as yourself, with conscious awareness.

Dhamma Therapy

Most forest monks do not depend on medicines or treatments, relying instead on herbal medicine when sick and not going to the hospital to see the doctor except for the diseases that can be treated effectively. If we have malaria, we will rely on Dhamma Osoth, which are the therapeutic qualities of Dhamma.

Since my ordination, I have never taken any painkiller, not keeping even one pill at my Kuṭī, but I've always had Dhamma Osoth as pain relievers kept in my heart. When the pain manifested, I would let it display. The pain only occurred in my body, but it could not enter my mind. Through meditation, the mind and the body can be separated. The mind is one thing and the body is another. For practitioners who are able to fast for five days or seven days straight, the suffering arising from pains will be insignificant to them. Therefore, you had better let go of your body. You should always contemplate death, and you will learn that no matter how well the body is treated, you will have to die one day. It's such a waste to spend too much time just taking care of it. It is much better to treat the heart because it will give you everlasting happiness, and you won't be bothered by any health conditions. No matter how rich or poor you are, you will not have any problems at all.

If you do not take care of your mind, you will be defiled by the desire for this and that. You will want to be rich and happy for the rest of your life. When you have financial problems, your mind will be restless and agitated. Therefore, you should not give excessive importance to your body. We have been born and have died repeatedly in numerous previous existences, so we used to have countless bodies, which is like having a lot of clothes. Accordingly, it will be better if you concentrate on purifying your mind.

Luangta's Personal Attendants

The monks who had an opportunity to serve as personal attendants to Luangta would have access to Dhamma or to the solutions to their meditation problems throughout the time of serving him. In addition, the attendants appeared to have more opportunities to learn from him than the other monks. Staying close to Luangta was like getting into the boxing ring, they had to handle 'punches' thrown at them. Therefore, they had to be well prepared all the time. Subsequently, this allowed them to develop mindfulness and wisdom to respond to his needs. In contrast, those who didn't stay close to Luangta were like audiences who could only observe. They didn't have Luangta to help trigger Dhamma as often for them. However, for those who were able to practice meditation by themselves, they wouldn't need Luangta to motivate them. Still, it would be a great opportunity to serve and stay close to Luangta.

This situation was similar to the monk, Ānanda Bhikkhu, who was very close to the Lord Buddha, which enabled him to learn a lot about Dhamma. Yet, it wasn't possible for everybody due to the fact that there were a large number of the Buddha's disciples. It depended on the Buddha's consideration as to who would be selected to serve him. However, it was not absolutely necessary that every disciple should be near the Lord Buddha. Certainly, many of those who didn't get to serve the Lord Buddha or meditation masters would still be able to attain enlightenment as well.

Memory and the Truth

Most of the Buddhist books in English contain the theoretical study of Dhamma (Pariyatti) rather than Dhamma practice (Paṭipatti). Those English books usually list the names of the defilements and the types of phenomena, but they fail to define their characteristics.

Luangta said, “The knowledge gained from reading is a function of memory, not the truth.”

Normally we will try to imagine the picture of what was mentioned in the book since we haven’t encountered the real thing yet. Thus, all we can do is speculate and imagine in our mind. Our mind is like eye-glasses that are blurry or have the wrong prescription. We see things and colors in accordance with the lenses of the glasses. For example, we might believe we see something in red, while the object is actually purple. It’s just the tinted eye-glasses that cause apparent vision problems resulting in distortion of the color.

Likewise, the mind perceives things according to our speculation. Therefore, only the knowledge gained through theoretical study is not enough. Practitioners have to put theoretical knowledge into practice so that the truth can be determined. The mind will realize what the truth is. The mind must be clear and clean prior to performing the investigation. Although the mind does not remain clean all the time, at least it can be temporarily clean so that it will be able to see the truth in a flash. Similarly, the clean eye-glasses can remain clear for

a while, which is long enough for one to see the real image clearly. Therefore, to visualize everything based on the truth, the mind needs to attain Samādhi stage, remain calm, and stay free from defilements.

Human's thoughts are under the control of Avijjā and Kilesas, or defilements. **Avijjā Paccayā Saṅkhārā-Ignorance conditions the arising of Saṅkhāra.** Our thoughts are driven by Avijjā, so the way we perceive things will be controlled by Avijjā, or delusion. This is like the dirty eye-glasses that must be wiped and cleaned so that we can see things as they really are. We will see green objects as green, and red ones as red. We won't see them in any other color.

Knowledge Excluded from Tipiṭaka

According to the biography of Venerable Ajahn Mun written by Luangta, Ajahn Mun was visited by the Lord Buddha and his Arahant disciples who came to deliver discourses on Dhamma and have conversations with him.

However, this is a special case which occurred with the person who had an exceptional ability to communicate with others in a spiritual way. People who lack this ability will not be able to contact others spiritually. This can be exemplified by contrasting between people who own cell phones and those who don't. People who have the phones will be able to

communicate with others who also own them. Even if they live in different countries, these people can still make a call to each other. The story like that of Venerable Ajahn Mun was just never documented in Tipiṭaka or the Pāli Canon.

Some people who were bookworm scholars reading only Tipiṭaka would become skeptical and dead set against Venerable Ajahn Mun, criticizing him, accusing him of bragging. At the end of his biography, M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, a Buddhist scholar, alleged that Venerable Ajahn Mun rambled because what he talked about was never found in Tipiṭaka. M.R. Kukrit, who thought he was an expert in Tipiṭaka, insisted that what Venerable Ajahn Mun mentioned never existed in Tipiṭaka.

Luangta replied that the knowledge in Tipiṭaka was merely like water in a small jar, whereas the knowledge manifesting in the mind of the Dhamma practitioners was like water in a vast ocean. Likewise, the Lord Buddha's knowledge that wasn't documented in the scriptures was comparable to the immense volume of water in the ocean. It was also like the leaves in the forest which were countless.

The Lord Buddha asked the Bhikkhus whether the leaves in his hand were more than the leaves in the forest. The Bhikkhus answered that there were very few leaves in his hand, but the leaves in the forest were countless indeed. The Lord Buddha said that the knowledge in his mind was like those leaves in the forest, but the knowledge he taught them was like a handful of leaves. He only covered what was necessary for them to apply in their practice, and when they did practice, they would

learn what he didn't teach. If they only studied from Tipiṭaka, they shouldn't be so confident; otherwise, their knowledge would be useless just like a plain palm leaf. They should undertake meditation practice, and then a vast amount of profound knowledge would manifest in their hearts. At that time, they would not reject the knowledge excluded from the scriptures.

Isaan Funeral Ceremony

During the early period of my stay at Wat Pa Baan Taad, I participated in the funeral ceremony there. I noticed that they did not use closed wooden coffins. The coffin was made of paper with wooden frames, and it had no lid. The cremation was done by placing the coffin on top of firewood with two pieces of wood laid on top of the coffin. When the fire started burning, the dead body would spring up in the coffin for all to see. I participated in the funerals several times. In contemplating death, if you cannot picture it in your mind, you should go to see the real thing. Keep visualizing it as it gives you a picture of what will, one day, become of your body.

The funeral of Luangta's mother was held one afternoon in front of the meeting hall in the monastery. There was no crematory funeral pyre, only a pile of wood on top of which the coffin was placed. When the time came for the cremation, a fire was lit. Later that night, when the fire burned itself out, the bones and ashes were collected and sprinkled under the Bodhi tree in the monastery. From dust to dust.

In the morning, nothing was left to be seen in front of the meeting hall. No remnants of the funeral remained. Everything was put away. At the beginning, Luangta wanted to have the cremation done the day of her death. She passed away in the morning, and the cremation would have been done in the afternoon of that day. However, at the request of the relatives who wished to allow those who lived far away from the funeral site to join the funeral, the body was kept overnight for relatives to come and pay respect. There was no religious ceremony performed on that night. There was no chanting of traditional Kusala Dhamma, the Abhidhamma verses. Before the cremation, ten monks were invited to chant the recollections on impermanence—**Anicca vata sankhara**—for her.

Kusala means wisdom. It refers to the deliberation regarding a human as a doll made of earth, water, air, and fire, which will age, get sick, and die. Therefore, Kusala Dhamma should be given to a person before death, not after. Kusala Dhamma must be given to a living person who contemplates Kusala by himself or herself, not to invite a monk to do it for him or her. The monk should contemplate Kusala of his own body, while we should also contemplate Kusala of our own bodies. In this way, we create wisdom in our hearts and comprehend the nature of our body: merely earth, water, air, and fire. It is transient: It will age, experience sickness, and die.

Fighting without Retreating

When I was at Wat Pa Baan Taad, I did not practice the Dhamma with utmost efforts. I only practiced as much as I was capable. Talking about **utmost efforts** might create the sense of something too big to handle. This is because there are many whose utmost efforts were beyond mine since each person's Majjhimā (middle path) is not the same. We must do the best we can and that is all.

