

The Autobiography of  
**Venerable Ācariya**  
**Thoon Khippapañño**

*Volume One*

By Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño



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*Written by*  
**Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño**

*Translated by*  
Neecha Thian-Ngern



SAN FRAN DHAMMARAM TEMPLE  
SAN FRANCISCO

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## Translator's Note

The Sanskrit version of words like “karma” and “dharma” are prevalent in Buddhism’s English narrative today. However, the Theravāda tradition uses Pāli, so those familiar Sanskrit words will take on slightly different spellings in some cases—such as “kamma” and “dhamma.” Additionally, there are differences in meaning highlighted by instances when dhamma is capitalized or not. In its uppercase form, Dhamma means the Buddha’s teachings, while its lowercase form refers to the laws of nature, the truth about the way things are, or mental objects.

As is common in any language, Pāli words can take on different meanings depending on their context. For example, paññā mainly translates to wisdom but can also denote examination, analysis, thought, reasoning, discernment, or intuitive insight. Avijjā and moha mean ignorance and delusion, respectively. When translated into Thai as “loeng,” the definitions of avijjā and moha expand and take on more descriptive definitions that may aid the reader in understanding what ignorance and delusion mean in Dhamma: lost, stray, disoriented, enraptured, spellbound, captivated, obsessed, intoxicated, stupid, and of course, delusional and ignorant. Avijjā and moha mean not knowing, or not seeing things as they are in reality. It is believing a lie or fantasy and not knowing the truth.

The widespread practice of silent, sitting meditation that is the face of Buddhism today is commonly referred to as “samādhi.” However, the original Pāli term doesn’t only come in the tranquil version. Samādhi translates to concentration or unification of the mind. Calm, serene meditation is only one of many incarnations of concentration.

In this text, “meditation” will primarily be used to refer to the contemporary connotation of samādhi (sitting or tranquil meditation) and not the denotation of the word (contemplation or deep reflection).

Buddhist teachers and texts, including this one, frequently mention kilesa and taṇhā. But what exactly are they? Taṇhā is desire. Kilesa literally translates as torment of the mind but is more commonly translated as defilement or mental impurity. Defilements are the things, the representations, or the embodiments of desire. For instance, expensive cars, the latest and greatest gadgets, brand name clothing, or a large house in an affluent neighborhood are all defilements associated with the desire to be rich. Like desires, defilements are limitless. Luang Por Thoon often refers to defilements and desires as deceiving us and leading us to be reborn within this world.

Āsava is sometimes mentioned alongside kilesa and taṇhā, but tends to take on more prominence shortly prior to one’s attaining full enlightenment, when one realizes that all āsava will be destroyed. Āsava is commonly defined as canker, taint, or mental intoxication. In a practical sense, when kilesa and taṇhā come together, āsava results. For instance, brand-name items are the defilements (kilesa) connected to the desire (taṇhā) to be well-known in society. Once you procure those items, you attribute your acceptance and popularity to owning them. Or if you don’t procure them, you attribute your lack of acceptance and lack of popularity to not owning them. Either way, the impression or bias gained from that permanent view is called āsava. Āsavas intoxicate the mind, leading you to see things sideways and get caught up in illogical, senseless notions.

Ñāṇa and dassana are important concepts in Luang Por Thoon’s teachings. Ñāṇa is knowing or understanding. Dassana is seeing or

realizing. For instance, the Buddha taught that birth, aging, sickness, and death are normal. So, we know that aging is normal. Every day, we see actual evidence of how we have aged—wrinkles, white hairs, loss of strength and flexibility—and how things around us age—toothbrushes fraying, clothes wearing thin, vegetables wilting, food going stale. However, if you don't fuse the theory that you know with the reality that you see, you won't be able to profoundly penetrate the truth about aging. Once you do connect them, you will both understand and realize the indisputable truth about aging—it is impermanent, it causes suffering, it isn't who we are and it doesn't belong to us, and it is normal. This is the “knowing and seeing” that Luang Por Thoon frequently refers to throughout this text.

In Thai, *ārammaṇa* denotes mood, emotion, or temper. In Pāli, *ārammaṇa* denotes an object, sense-object, preoccupation, or focus of the mind at a given moment. *Ārammaṇa* is basically the sense-object, or what happens when the internal sense-bases (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body) interact with the external sense-bases (form, sound, scent, taste, touch). Once the interaction occurs, there are three types of preoccupations: 1. pleasing (*iṭṭhārammaṇa*), 2. displeasing (*aniṭṭhārammaṇa*), and 3. indifferent, neither pleasing nor displeasing (*upekkhā-ārammaṇa*). When the pleasing *ārammaṇa* occurs, you repeat it in order to hold onto it. When the displeasing *ārammaṇa* occurs, you try to push it away to get rid of it. When you don't feel completely fulfilled about something because it isn't clearly pleasing or clearly displeasing, it becomes a lingering, unresolved *ārammaṇa* (this is referred to elsewhere as a neutral *ārammaṇa*). The residue of these three types of preoccupations or objects (*ārammaṇa*) that you hold onto are called mind-objects (*dhammārammaṇa*). Pleasing *ārammaṇas* (*iṭṭhārammaṇa*) lead to

desire for existence (*bhava-tanhā*), displeasing ārammaṇas (*anītthārammaṇa*) lead to desire for non-existence (*vibhava-tanhā*), and indifferent ārammaṇas (*upekkhā-ārammaṇa*) lead to ignorance (*avijjā*).

Sammuti is a term found in both Pāli and Thai. In Thai, sammuti means pretend, assume, suppose, or not real. It is translated from Pāli into English as general opinion, consent, construct, convention, supposition, or anything that is conjured into being by the mind. It is labeling things so that they can be referred to and then coming to perceive those things in terms of those labels. For instance, “mother,” in a technical and objective sense, is the physical being that provides an egg. But “mother” has been expanded to include common cultural norms: one who loves, nurtures, and raises you; one who stays at home, cooks, and cleans; one who sacrifices her life for her child. And once you buy into these conventional characterizations and begin to expect “mother” to be a certain way, suffering arises when a mother doesn’t raise her own child, a mother is abusive and neglectful, a mother doesn’t fit into the homemaker mold, or when it is the child who sacrifices for the mother. These labels, constructs, and conventional realities are the sammuti that make up the world as we know it. That is why Luang Por Thoon refers to this world as the “mahā-sammuti,” or great sammuti.

Puñña is translated as merit or meritorious action, but for those who didn’t grow up in a Buddhist culture, what does that even mean? Making merit can be a virtuous deed that is tangible, like donating goods to a respectable temple or building a pagoda to honor the Buddha. It can also be intangible, like observing the precepts or dedicatedly practicing Dhamma. Its cousin, kusala, is translated as wholesome, skillful, or clever. Luang Por Thoon has explained in Q&A

sessions that kusala is wisdom (*paññā*), and kusala comes before puñña. Kusala is the wisdom to seek and recognize opportunities to make merit in a way that leads to heaven or enlightenment. Commonly referred to together, “puñña-kusala” basically represents something good, or good kamma. Their counterpart, *pāpa*, is translated as demerit or evil. Like puñña, *pāpa* can be tangible, like stealing something, or intangible, like disrespecting a teacher. In other words, it refers to something bad, or bad kamma. Buddhists are encouraged to cultivate puñña and abstain from *pāpa*, as we will have to account for all of our actions—both good and bad.

Navigating naming conventions can be confusing, as there are many ways of referring to a single individual. When Thoon Nonruecha ordained, he was given a Dhamma name reflecting his lightning-fast wisdom: Khippapañño. Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño is his full, formal monk name, while Luang Por Thoon or simply Luang Por is the familiar name his students call him. “Ācariya” is the Pāli word for teacher (Ajarn, Ajahn, or Ajaan are the common Thai versions), that is typically used for monks who have been ordained for at least ten rains retreats. “Kru Ba” is a Thai term for teacher that is used to address junior monks in the northeastern regions of Thailand. “Phra,” which means monk in Thai, is used like the “Venerable” prefix to a monk’s name—Phra Ācariya Thoon, or simply Phra Ācariya. In Thai, “Luang” means honorable or venerable, “Pee” means elder sibling, “Por” means father, and “Pu” and “Ta” mean paternal grandfather and maternal grandfather, respectively.

As for Thai naming conventions for places, “Ban” is the Thai term for village. So, for example, Champa Village would be referred to as “Ban Champa.” “Wat” means temple, and “Pa” means forest, so the forest temple at Champa Village would be named, “Wat Pa Ban

Champa,” while the temple at Nong Waeng Village would be named, “Wat Ban Nong Waeng.”