Practicing Dhamma can be compared to driving a car. You press on the gas pedal to the fullest. But whether your car will run faster or slower than the other cars is another matter. Your car is 150 cc.; you might encounter a car with 250 cc., which also runs at its fullest speed. That car is definitely running faster than your car. But both cars will get to the destination. That is, if you do not give up. But if you feel discouraged, you will not get there.

Practicing Dhamma, you will sometimes feel discouraged or bored when you encounter obstacles. But do not give up practicing. You should slow down, take a break or read a Dhamma book. If you push too hard, you will induce more stress and resistance to your practice. Therefore, on days that you don't seem to get anywhere with your practice after trying as hard as you could, take a rest and resume your practice the next day after you feel reinvigorated.

When you flow with the Dhamma, your practice will be smooth and easy. When you flow against the Dhamma

your practice will be tough and hard. It is like walking with the wind or against the wind. When you flow with the Dhamma, it is easy to make the mind calm and peaceful. On the other hand, when you flow against the Dhamma, it is hard. This is why you should always observe the mind. If the mind does not want to meditate, you should do something else, like reading Dhamma books. If the mind wants to keep thinking, let it think about Dhamma, the 32 parts of the body, birth, aging, sickness, or death. Thinking about Dhamma is the way of developing wisdom. If the mind does not want to think and wants to become still, then it is easy to meditate. That's why you should constantly observe the mind.

When you feel discouraged, you should think of your teachers or the Lord Buddha. Being human beings like you, they also had to struggle when taming the mind. You should use them as your role models. See how they fought and won. They never gave up. They also had to take a break because they could not practice intensely all the time, but they never deviated from their meditation practice.

No Other Interest except in the Dhamma

While residing at Wat Pa Baan Taad for nine years, I did not venture out. Nor did I form any close relationship with anyone at the monastery since I had entered monkhood. Although we resided in the same monastery, I only knew the other monks by name and by face. I did not form close relationships with anyone because we all had our own duties and responsibilities.

Staying there is the same as staying here. Every morning I went to the meeting hall to prepare to go out begging alms. Upon my return, I consumed my meal, cleaned up, and returned to my Kuṭī. In the afternoon, I swept the outside. When the chore was done, I had hot tea. After that, it was time for a bath before doing meditation. That is the essence of the life of a practicing monk.





Chapter Seven

Moving to Wat Yannasangvararam



Goodbye to Wat Pa Baan Taad

I HAD NEVER VISITED WAT BOWON and had not known anyone there. However, merit brought me to meet Somdet Phra Yannasangvorn, who, out of compassion, ordained me. Merit also helped introduce me to various forest monasteries. This was because there were several foreign monks who, after ordination, followed their mentors to reside at the forest monasteries. There were the monasteries of Luangpu Khao, Luangpu Thate, Luangpu Fan, and Luangta Mahā Boowa. After I was ordained at Wat Bowon on February 19, 1975, I chose to go to the monastery of Luangta Mahā Boowa that April. I had planned to visit a few of the forest monasteries eventually. However, when I arrived at Wat Pa Baan Taad, I did not go anywhere else.

I stayed there for eight years and eight months, leaving there in December 1983 after completing nine rains retreats. I stayed there all the time and only went to Udon Thani 4-5 times and was invited to perform Buddhist rituals outside the monastery once or twice. I went to visit a doctor two or three times for treatment

of malaria. The farthest trip I made during my stay there was to join a Kaṭhina ceremony in Chiang Mai.

During my stay at Wat Pa Baan Taad, I never went to pay respect to other teachers. I did not feel compelled to go because I knew that the teachers would teach me the same lesson: that is to meditate. All of them would teach the same lesson about generosity (Dāna), morality (Sīla), and mind development (Bhāvanā). You should search for the right teaching, and once you have found it within your heart, you do not have to search for an external teacher.

I did not go for Dhutaṅga walks because I knew that I could practice Dhamma at the monastery. A Dhutaṅga walk that a monk undertakes is an activity that cuts into his meditation time. Luangta promoted meditation. If a monk or a novice desired to meditate, Luangta would not give him assignments that take time away from meditation.

After spending five rains retreats, in April 1980, I asked Luangta's permission to visit home. Permission was granted and I spent approximately two weeks at home. On my way back, I stopped to meditate at Chulabhorn Dam in Chaiyaphum province in Northeastern Thailand. I meditated there for about a week when I heard about the crash of the plane that carried five senior Buddhist monks. They all died in the crash. I decided to return to the monastery in case I could be of assistance to Luangta. Upon arrival, I was told that Luangta did not want the monks and novices to help. He wanted them to meditate. This is because

worldly tasks are coarse, while the inside work is delicate. If you are performing internal work and then go out to perform external work, you might spoil the internal work already done. Therefore, he did not allow monks and novices to go. Only Luangta and two senior monks went to oversee the funeral of the dead monks.

After the end of the eighth rains retreat, I asked permission to go out to meditate and to also visit home. That was the end of 1982. I went to visit home first. Then I went to Wat Yannasangvararam (Wat Yan) for the first time. I had heard that Somdet Phra Yannasangvorn had this temple built. Luangpu Jia used to reside there as an abbot. Therefore, I went there to see how this monastery was. I stayed there for about two weeks, and then I went to stay at the garden of Wat Chonglom for about three months. After that I returned to Wat Pa Baan Taad to spend my ninth rains retreat there.

After the rains retreat of 1983, when the Kathina ceremony was completed, I heard news from home that my father was ill with cancer of the neck. I then asked permission to leave so I could be near my father and take care of him. During this time, I stayed at Wat Phothisamphan in Pattaya. My father was under medical care until June 1984 when he passed away. The cremation took place right after his death and was over when the rains retreat was approaching, so I did not go back to Wat Pa Baan Taad.

When I left Wat Pa Baan Taad, I did not intend to leave for good. The reasons for my not returning were that it was almost the rains retreat when the funeral

ended, and I knew that many monks wished to stay at Wat Pa Baan Taad, therefore, my returning would take away some people's opportunity to stay there. I also thought that I had had the privilege and ample time of being there from the first to the ninth rains retreats, for more than eight years. So I decided not to go back to Wat Pa Baan Taad, and I have never returned since then.

Staying at Wat Yan

I spent my first nine years after being ordained at Wat Pa Baan Taad, the tenth year at Wat Phothisamphan in Pattaya, and from the eleventh year (1984) until present, at Wat Yan.

After my one year at Wat Phothisamphan in Pattaya, at the end of the rains retreat in 1984 after the Kathina ceremony, I came to stay at Wat Yan where I had visited earlier. At that time, I stayed at the temple because the monks' residence on the mountain had not been established. It's been almost 30 years since I moved up to the hillside residence in 1986, but I have continued to participate in ceremonies, going for alms round, and eating at the same meeting hall in the main temple where monks who are not ready for the mountain solitude reside.

My routines at Wat Yan haven't varied much from when I was at Wat Pa Baan Taad with Luangta. I have gone down for alms round and when finished with the morning routines, gone back up to the mountain. I have practiced meditation as usual and though I haven't taught

formally, I have been willing to talk about the Dhamma with anyone who is interested. I have offered Dhamma talk to the best of my ability with no particular goals in mind.

My main focus, however, has always been to look after the mind, to live simply and peacefully, and to always stay in the present until the end of my time. If something at this monastery were to have caused agitation and disturbance, preventing the heart from getting calm, I would have had to leave. However, I would not have known where to go because I had not visited any other temple or associated with any monks from other monasteries.

History of Wat Yan

Wat Yannasangvararam (Wat Yan) is a Dhammayuttika Nikāya Royal temple (Aram Luang). Its importance ranks within the third tier of the royal patronage (Woramahavihara) and is situated in Tambon Huay Yai, Amphur Bang Lamung, Chonburi province. His Holiness, Somdet Phra Yannasangvorn (Charoen Suvaddhano), the late Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Saṅgha, was the chief implementer of the building of the temple. He had envisioned a temple used for religious activities and meditation and pilgrimage with the strict discipline and practices similar to Wat Bowonniwet, a royal temple in Bangkok; however, due to its beautifully designed architecture, Wat Yan has become a tourist attraction, constantly receiving visitors as well.

The original 300 rais (approximately 119 acres) of land that the temple is built on was donated to His Holiness in 1976 by Dr. Kajorn and Khunying Nitiwadee Ontrakarn. Supporters for the building project added another 66 rais (approximately 26 acres) and the temple was given the name Wat Yannasangvararam. On March 25, 1982, it received the royal decree granting the land for religious usage. His Holiness the late Supreme Patriarch oversaw the temple as official abbot and the temple now covers 366 rais (approximately 145 acres) of land excluding the additional 2500 rais (approximately 988 acres) of land used for HM the King's royal project.