The Thai language does not require pronouns or subjects. For instance, “I want to see you” can also be stated as “want to see.” Perhaps it is because enlightened individuals have destroyed the sense of identity (*attā*) that they characteristically communicate in this indirect, objective manner. Their sentences are more like general statements about a situation instead of the actual individual in that situation. Unanchored by pronouns or subjects, these sentences tend to float and can be interpreted a number of ways. Having known Luang Por Thoon personally, and having translated his sermons and books, I feel that he is very particular and precise when it comes to word choice and word order. I have also found that his sentences can take on different meanings when I revisit them after a slight change in perspective. Because of this, I have made every effort to maintain the integrity of Luang Por’s writing style, especially in sections with Dhamma teachings. Sometimes a sentence might feel more natural written in a more common way, but oftentimes the slight awkwardness can compel you to really think about the difference in emphasis or meaning. For example, consider phrases like, “the ghost caused many people to die” versus “the ghost killed many people,” or “internal elements and external elements,” versus “internal and external elements,” or “the mind knows and sees” versus “my mind knows and sees.”

A glossary is included at the back of the text.

## Preface

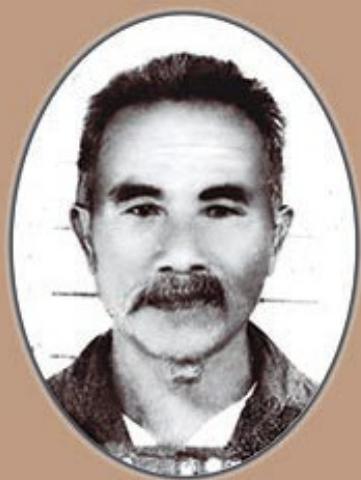
Several of my students requested that I write an autobiography so that my many followers could understand how my life and Dhamma practice transpired. They reasoned that if I did not write it at this time, many uncertainties could arise in the future. Because my students range from being very young to very old, the elderly could pass away and miss out on the opportunity to learn about my life. Even the younger students could meet a fate that would similarly strip them of the chance to read my life story. Or, if I passed away before I had a chance to put my life into writing, everyone would miss out. Future generations would not know about my life, either.

Upon hearing these pleas and considering that my life story could benefit others, I decided to write about it. It would be impossible to write an extensive, comprehensive biography, as it would swell into a massive book. I will only write enough to paint an adequate picture of my life. The entire autobiography is factual. These are actual events that transpired. The majority of the stories are about my own life, while some involve famous teachers. My life story is pretty peculiar, and you may doubt whether or not these stories are true. You may think that my life is unbelievable or even downright impossible. In fact, you might even feel enough contempt to lose faith in me. Regardless, the events that transpired are a very real part of this world, have been for past eras, and will indefinitely continue to be in the times to come.

Once you read my autobiography, use your own insight to determine which stories can be used as a model for your own personal benefit. Don't waste your time critiquing the stories or Dhamma

methods that are incongruent with your personality. Leave them be. Lastly, may all readers excel in mindfulness and wisdom. May you come to understand the universal truth in any matter which you contemplate. If you have cultivated perfections of character in past lives and are kammically ripe to attain a level of enlightenment in this lifetime, may your aspirations come to fruition.

Phra Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño



Mr. Uddha Nonruecha  
Father



Mrs. Chan Nonruecha  
Mother



**Phra Ācariya  
Thoon Khippapañño**

I am the fifth of Mr. Uddha and Mrs. Chan Nonruecha's ten children:

1. Mr. Home Nonruecha (deceased)
2. Mrs. Ting Ruamjit
3. Mrs. Boon Soma (deceased)
4. Mrs. Boonnoi Namakhun (deceased)
5. Phra Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño
6. Mrs. Bappa Arron
7. Phra Bunma Siridhammo
8. Mr. Sopa Nonruecha
9. Mrs. Boonna Kantavichai
10. Mrs. Buangun Kongumpai



## Hometown

I was born on Monday, May 20, 1935 in Ban Nong Kho, Bua Kho sub-district, Mueang Maha Sarakham district, Maha Sarakham province. In 1942, when I was seven, my parents relocated to Ban Nong Waeng (Gam Hom) of the Chai Wan sub-district, Chai Wan district, Udon Thani province. I completed the fourth grade at Ban Nong Waeng School. I was elected the class leader in every grade level. There were two teachers named Hassa and Aksorn. Because there were only two teachers for the entire school, I was chosen to be a student teacher. I was widely accepted by my peers and well-loved by all my friends because I was always sincere and honest. I was benevolent, sympathetic, and exercised fair judgment by nature.