Buildings in Wat Yan

Every building at Wat Yan was built as a tribute to the kings of Thailand and the royal families who have protected Thailand and its people. For example,

- ◇ The ordination hall (Ubosot) took the Chinese style design from Wat Bowonniwet as a tribute to King Taaksin and the principle Buddha image in the Ubosot is named Somdet Phra Buddha Yannaret as a tribute to King Naresuan the Great.
- ◇ The pagoda (Chedi) was constructed as a tribute to all nine kings of the Chakri dynasty.
- ◇ The Pavilion (Mondop) at the top of the mountain is a tribute to Their Majesties the King and Queen.

◇ The praying Hall is a tribute to HRH the Crown Prince and HRH the Crown Princess.

◇ The Eating Hall is a tribute to HRH the Princess Mother and HRH Princess Galyani Wattana, the King's sister.

History of Meditation Residence at Chi-On Mountain

His Holiness Somdet Phra Yannasangvorn's vision for Wat Yan was that it would be a meditation retreat temple. For many years Wat Yan didn't have an abbot. As senior monks from Wat Bowonniwet then weren't meditation teachers, His Holiness had asked meditation monks from the Northeast such as Luangpu Jia, a venerable master in the Forest Tradition of Thailand, to stay temporarily for a couple of retreat seasons. Some other meditation monks intermittently came to stay. Finally in 1982, Phra Ajahn Whan Chulapandito, a disciple of Luangpu Khao Anālayo, from Wat Tham Klong Pane was invited to become the head monk and stayed for several years.

While there, Phra Ajahn Whan saw that the mountain was a quiet and peaceful place conducive to meditation, so he asked His Holiness for his permission to develop it. At that time there was only a walkway through the woods and buildings materials were donated and carried up through the paths by the villagers to build a

Sālā (meeting hall) and Kuṭīs (monks' dwellings). A few months after these structures were built, His Holiness the late Supreme Patriarch received His Majesty the King there. Those who accompanied His Majesty expressed a desire to upgrade the structures to improve it, but the villagers, who had helped build the original, refused and threatened to stop giving alms to the monks if the original structures were torn down; thus they remain standing until the present time.

Through the years the mountain retreat structures have received many honorable guests ranging from His Majesty the King, His Holiness the late Supreme Patriarch, and Luangta Mahā Boowa. It has held a special auspicious aura, and while other attempts through the years to rebuild and upgrade were no longer rejected by the villagers, these improvements never came to fruition anyway. This story about the villagers' attachment to the memories of how hard it was to carry building materials up the mountain made them refuse the offers for a more permanent structure to replace the original ones is a good example of how the feeling of attachment to things can create problems. Had it been a different temple, the original shack would likely have been replaced without much fanfare.

Phra Ajahn Whan spent the first night at the retreat, and he said that after he got into a meditative state, a large dark-skinned man appeared with a big stick trying to chase him away. Phra Ajahn said that he explained to the being that he wasn't there to try and take over the place and chase anyone away, but he was there to practice Dhamma to seek peace of mind as taught

by the Buddha. The man then walked away. The second night the same being came back, more friendly this time, and told Phra Ajahn that if the place would be used in this manner, then it would be possible to coexist. Since then other monks and novices have been able to use the mountain retreat.

Up on the mountain, the retreat is meant for solitude. Individual monks meditate instead of participating in group activities such as chanting. The solitary retreat doesn't suit everyone and some can only last one night, not able to handle unexplained encounters while meditating. For example, one New Year's Eve a layman asked to stay at the retreat. After one such encounter, he asked me for advice about how to handle it. I recommended giving loving-kindness and asking the spirit of the place for permission to stay and meditate. However, the man never found out if it would work since he didn't feel strong enough to stay around to try it.

Personally I've never had any such encounters in the 30 years that I've been here. I've never seen any of those beings and nobody ever appeared to chase me away. It could be that I've never made any changes or additions to the retreat buildings that are not necessary. I think that if one comes to stay at the mountain retreat with a sincere desire to meditate, keep the mind and spirit calm and not let thoughts run wild, the delusion will not be likely to occur.

Somdet Did Not Recognize Me

I was ordained at Wat Bowonniwet by Somdet Phra Yannasangvorn, His Holiness the late Supreme Patriarch. I had only been at Wat Bowon for six weeks when I asked His Holiness permission to go study with Luangta Mahā Boowa at Wat Pa Baan Taad. He gave me the permission to go, and after I left, I never went back to visit Somdet after that. It was not until I came to stay at Wat Yan that I saw him again, so understandably, he didn't remember me.

He asked me who ordained me. His secretary recognized me because he was my trainer after my ordination and pointed out that His Holiness, himself, was the one who ordained me. Not being remembered was of little consequence to me, especially since Somdet later gave me the opportunity to show my gratitude for his ordaining me many years before.

Repaying the Kindness of My Preceptor

Ecclesiastical order is the order of the ranking for Thai monks. Monks who have administrative responsibilities or monks with higher ranking may induct other monks into the ecclesiastical order by the rank given to them according to the royal decree.

The position of Phra Chulanaayok is a high rank within the ecclesiastical order that only exists under the Supreme Patriarch because it is a special appointment with responsibilities for special tasks for one whose qualifications have been screened by His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch.

Somdet Phra Yannasangvorn bestowed this high rank of Phra Chulanaayok in his ecclesiastical order on me and appointed me the Assistant Abbot of Wat Yan in order to oversee all the monks and activities within the temple in his place. As the Assistant Abbot, anyone ordained at the temple will come under my charge and care. In this capacity, I also provide knowledge to anyone who is interested in practicing Dhamma and at the same time, I am repaying the kindness of my preceptor by serving His Holiness.

Meditation Center on Chi-On Mountain

The meditation center on the mountain is not that well-known, so there are very few visitors to disturb the peaceful environment. There is also a check point to prevent any unauthorized entry into the preserved forest. Most merit makers at Wat Yan aren't always aware of its existence. They tend to come and offer alms in the morning, listen to Dhamma talk, and leave. Because the center is quite small, care has been taken to keep it private.

The center is situated in the 2,000 rais (approximately 791 acres) of the non-hunting area of Chi-On Mountain, with a nearly 8 km-long road running around the areas. The ten or so meditation buildings for monks sit on approximately 80 to 100 rais (approximately 32 to 40 acres) around the circular walkway. Usually only five or six of these buildings are occupied at one time because monks ordained at Wat Yan, in order to practice meditation, usually come to study with me. Others who are temporarily ordained don't usually prefer to stay at the mountain center because it looks barren and lacks water and electricity. Unlike the main temple below where water is plentiful, the only water available for each Kuṭī on the mountain is rain water stored in two or three tanks. However, monks can also take a shower at the main temple in the morning before going on alms round. During the earlier days, water conservation was severe—monks could only use four or five bowls of water to wash each day.

Whenever I want something, I can get it without asking. The walkway was originally made of dirt, and in the rainy season, the path became muddy and difficult to walk on. The mud would stubbornly stick to monks' sandals and cause them to slip, making walking hazardous. I thought that a concrete walkway should be constructed instead. Not long after that, a lay devotee asked me if I needed anything, such as Kuṭīs. I told him that there were enough Kuṭīs to accommodate the monks and explained the need for a concrete walkway. The lay person gave me a check after I told him about the estimated cost of the concrete road construction.

Water containers are also essential. When building the Kuṭīs, the donors did not realize the importance of water containers. Therefore, each Kuṭī was usually equipped with one water container, which was not adequate. I thought that there should be three containers for each Kuṭī. Not long after that, water containers were sufficiently provided for nearly all the Kuṭīs by generous lay persons.

Routines and Responsibilities of Monks at Wat Yan

Monks residing at the main temple don't have to walk very far, and electricity and ample water are available. Those who stay up on the mountain have to start out before dawn, around 4:30 a.m. to make the 3.5 kilometer walk in order to start out at 5:45 a.m. for alms round. It takes about 45 minutes to walk down to the main temple and monks make the trek rain or shine.

The reasons that there is never a ride to bring the monks down from the mountain are that, firstly, it is too early for the drivers to get up, and secondly, it is also a meditative practice to use the time to think about mortality because living in the wilderness, one never knows what one would encounter (snakes, other animals, etc.). By not living in a comfortable and convenient location, one can spend the time during the downhill walk considering the possibilities that death may occur at any time. Through this practice, one gains the wisdom to accept the eventuality of death and the mind becomes free from fears.

Once reaching the main temple (around 5:30 a.m.) and having about 15 minutes to rest, a car would pick up the monks to go for alms round. Wat Yan does not follow the ascetic practices and monks can accept food given to them inside or outside of the temple; there's no fasting period because there's no tradition of serious meditation practice at this temple. Most monks who stay at the temple are usually those who are ordained temporarily for three months. Some who stay on longer only follow the ritual routines such as chanting, praying, and seeking alms.