After I completed the fourth grade, my two teachers envisioned a bright future for me. They entreated my mother and father to permit me to continue my studies in Udon Thani, but my mother and father were unable to allow it. They told the teachers that we had just moved into our new home and weren't quite ready. I very much wanted to further my studies, but as my parents did not have enough money to fund my education, I only completed the fourth grade. Thereafter, I ordained as a novice monk (*sāmañera*) in 1949. I quickly completed my primary level Dhamma studies<sup>1</sup> and swiftly learned all the prayers

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<sup>1</sup> There are three levels of Dhamma studies: primary, secondary, and advanced.

and chants. My parents asked me to disrobe as a sāmañera, so I was only able to ordain for one year. It was during that year that I heard the news of Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhūridatta's passing. However, I did not have enough time to go and pay my respects.

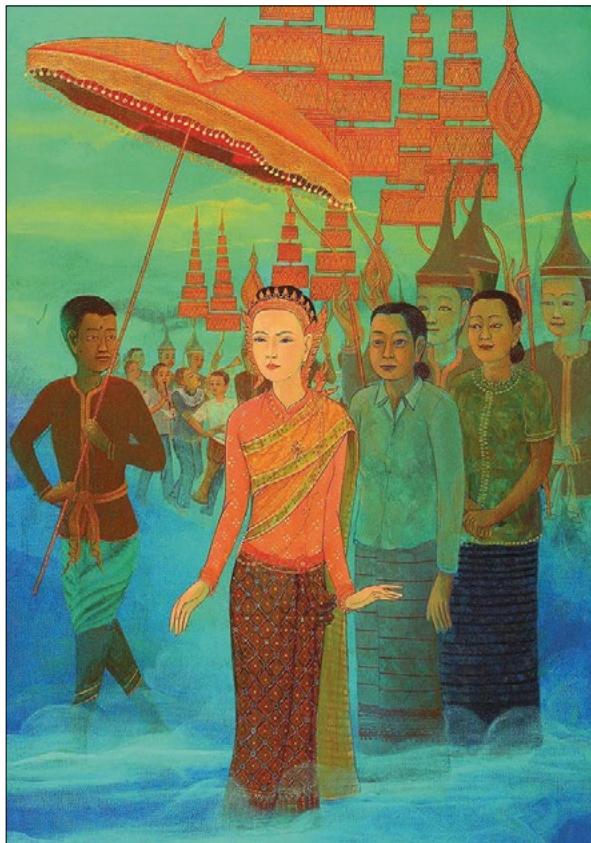


## Mother Recounts the Past

My mother told me about mystical occurrences that happened prior to my being born. One night, before she was fully asleep, in a pseudo-dreamlike state, she saw a clear, bright orb of light floating toward her. It glowed like a firefly. She tried to grab it with her hand but was unable to do so. The large firefly continued to float around the room. At that moment, she got up with great determination to catch it. Once she awoke, she could no longer find that clear, bright light. Perplexed, she wondered, *"What is this light? It is too big to be a firefly. It is unlike the light of fireflies I have seen around."* But she was not frightened. She simply thought the light orb came from a firefly. An interpretation of this vision points to a life force (*viññāṇa*) coming to be born at that moment, but my mother did not understand this and believed it to be the glow of a firefly.

Many days later, my mother had an even odder dream. She was dressed as a heavenly goddess (*devadhītā*), adorned in glittering jewels and gold necklaces. Dazzling gold bracelets and armbands glowed on her arms. Jeweled rings sparkled on her fingers. She wore a traditional long skirt with a golden sash wrapped around her. Her skin glowed and she radiated a brilliant aura. On her head was a tiara, and on her feet, beautiful silver-gold shoes. She was stunning. Then she walked somewhere, and someone held a large umbrella over her.





She was encircled by an adoring crowd of people displaying great respect for her. Sounds of flutes, drums, and other melodies filled the air. She was tremendously happy. The people cheered and chanted in unison, "We lift you up and honor you as our great lord mother! May you be a great refuge for all of us!" Their voices continued to resonate the entire time. Thereafter, my mother woke up, consumed with great anxiety.



## Mother's Anxiety

My mother awoke feeling troubled and unsettled. She was certain that she was going to die and be separated from her beloved husband and children. She believed that her life force (*viññāṇa*) had left her body during the dream and that another life force would be coming to pick her up. She called for her husband and older children and recounted the dream to them. They listened intently. She told them, “I will not be with you all for much longer. I will likely die and leave my husband and children.” She proceeded with instructions, “After I’m dead, if you seek a new wife to help raise the children, may you think it over prudently. Be sure not to allow your new wife to order around your old set of children. You, yourself, must be careful not to become overly enamored and obsessed with your new wife and new kids, thereby creating a division within the household. May you serve as the middleman, love both sides, and teach all of the children to mutually understand one another so that the household is blessed with harmony.

“Children, may you all listen to your father’s teachings and be obedient, so that your father may have peace. Do your part in working diligently to help the family earn a living. The older children should not bully the younger children. The younger children should listen



to the older children's orders. Do not argue or hit each other. Love one another and share whatever you have."

As she was giving her husband and children these instructions, she sobbed and tears streamed down her face. With a handkerchief, she wiped the tears from her grieving, wet face. Her voice quivered with her every word. She wailed and whimpered, struggling to come to grips with letting go. Consumed with misery, she mourned for her darling husband and all of her dear children. She lamented to herself that her life would end before its time was due. She would soon part ways with her loved ones. After she died, how would they live? How would they eat? How would they sleep? The air was thick with this depressing gloom and sorrow. It was as if a great tree that had long provided shade and comfort had come time to fall. She glimpsed the bleak future that awaited her children that would survive her, and so she lamented and cried.



## Father's Prophecy

While my mother told my father and older siblings of her dream, my father listened attentively. He analyzed the omens in the dream and considered how they could be interpreted. After listening to my mother describe the dream from start to finish, he came up with an entirely opposite conclusion. He told her, "Hmm, I think your dream isn't at all related to death. It signifies a child coming to be born who is replete with merit (*puñña*), moral goodness (*kusala*), and perfections of character (*pāramī*).<sup>2</sup> In fact, this child will become a refuge for our relatives and people in this world. Do not be distraught or think that you will die. These omens are all related. Earlier, you dreamt of an orb of light floating into your bedroom. That indicates that a virtuous life force (*viññāṇa*) will come to be born with you. Coupled with your dream from tonight, these are all auspicious omens. This child will greatly benefit the masses and will be highly respected." My mother listened intently. She was unsure what to believe. Was she correct in believing she would soon die? Or was her husband correct in predicting her impending pregnancy? Either way, she decided not to be heedless. She continued to pray and chant, as was her routine.

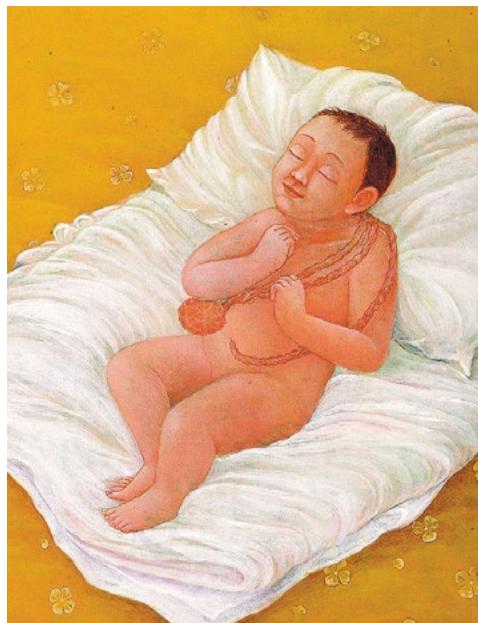
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<sup>2</sup> There are ten perfections of character (*pāramī*): generosity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), renunciation (*nekkhamma*), wisdom (*paññā*), effort or diligence (*viriya*), patience or forbearance (*khanti*), truthfulness or commitment (*sacca*), resolve or determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*), benevolence or loving-kindness (*mettā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

A few days later, my mother became pregnant, just as my father had forecasted. A flood of relief washed over her as she appeared to have narrowly escaped separation from her loved ones for the time being. The reason my father stated that my mother's dreams pointed toward a pregnancy was because he was learned in astrology. Dream interpretation was a specialty of his. Afterward, our relatives anxiously awaited the arrival of the baby. They had heard about my mother's dream and of her pregnancy that followed. They wondered how the child would turn out. What kind of atypical characteristics would this child manifest? My father was certain that this child would be different.