When the monks return to the temple after alms seeking around 7:00 a.m., there usually are supporters who bring food to donate at the eating hall. During the weekend or holy days, the process is finished by around 8:00 a.m., and the Dhamma talk is given for about half an hour before the monks, along with the people who came to give food, start to eat. During the normal week days, it takes less time. Everyone disperses after the meal. The monks from the mountain then walk back up the hill and usually begin the day with walking meditation to ward off sleepiness before sitting down to meditate. Some may take a nap first if necessary. They usually take a break around midday and continue to do either walking or sitting meditations. Sometimes they sweep the ground, keeping the mindfulness on the movement of the sweeping, keeping the mind off of other matters, and staying with the present that way. Once the mindfulness is established in the present, the mind will be still, just like the ball on a pendulum that has stopped swinging to the left and the right.

Meditation Center for Laymen

At Wat Yan, there's a meditation retreat for lay people to stay, but there are no teachers to help them. There is morning (5:00 a.m.) and evening (6:00 p.m.) chanting and praying with a half-hour meditation session afterward. After that, meditators return to their rooms situated in a large building, each bedroom having an en suite bathroom just like in hotels. They are required to stay for at least three days and no more than seven days each time. The minimum three-day requirement is set to keep out tourists who need an overnight place to stay while passing through the area.

On the mountain, due to the Spartan facility—the retreat can only handle a few people at a time as the rain water in the tanks does not last for so long, and there is no electricity either—only laymen who had been ordained at the temple previously are allowed to stay a night or two if a Kuṭī is available. Only serious meditators tend to like the peacefulness and the stillness that the mountain has to offer, as barren as it is, because it is more conducive to meditation. Even novice monks are not allowed to stay at the mountain Kuṭī right away so that they would not disturb the other monks. The new monks have to stay at the main temple below and are observed to determine whether or not they appreciate the peaceful quietness that the mountain has to offer and whether or not they are interested in meditation. Being up on the mountain without the desire for solitude would be useless.

For lay people who are really interested in the meditation retreat, it is recommended that one come alone to cut down the talking and socializing so that more time can be spent concentrating on meditation.

Observation of Myself

When I was first ordained, in order to stave off afternoon hunger, I used to drink hot cocoa with several spoonfuls of sugar. This practice had no ill effects until I got older when I started to notice that I was experiencing an allergic reaction to sugar. I developed sores in my mouth. Generally, most people tend not to think about the cause; they just treat the sores with medication.

However, I started to observe my food intake and kept reducing things that I thought might be the cause until I reduced the sugar intake. If I took less sugar for a couple of days, the sores would go away; increasing it, they would come back. Thus I determined the actual cause and noticed the warning signs. I no longer developed any sores in the mouth, and as I'm getting more advanced in age, I hardly take anything sweet anymore. It's really up to each of us to do what is right for the body.

Our body usually gives us warning signs about whether or not we are taking good care of it by making sure we have enough sleep and exercise. If we sit around all the time, we are likely to experience a lack of energy. With regular exercises such as walking and doing physical chores, the body usually feels healthier and stronger.

We need to keep observing the body to determine if any part of living would give it problems. For example, many things can create stomach problems. For me, if I drink milk every day, my stomach is usually fine. Skipping a day or two, then drinking it again, can upset my stomach.

Bitten by a Snake at Wat Yan

I was bitten by a snake once at Wat Yan. It was still dark one early morning when I was walking down a clear path that I've used for so many years without a problem. I was so familiar with the path that I didn't use the flash light. The dim light from the stars and the moon seemed adequate.

I thought that I was pricked by a thorn so I shone the light on it and saw a fairly small Malayan Pit Viper. I squeezed blood out through the small bite that looked like a needle hole and went for help at the nearby forest official's residence. By the time I got there, my leg had begun to hurt and it was hard to walk. They put lime on the bite to help pull out the venom and got me to the hospital.

It was almost 6:00 a.m. when we got to the hospital. The blood test showed normalcy at that point because it hadn't been long enough for the poison to spread yet. We had to wait six more hours to test it again. I thought that I would get the serum right away, but they only hooked me up to a saline solution. I asked the nurse

about it, and she said that the poison from this type of snake doesn't kill right away or make your heart stop or destroy the nerves. It makes the blood thin so the bleeding would not stop. The doctor had to keep checking to see if the blood would coagulate. He said that since the bite happened early in the morning, the nocturnal snake had likely used the poison for hunting during the night, and the poison that got into the body might dissipate without treatment, saving the patient from a possible allergic reaction to the serum. Until the explanation was given to me, I was quite anxious, thinking that my time might have come and trying to resign myself to the fact.

By noon the second blood test showed that the blood would not coagulate after 30 minutes while the normal time for it should have been within 10 minutes. The serum was then given and I was monitored for possible shock, resulting from an allergic reaction. The first dosage, given intravenously, took about 45 minutes. After six hours, the blood test still showed no coagulation, so the second dosage had to be given as well. The blood test after another six hours showed normal coagulation, but the wound and some veins became visibly darkened. The doctor recommended a two-day observation, saying that if gangrene appeared, part of the leg muscles might have to be removed. However, after two days the skin regained its color, perhaps because of squeezing the wound when I was bitten or the early application of the lime right after the bite. Luckily, no removal of flesh was necessary.

Nobody thinks about getting a snake bite, but if it should happen, Sati (awareness) to prevent the mind

from excessive worry will help. You are not supposed to ignore a problem like this or be at the mercy of death. You need to do something about it. If you need help from a doctor, you should do it.

Luangta's Visits to Wat Yan

In the beginning, Luangta who kindly visited us quite often, used to come almost every year. Before Suan Sangdham was built, he used to have his retreats at a forest meditation center at Wat Chonglom, tambon Naklua, whose abbot was Luangpor Buagate. A Chinese merchant, Khun Gimgai, had built a Kuṭī for Luangta at this temple. I sometimes would go there to pay respect to him when I heard about his visits.

He came to stay on the mountain once to seek solitude and a quiet place to rest when his heart condition was aggravated. He came by himself and chose to stay at the Sālā, telling us that all he wanted was peace and quiet and that he wouldn't need to eat the next day. He stayed there for one day until his disciples picked him up the following day.

After Suan Sangdham was built, Luangta would only stop by once in a while when he came through this area. He came unannounced but I've always been here to receive him since, as mentioned, I rarely left Wat Yan. I've never been back to Wat Pa Baan Taad since 1983 though it has remained an important place that offers peace and quiet with teachers who can guide us and help solve problems.

Funeral Rites for Our Teachers

Paying respect to our teachers after their passing can be done with or without attending the funeral rites. It is not necessary to be in the presence of their bodies because we can honor them right where we are.

As Luangta always taught us, practicing the Buddha's teaching such as giving (Dāna), keeping the precepts, and meditating is the true way to honor the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. Where we do this is not important.

The Lord Buddha said, "If you stay close to me and touch my robe, but do not follow my teaching, then you are really far away from me. But if you put my teaching into practice, even if you are far away, you are actually close to me. For one who sees the Dhamma, sees me, the Tathāgata. One who sees me, the Tathāgata, sees the Dhamma." Therefore, the important thing is to put the Lord Buddha's teaching into practice and practice it correctly and perfectly.

When we put into practice the Lord Buddha's teaching, whether we hear from the Lord Buddha himself or from his Noble Disciples, we are actually honoring them. Their goal is for us to become enlightened and released from suffering, because it is the most important thing for us.

The Substitute Teacher for Luangta

Luangta's teachings have become the substitute teacher for Luangta, so we are never without a teacher. An ample amount of his teaching had been recorded in forms of books and voice recordings as well as in videos. These should never be kept high on the altar but should be read and listened to regularly. The teachings are timeless and do not deteriorate with time or with the passing of the teacher.

Luangta's teachings remain as effective now as they were in his live Dhamma talks. Even though his body has left us, his teachings have remained. If we accept his words into our heart and follow the practice, we will benefit from them the same way we would if we had heard them live from his talks. His teachings become the truth only when we follow them and practice Dhamma to wash away greed, anger and obsessions. The truth in the teachings will stay in our mind and will provide protection so that we can weather the hard times and remain happy in any situations.

Conclusion

My life has been with the Dhamma since the day I started to read a Dhamma book. Reading my first Dhamma book filled me with the conviction that I wanted to practice the Dhamma, and I have been eager to focus on it to the exclusion of almost everything else. In so doing, the results materialized quickly. The Lord Buddha predicted seven years at the most. When I read the prediction, I never gave much thought, as to whether that was possible or not, because at that time I just wanted to practice Dhamma without interruption and without giving up. The only thing that I was afraid of was failure. I did not care how long it would take me to attain the ultimate goal. I knew that as long as I kept on practicing, I would definitely get there. To me, practicing Dhamma is like eating. If I keep on eating, I will eventually get full.

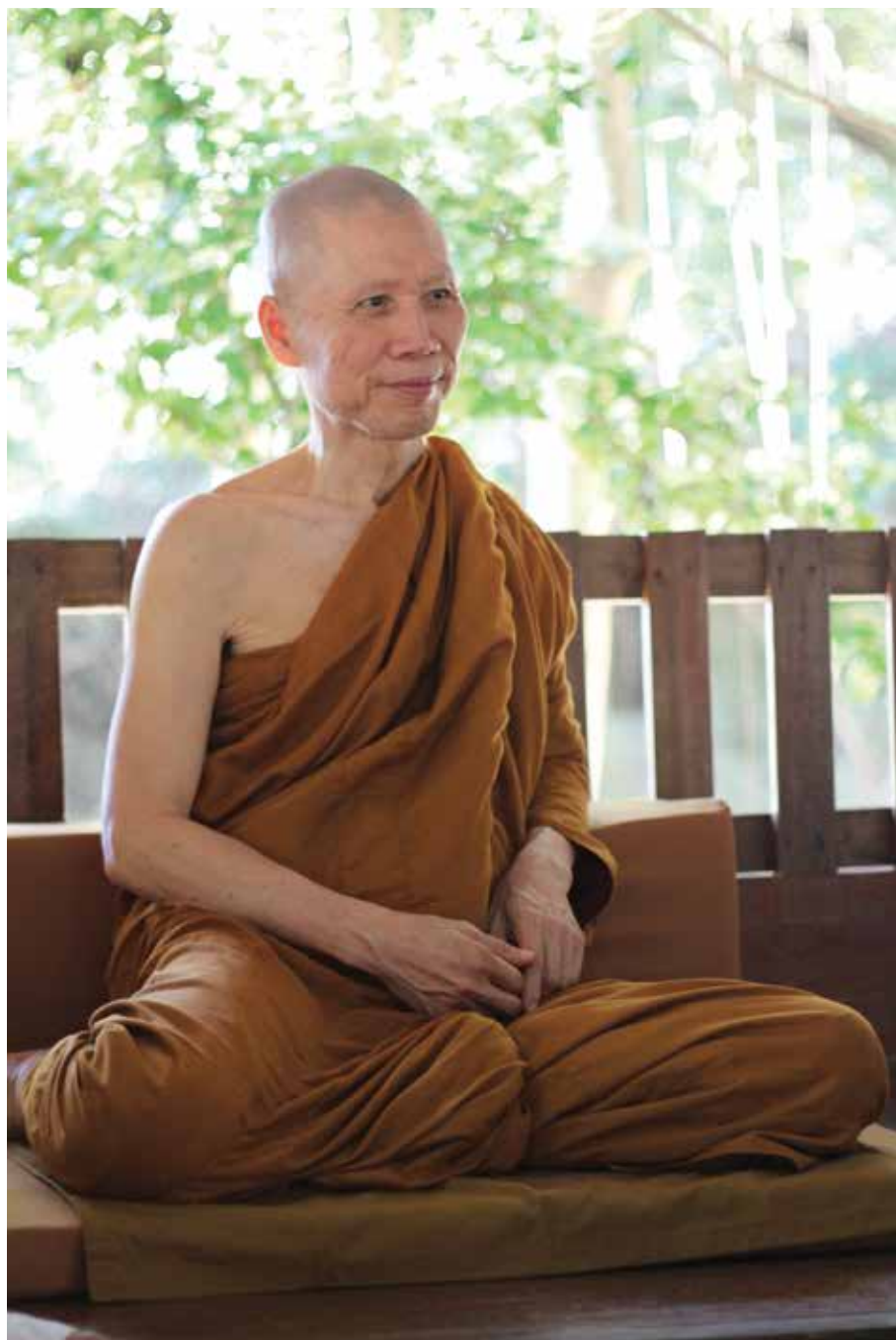






Dhamma

on the Mountain



I never used to give Dhamma talks, but it had become necessary because if I didn't do it, nobody else at the temple would do it. When I began, I felt a bit nervous but as I continued, I realized that I could do it, so I just let it flow. I used to prepare and memorize the Dhamma talk to make sure that I knew what I was going to say. But now I no longer need to do that. I just let the words flow out naturally like turning on the water faucet.



Natthi Santi Paraṃ Sukkhaṃ. No happiness can be greater than the happiness of the absolute peace that the practitioner of mental development will come to possess following the total extinction of defilements. The happiness generated by Samadhi (meditative calm and concentration) is temporary, comparable to a movie preview. The happiness of Nibbāna, on the other hand, is compared to the main feature that is shown all day and all night, 24 hours a day. Whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down, you will always be in this state of supreme bliss. There is no need to do any more Dhamma practice. You have your fill of Dhamma, abstaining from committing sin and letting go of your attachment to doing good deeds.



Money, gold, and other worldly possessions are not the sources of happiness. The true source of happiness is the virtue that dwells in your heart.

Morality, however great or small, will lessen the strength of desire in your heart. When desire decreases, happiness will increase. Happiness is in your heart; therefore, wealth and worldly possessions are not important. We should have in our possession only necessary things. For example, this Sālā serves the purpose of protecting us from the sun and the rain and has enough space for needed activities. It does not have to cost a lot to build. The major consideration in acquiring anything should be based on its function or purpose. Cost should not be the main factor. If a cheaper item can serve the same purpose as the more expensive one, we should choose the cheaper one, because it will set a good example. We do not have to put in time and effort to bring in more money to build something that is costly but will serve the same purpose as the one that is less expensive. The same goes for food. A meal that costs 50 baht and a meal that costs 500 baht serve the same purpose. They both fill you up. Meals eaten at the temple will fill you up as much as expensive meals at a hotel. Both experiences will pass. It is better to save the time you will spend on earning money to pay for expensive meals to do something to benefit society and religion.



Do merit for merit's sake. Do merit and give alms from your heart. Do not expect return or compensation of the deed from anyone. Do it out of loving-kindness (Mettā). Let go. Do not hold on to things, property, and wealth. Having more than what is needed is not beneficial to you. On the contrary, it will create suffering because you will worry about it being lost or stolen. It is better to offer it as alms in order to get rid of the problem, and at the same time you will feel happy because you have helped those in need. This is the purpose of merit making and alms giving.



Nowadays there is confusion in our society because of the lack of religion in people's hearts. Religion has its presence in temples, in various objects, but people do not embrace religion in their hearts. Their hearts are filled with defilements and cravings. They go to the temple to argue or to fight with each other. **If you want to go to the temple, you must go in peace, go with the intention of not causing problems for others. The ultimate aims of going to the temple are to practice Dhamma, to improve oneself through meditation, and to observe the precepts.** Do not pay attention to other people's opinions or viewpoints. It is better to behave like a small mouse, rather than a big lion. A big lion might get into a fight whereas a small mouse will not run into a problem. As a result, you will have time to meditate.



Education through reading Dhamma and practicing on your own without the benefit of a mentor will be difficult and might not take you to your destination. This is because you might be tempted by desires and trapped by delusion. For example, you may think you have attained enlightenment, even though you are still a layman. You think that if you do not infringe on others, do not have greed, do not have desire, you have reached enlightenment. You do not know that, living as a layman, you are still trapped in visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations. If you live as a monk in the forest, will you feel the same way you feel when you are at home or not? Will you feel peaceful and calm or not? If you have not gone through the experience, you will not know the difference. If you want to know, you will have to go through the test. For example, you might want to find out if your fear is gone. You might think that you are no longer afraid because you are in a place where there is nothing to trigger your fear. If you are in a place where you are surrounded by danger like being in a forest, will you still feel calm in that kind of situation? If you have not tested yourself in various situations, you might be deluded.



We have to be aggressive and go on the offensive. We must not wait for defilements to first launch an attack before we start to fight. We will risk not being able to win if defilements launch their attack first. This is because upon attacking, defilements will overpower us and leave us totally weak. Whatever defilements desire, such as craving for food or drinks, we will have to give in. We have to go on an offense by setting limits and a timetable regarding how much to eat or to drink. For example, if we limit our food intake to once a day, whatever we wish to eat, we will have to eat during that time. Whatever we wish to drink, we will only drink at that time. Beyond that time we will only drink water. This is how it has to be managed.

Watching television is off limits. Sell the TV set. Remove anything that is connected with entertainment. Donate all entertainment gadgets. That is what we call **being aggressive and going on the offensive**. If we sit and wait, defilements will entice us to watch this and that, eat this and that. When this kind of craving occurs, we might not be able to win the fight. Without the **props** of the defilements, when the craving occurs but we do not have anything to chew or to watch, we will not have a problem.

We have not seen or recognized the value of having peace of mind because we do not often look into our mind. We have been preoccupied with observing material things, gauging their values, and neglecting the care of our mind, which has been left withered, lonely, hungry, and full of cravings. We do not look into our mind. And even if we do, we look in the wrong place. The recitation of “Buddho” and concentration on the meditation objects are practices that bring us back to focus on observing our mind, its condition, and how to take care of it. These practices should be repeated as often as we can. If we do not perform the practices, we will not be able to see the condition of our mind and the care it needs.



Life is like a candle. Once lit, it will continue to be shortened. As you age, your life span becomes shorter. The number increases –now you are 40 or 50 years old, but the remaining years of your life continue to be shorter. The remaining time to practice in line with the Path (Magga) gradually decreases. Do not waste time. You should get on with this. Relieve yourself from worldly affairs. Do away with whatever is not essential. Commit yourself to this work of mental development. This kind of work is genuine, leading you to the cessation of suffering while endless worldly work takes you nowhere.



The Dhamma practice aims at eliminating wants and desires in order to bring peace to your heart.

It is a waste of time to look at things that do not extinguish desires. Take, for example, the sun and the trees. These bring you nothing useful because they are not things that create problems. You should look at things that bring you problems, things that create turmoil and suffering in your heart. You should look at them—things such as deterioration of your body and that of your loved ones, so you will accept the fact that one day all of us will end up this way. Our bodies as well as those of our loved ones will one day stop functioning, becoming ashes and bone fragments. That is how you should look. When looking at the person you desire to have sexual relationship with, you should see the skeleton within the body. If your loved one dies today, can you still think of having an intimate relationship with this person? You can be with your loved one while he or she is alive, but when your loved one is dead, you will think that it is a ghost lying there and you will not want to be with him or her any more.

This is how you should think in order to extinguish sexual desire because sexual desire does not bring

peace. If you want happiness generated by peace or calm, you must eliminate your sexual desire. You must regularly contemplate loathsomeness (Asubha). Think about the unattractiveness of the body. Think about the situation when one is dead for three days and the body decomposes and emanates stench. Do you still want to have sexual relationship with this body? This way of thinking will extinguish your desire. You can then live alone, and your heart will have peace. You will achieve genuine happiness without the help of impermanent things. As someone you care about is impermanent, when this person is gone, you will be sad and lonely. If you have happiness in your heart, you do not want anything else. That is the reason why you should contemplate eliminating everything from your life.

You should be aware that material things will eventually leave us or will deteriorate. Even our own body will also deteriorate. However, the deterioration of the body does not mean that you will no longer be living. You are still alive; however, you have to decide what kind of existence you will have. You will either have a miserable existence or you will be free of misery. If you accept the impermanence of your body, you will

escape misery, be indifferent and happy like nothing has happened. If you use wisdom (Paññā) in your contemplation, you will see that it is even better not to have to take care of your body any longer because taking care of it is such a burden. From the time you get up in the morning until the time you go to sleep at night, you have to breathe, look for water to drink, prepare food to eat, clean your body, and go to the toilet when needed. Everyone's body requires such activities. Without body, such activities are not required. Using wisdom, you will conclude that death is a good thing. Death relieves all responsibilities and burden. If you still have your body, even though there is no physical desire or suffering, you will still have the responsibility of taking care of your body. The Lord Buddha himself had to go around taking alms, eating, taking a bath, and taking medicine when sick. Therefore, you should contemplate deterioration of everything so that you will not hold on to them; you will not cling to your worldly possessions to provide you with happiness. This is because you have more genuine happiness. If you have peace of mind, you do not need anything else. **If you can let go, your mind will experience happiness, calm, and comfort. You will not be mistaken by clinging to or coveting this and that in your quest for happiness.**



Westerners say that the truth is painful. So too is medicine like tincture of iodine that stings but heals the wound fast. Buddhism teaches only the truth. If a teacher of Buddhism has not yet realized the truth, he will modify the truth. Luangta said: **“I don’t modify the truth. The truth of Dhamma is above modification. I don’t modify the truth to please my students. I give the truth of Dhamma precedence over everything else. If I don’t give the truth of Dhamma to those who seek it, how then will they acquire the truth of Dhamma?”** Students of Buddhism want to learn the truth of Dhamma. They don’t want to be pleased. To learn the truth of Dhamma, you have to be brave—brave in facing the truth—and not be afraid of the truth. If you are afraid of the truth, don’t study Buddhism because you are just like a person who is afraid of the light, who enjoys staying in the dark and remaining immersed in his or her own imagination.



If we do not push ourselves, there is no one who will push us. Teachers have taught us, but they are not able to drag or push us. We have to push ourselves.

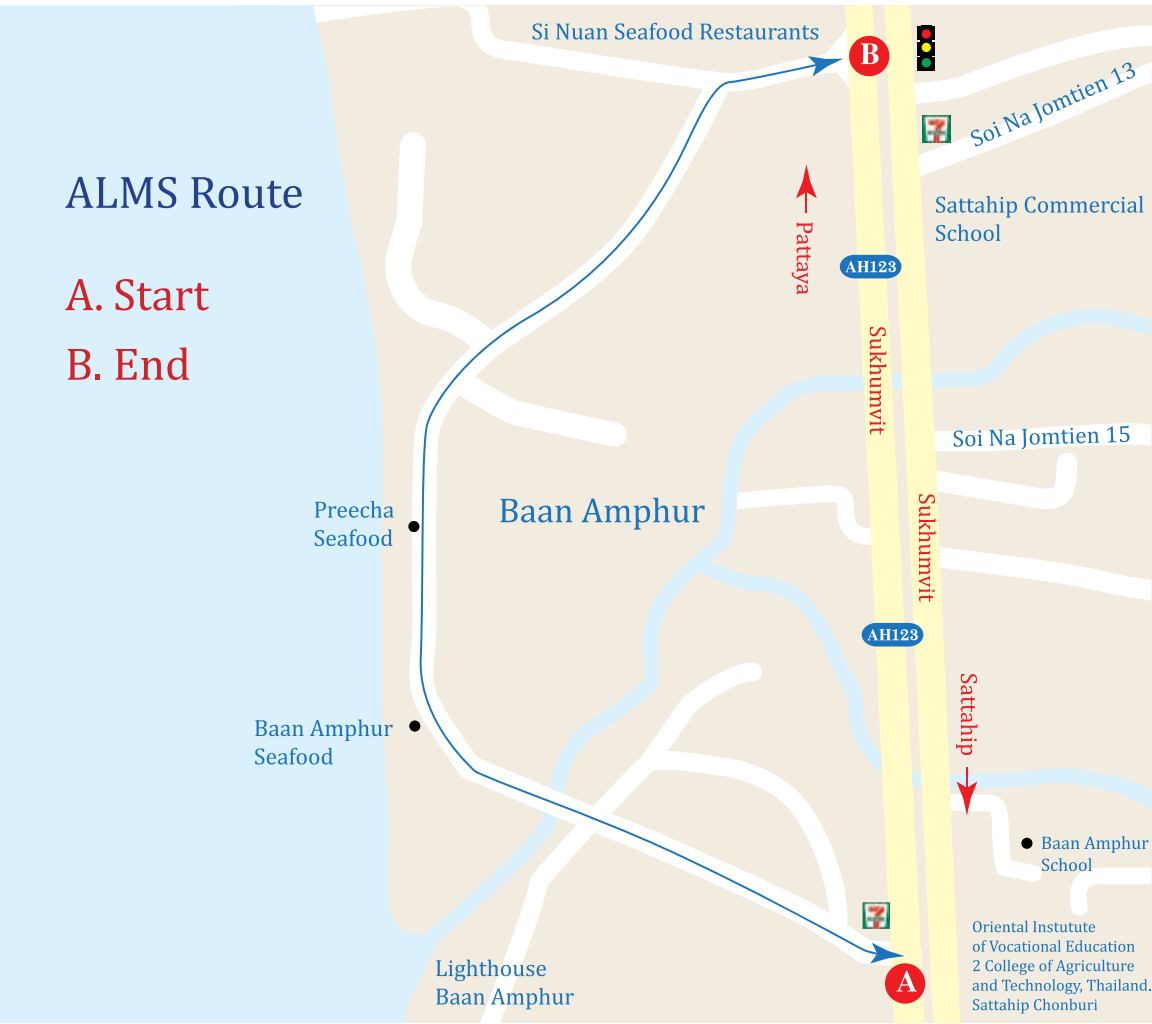
We have to be reminded of thinking about death on a regular basis. It will stimulate us to persevere. We do not know when we will die. Therefore, we should not be negligent and complacent. We should think about the Lord Buddha and his disciples all the time. Look at their examples. They were once like us, even though they were born in the midst of fame and wealth, surrounded by pleasures deriving from the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, and the body. How could they have attained Nibbāna? They persevered and had wisdom (Paññā). We, perhaps, do not have wisdom; that is why we do not see the danger of fame and fortune, and of pleasures derived from the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, and the body. We are like a fish caught with a lure in its mouth and afraid to remove the lure from the mouth because we do not want to endure pain. When we remove ourselves from fame, fortune, and happiness, we are afraid of suffering. We are afraid of loneliness and sadness if we go to stay at the temple. So we continue to remain prisoners trapped in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.



The goal of Dhamma practice is to let go. To set your mind free from stress. Your mind creates stress by interfering with other people and things. You want to change them. But you don't know that you can't really control or change them. Because they are Anattā: According to the Lord Buddha, **“Sabbe Dhammā Anattā.”** All phenomena including humans are natural processes, they are without a self. You can't order them to be like this or like that. If you want unceasing happiness in your heart, you will have to let go of all things in this world. If you don't, they will make you suffer.

What makes you suffer? Everything in this world, including your physical body, does. Your body is a heap of suffering, so are your spouse's, your children's and your grandchildren's, as well as your possessions, and all the visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. You are living unknowingly with these hoards of suffering. Without the teaching of the Lord Buddha, you would never know this truth. You would forever be stuck with these masses of suffering. After death, you will be reborn and repeat this cycle of suffering again. But if you study Buddhism and take up the Dhamma practice, you will have peace and happiness. You will see that your suffering is the result of your clinging to things. You will then use Sati (mindfulness), Samādhi (meditation), and Paññā (wisdom) to let go of your clinging. You will let go of what you like and what you dislike. When you have let go of everything, you will then have accomplished your mission. **“Vusitaṃ Brahma Cariyaṃ”.**





Addendum

Daily Life Schedule of Phra Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto

- 5:54 a.m. – 6:40 a.m. (approximate time) Walking with other monks from Wat Yan for alms around Baan Amphur

- 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. At the Sālā (dining hall) at Wat Yan. - Morning meal and conversation with visitors afterwards. On every Buddhist Holy Day, Saturday, and Sunday, Phra Ajahn Suchart gives a 30-minute Dhamma talk (around 8:00 a.m.) at the Sālā (dining hall).

- 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. At Chuladham Sālā on Chi-On Mountain – Giving a Dhamma talk on every Holy Day, Saturday, Sunday, and Buddhist Holiday while other weekdays will be Dhamma conversation with visitors.

****Please do not visit Phra Ajahn outside of the scheduled time.****

****When ladies plan to visit Phra Ajahn or to attend a Dhamma Talk, please refrain from wearing short pants or short skirt around the temple or the meditation retreat.****

****Phra Ajahn Suchart does not accept any out- of-temple events or functions.****

Phra Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto Websites

www.kammattthana.com

www.PhraSuchart.com

www.facebook.com/PhraAjarnSuchart



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Glossary

Abhidhamma:

(1) In the discourses of the Pāli Canon, this term simply means “higher Dhamma,” and a systematic attempt to define the Buddha’s teachings and understand their interrelationships. (2) A later collection of analytical treatises based on lists of categories drawn from the teachings in the discourses, added to the Canon several centuries after the Buddha’s life.

Ācariya:

Teacher, mentor; also used as a term of respect when referring to a senior monk. When capitalized, Ācariya is the respectful title given to a teacher by his disciples, as in Ācariya Mun and Ācariya Sao.

Ajaan, ajahn, achaaan, etc.:

(Thai). Teacher; mentor. Equivalent to the Pāli Ācariya.

Anattā:

Not-self; ownerless.

Anicca:

Impermanence; constant change.

Arahant:

One who is worthy, one who attains the ultimate state of Nibbāna.

Avijjā:

Fundamental ignorance; ignorance of one's own true nature.

Baan:

(Thai). Village.

Bala:

Power; strength; health; energy.

Bhāvanā:

Mental cultivation or development; meditation.

Bhikkhu:

A Buddhist monk; a man who has given up the householder's life to live a life of heightened virtue in accordance with the Vinaya in general, and the Pāṭimokkha rules in particular.

Bojjhaṅga:

'The seven factors of enlightenment', consists of mindfulness, investigation of the law, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. Because they lead to enlightenment, they are called factors of enlightenment.

Buddha:

The name given to one who rediscovers for himself the liberating path of Dhamma, after a long period of its having been forgotten by the world. According to tradition, a long line of Buddhas stretches off into the distant past. The most recent Buddha was born Siddhattha Gotama in India in the sixth century BCE. A well-educated and wealthy young man, he

relinquished his family and his princely inheritance in the prime of his life to search for true freedom and an end to suffering (Dukkha). After seven years of austerities in the forest, he rediscovered the “middle way” and achieved his goal, becoming Buddha.

Buddhānussati:

Recollection of the Buddha.

Buddho:

Supremely enlightened. A traditional epithet for the Buddha, Buddho is a preparatory meditation-word (Parikamma) that is repeated mentally while reflecting on the Buddha’s special qualities. In its simplest form, one focuses attention exclusively on the repetition of “Buddho”, continuously thinking the word “Buddho” while in meditation. One should simply be aware of each repetition of “Buddho, Buddho, Buddho” to the exclusion of all else. Once it becomes continuous, this simple repetition will produce results of peace and calm in the heart.

Chanda:

(1). Will, aspiration; the will to do; resolve; zeal; desire; impulse; wish; loving interest; desire for truth and understanding. (2). Consent; declaration of consent to an official act by an absentee; proxy vote.

Chedi, Phra Chedi:

(Thai). Equivalent to Pāli term “Cetiya” which refers to: (1) person, place or object worthy of worship;

reminder. (2). A sepulchral monument; pagoda; shrine; dagoba; bell-shaped stupa (with a slender spire); tapering-spired stupa.

Citta:

The underlying essence of mind where Dhamma and the Kilesas dwell. In its pure state it is indefinable. It is beyond birth and death. It controls the Khandhas, but does not die when they do.

Dāna:

Generosity; giving, liberality; offering, alms. Specifically, giving of any of the four requisites to the monastic order. More generally, the inclination to give, without any expectation of the reward.

Desanā:

Preaching; discourse; sermon; instruction; Dhamma talk.

Dhamma (Skt. Dharma):

Truth; the ultimate order underlying everything; the teaching of the Buddha.

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (Skt. Dharmacakra Pravartana Sūtra):

The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Dhamma is a Buddhist text that is considered to be a record of the first teaching given by the Buddha after he attained enlightenment. According to tradition, the Buddha gave this teaching in Sarnath, India, to the five ascetics (his former companions with whom he had spent six years practicing austerities). The main topic of this Sutta is the Four Noble Truths,

which are the central teachings of Buddhism that provide a unifying theme, or conceptual framework, for all of Buddhist thought. This Sutta also introduces the Buddhist concepts of the middle way, impermanence, and dependent origination.

Dhammayuttika-nikāya:

The Dhammayuttika Sect.; an order of Theravāda Buddhist monks.

Dhutaṅga:

Ascetic practices. The Dhutaṅgas are a set of 13 specialized ascetic practices that Buddhist monks voluntarily undertake. Their purpose in each case is to counteract specific mental defilements (Kilesas). They are: 1) Wearing only robes made from discarded cloth; 2) Wearing only the three principle robes and no others; 3) Going on alms round everyday without fail; 4) Not omitting any house on alms round; 5) Eating only one meal per day; 6) Eating all food directly from the alms bowl; 7) Refusing to accept food offered after the alms round; 8) Living in the forest; 9) Dwelling at the foot of a tree; 10) Living in the open – not at the foot of a tree or under a roof; 11) Living in a cemetery; 12) Being satisfied with whichever bed or resting place is available; 13) The sitter's practice; that is to say, sitting, standing or walking, but never lying down.

Dukkha:

Suffering, pain, discontent; the unsatisfactory nature of all phenomena. Dukkha is the condition

of fundamental discontent that is inherent within the very nature of all sentient existence. Essentially, it is the underlying sense of dissatisfaction that ultimately undermines even the most pleasant experiences, for everything in the phenomenal world is subject to change and therefore unreliable. Thus, all of Samsāric existence is characterized by Dukkha.

Dukkha-vedanā:

Painful feeling; unpleasant feeling.

Isaan:

(Thai) The northeastern region of Thailand.

Kamma (Skt. Karma):

Intentional acts that result in states of being and birth.

Kammaṭṭhāna:

Literally, “basis of work”, Kammaṭṭhāna refers to the “occupation” of a practicing Buddhist monk: namely, the contemplation of certain meditation themes that are conducive to uprooting the defiling forces of greed, hatred, and delusion from his mind. In the ordination procedure, a new monk is taught the five basic Kammaṭṭhāna that lay the groundwork for contemplation of the body: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin. By extension, Kammaṭṭhāna includes all 40 of the classical Buddhist meditation subjects. The term Kammaṭṭhāna is most often used to identify the particular Thai forest tradition and lineage that was founded by Ācariya Sao and Ācariya Mun.

Kaṭhina:

A ceremony, held in the fourth month of the rainy season, in which a Saṅgha of Bhikkhus receives a gift of cloth from lay people, bestows it on one of their members, and then makes it into a robe before dawn of the following day.

Kāya:

Body. Usually refers to the physical body, but sometimes refers to the mental body.

Kāyagatā-sati:

Mindfulness immersed in the body. This is a blanket term covering several meditation themes: keeping the breath in mind; being mindful of the body's posture; being mindful of one's activities; analyzing the body into its parts; analyzing the body into its physical properties; contemplating the fact that the body is inevitably subject to death and disintegration.

Khandha:

Literally, "group" or "aggregate". In the plural, Khandhas refer to the five physical and mental components of personality (body, feelings, memory, thoughts, consciousness) and to the sensory experience in general (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations). Also known as "aggregates of attachment" because they are the objects of a craving for personal existence, they are, in fact, simply classes of natural phenomena that continuously arise and cease and are devoid of any enduring self-identity whatsoever.

Kilesa:

Mental defilement. Kilesa are negative psychological and emotional forces existing within the hearts and minds of all living beings. These defilements are of three basic types: greed, hatred, and delusion. All of them are ingenerate pollutants that contaminate the way people think, speak and act, and thus corrupt from within the very intention and purpose of their existence, binding them (through the inevitable consequences of their actions) ever more firmly to the perpetual cycle of rebirth. Their manifestations are many and varied. They include passion, jealousy, envy, conceit, vanity, pride, stinginess, arrogance, anger, resentment, etc., plus all sorts of more subtle variations that invariably produce the unwholesome and harmful states of mind which are responsible for so much human misery. These various Kilesa-driven mental states interact and combine to create patterns of conduct that perpetuate people's suffering and give rise to all of the world's disharmony.

Kusala:

Wholesome, skillful, good, meritorious. An action characterized by this moral quality (Kusala-kamma) is bound to result (eventually) in happiness and a favorable outcome. Actions characterized by its opposite (Akusala-kamma) lead to sorrow.

Kuṭī:

An abode of a Buddhist monk or novice; hut or home for a monk.

Luangpor:

(Thai). ‘Venerable Father’, a reverential term for an elderly monk.

Luangpu:

(Thai). ‘Venerable (paternal) Grandfather’, a reverential term for an elderly monk.

Luangta:

(Thai). ‘Venerable (maternal) Grandfather’, a reverential term for an elderly monk.

Magga:

Path; usually refers to the eight-fold path leading to Nibbāna.

Mahā:

A monk who has passed the Pāli grade 3 (Parien 3) examination. This is not a rank, but a degree.

Majjhimā:

Middle; appropriate; just right.

Mettā:

Loving-kindness; friendliness; pure love.

Mondop:

(Thai). Equivalent to Pāli term “Maṇḍapa ” which refers to a pavilion; temporary shed; square spired pavilion.

Nibbāna (Skt. Nirvāṇa):

Literally meaning “extinguished”, Nibbāna is compared to a lamp or a fire going out. That is to

say, the threefold fire of greed, hatred and delusion goes out in the heart due to lack of fuel. The extinguishing of this fire frees the mind from everything that binds it to the cycle of rebirth and the suffering experienced therein. Nibbāna is Absolute Freedom, the Supreme Happiness. As such, it is the ultimate goal of the Buddhist training. It is said to be Unborn, Deathless, and Unconditioned, but being totally detached from all traces of conventional reality, a description of what Nibbāna is, or is not, lies wholly beyond the range of conventional figures of speech.

Opanayiko:

Referring inwardly; to be brought inward. An epithet for the Dhamma.

Pāli:

An ancient variant of Sanskrit, Pāli is the literary language of the early Buddhists and the language in which the texts of the original Buddhist Canon are preserved.

Paṃsukūla:

To perform a requiem for the soul of the dead.

Paññā:

Wisdom; intuitive insight.

Pāramī:

Perfection of the character. A group of ten qualities developed over many lifetime by a Bodhisatta, which appear as a group in the Pāli Canon only in the Jātaka ('Birth Stone'): generosity (Dāna), virtue

(Sīla), renunciation (Nekkhamma), discernment (Paññā), energy/persistence (Viriya), patience/forbearance (Khanti), truthfulness (Sacca), determination (Adhiṭṭhāna), good will (Mettā), and equanimity (Upekkhā).

Pariyatti:

Theoretical understanding of Dhamma obtained through reading, study, and learning.

Pāṭimokkha:

The Buddhist monk's basic code of discipline. It comprises 227 rules of conduct and is usually recited rule by rule before an assembly of monks once every fortnight. The Buddhist monk's basic code of monastic discipline, consisting of 227 rules for monks (Bhikkhus) and 310 for nuns (Bhikkhunis).

Phra:

(Thai). Venerable. Used as a prefix to the name of a monk (Bhikkhu).

Piṇḍapāta:

Walking on the alms round to receive food.

Rai:

(Thai). A unit of area, equal to 1,600 square meters (40 m × 40 m), used for measuring land area. Its current size is precisely derived from the meter, but is neither part of nor recognized by the modern metric system, the International System. It is commonly used in Thailand and equals 16 acres.

Sālā:

Meeting hall in a monastery, a hall where the monks can meet and eat. The hall is also used for acts within the Saṅgha, and for Dhamma talks.

Samādhī:

Meditative calm; absorbed concentration, having many levels and types.

Saṅgha:

The community of the Buddha's disciples. On the conventional level, this means the Buddhist monastic order. On the 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.

Saṅkhāra:

As a general term, Sankhāra refers to all forces that form or condition things in the phenomenal world of mind and matter, and to those formed or conditioned phenomena that result. As the fourth component of personality (Sankhāra khandha), it refers to thought and imagination; that is, the thoughts that constantly form in the mind and conceptualize about one's personal perceptions. Sankhāra creates these ideas and then hands them on to Saññā, which interprets and elaborates on them, making assumptions about their significance.

Sati:

Mindfulness, self-collectedness, powers of reference and retention. In some contexts, the word Sati when used alone covers alertness (Sampajañña) as well.

Satipaṭṭhāna:

Foundation of mindfulness; frame of reference — body, feelings, mind, and mental events, viewed in and of themselves as they occur.

Sīla:

Morality; moral behavior; the five moral precepts.

Sukha-vedanā:

Pleasant sensations; pleasant feelings.

Sutta:

A discourse or sermon spoken by the Buddha. After the Buddha's death, the Suttas he delivered to his disciples were passed down in the Pāli language according to a well-established oral tradition. They were finally committed to written form in Sri Lanka around 100 BCE and form the basis for the Buddha's teachings that we have today.

Taṇhā:

Craving – craving for sensuality, for becoming, and for not becoming; the chief cause of Dukkha.

Theravāda:

“Doctrine of the Elders”. Handed down to us in the Pāli language, it is the oldest form of the Buddha's teachings. Theravāda is the only one of the early schools of Buddhism to have survived into the present. It is currently the dominant form of Buddhism in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Burma.

Ti-lakkhaṇa:

Three characteristics inherent in all conditioned phenomena — being inconstant (Anicca), stressful (Dukkha), and not-self (Anattā).

Tipiṭaka (Skt. Tripitaka):

The Buddhist (Pāli) Canon. Literally, “three baskets” in reference to the three principal divisions of the Canon: the Vinaya Piṭaka (disciplinary rules), Sutta Piṭaka (discourses), and Abhidhamma Piṭaka (abstract philosophical treatises).

Upekkhā:

Equanimity. One of the ten perfections (Paramīs) and one of the four “sublime abodes” (Brahma-vihāra).

Upekkhā-vedanā:

Indifferent feelings (neither pleasure nor pain); neutral feelings.

Ubosot:

(Thai) or short “bot” is a building in a Buddhist Wat. It is the holiest prayer room, also called “ordination hall” as it is where ordinations take place. Equivalent to Pāli term “Uposathagara,” which refers to a hall used for rituals on the Uposatha days — the Buddhist Sabbath, which falls four times a month on the full moon, new moon, and eighth day after each.

Vassa:

The annual three-month rains retreat, when a bhikkhu is required to remain in a single residence.

Vedanā:

Feeling - pleasure (ease), pain (stress), or neither pleasure nor pain.

Vinaya:

The code of conduct and discipline of a Bhikkhu.

Vipassanā:

Clear intuitive insight. Aided by a clear, quiet state of meditative calm, Vipassanā is spontaneous insight into physical and mental phenomena, as they arise and cease, that sees them for what they really are: inherently impermanent and unstable, bound up with pain and suffering, and devoid of anything that can be identified as “self”.

Viriya:

Persistence; energy. One of the five spiritual faculties and powers (see Bala), one of the seven factors of enlightenment (see Bojjhaṅga), and identical with right effort of the Eightfold Path (see Magga).

Wat:

(Thai). Monastery; temple-monastery; temple.

SOURCES:

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