Thereafter, my mother noticed a shift in the way that she felt. Namely, she began to experience nausea. Her reaction to this pregnancy was quite different from her prior pregnancies. Once this child had entered her womb, several things changed. For instance, she could not tolerate the stench of animals. The smell of cattle under the house made my mother vomit. All the cattle had to be removed from under the house. Thereafter, the nausea she felt in reaction to the stench of animals no longer occurred. However, there was still another thing that my mother could not eat or even lay her eyes on without feeling nauseous. Whenever she came across animal meat of any kind, she would start heaving. From fermented fish sauce to other meats, the sight of them would instantly cause her to vomit. She could not eat from her husband's and children's trays of food.

Thus, my mother had to separate herself and have her own designated food set up. If anyone in the family wanted to eat a spicy raw meat salad, they would have to go to a friend's house to make it and eat it. All raw food was prohibited at the house. My mother instructed her children to scoop rice and store it in a separate container for her. They were to scoop this rice from the middle, not from the



bottom or sides, of the steamer. Other people were prohibited from eating rice from my mother's special container. The only food she could eat with this rice was salt or something sweet, like cane juice or ripe bananas. She would eat alone. No one was allowed to eat with her.

Following a full gestation period, my mother gave birth to a baby boy. She remarked, "This baby was the easiest birthing experience. I didn't feel an ounce of pain." Once the baby was born, there was another oddity. The umbilical cord was wrapped around the baby's body like a monk's *āmsa*.<sup>3</sup> What's more, the placenta came out at the same time and was positioned like the baby was holding a monk's alms bowl.

Once my father saw this he exclaimed, "Buddho! A great yakhu ācariya<sup>4</sup> has arrived. Look, he is even wearing his robes and holding

<sup>3</sup> A sleeveless one-shouldered singlet or vest that monks wear under their other robes.

<sup>4</sup> Yakhu is a Northeastern Thai term for a great elder monk (mahā-thera) who ordains and never disrobes. Ācariya means teacher.



his alms bowl!" My mother felt normal again and no longer experienced nausea.

Thereafter, the elder relatives were invited to help name me. The basis for the naming was my mother's dream—the dream about a great crowd elevating her as lord mother, as previously described. The relatives unanimously agreed that the dream signified being raised up high. Thus, the elders decided to name me after the dream, "Thoon." From that day forward, up to this present day, everyone kept a close watch on me. My parents, siblings, and relatives monitored my every move, their eyes peeled for any peculiarities in my character. They all wondered how I would turn out.

In my younger years, I was like any other infant who lives off of their mother's breast milk. Once I could eat on my own, I began to demonstrate atypical behavior. I absolutely refused to eat with my family members, let alone from the same tray. If I were to eat with them, they had to prepare a separate food tray that contained my individual portions of the food. I even had to have my own separate bamboo rice container. My mother, father, and elder siblings were prohibited from eating from my rice container or food bowls. They were not even allowed to touch them. If anyone tested these rules, the food and plates would instantly start flying. The plates and bamboo rice containers would be thrown and broken beyond salvaging. Many times, my older siblings tried to eat with me. Each time, I would pick up the clay bowls and hurl them to the ground, shattering them to pieces. My parents and older siblings had a difficult time with me.

Thereafter, my parents came up with a new plan. I would eat completely apart from the family. If there were fully cooked dishes,



they would set aside a special serving just for me. If there were raw dishes, the plates would promptly be broken. I even had my own separate bamboo rice container. Everyone was prohibited from touching my food. Nevertheless, my older sister would often annoy me. When our parents weren't looking, she would extend her hand to grab something from my tray. I would immediately show my frustration by picking up the plate and smashing it on the floor. I would refuse to eat unless our parents made up a new tray of food for me. During those times, the plates were all made of clay. One bump would shatter them into pieces. If a sibling tried to grab rice from my container, I would throw it to the ground. This happened every single time. Ever since I was born, my character was one of being steadfastly true to my word (sacca).

My father foresaw the impending destruction of all the plates and bowls. So, he took an internode of bamboo and carved it into a special food bowl for me. When my sister came to pick from my food again, I would bang the bamboo bowl on the floor. If it didn't break, I would chuck it under the house. My parents would walk over to pick it up, wash it, and fill it with food again. I possessed this character since I was little. If I desired something, I had to have it. No one was to defy me. I always had to have my way. If I couldn't have what I wanted, I would cry incessantly. One time, after I had already begun to crawl, I wanted to eat dried bananas. The bananas weren't dried in time, so my mother gave me ripe bananas. I refused to eat them, saying, "If I want dried bananas, I have to have dried bananas." My mother picked me up, held me against her hip, and walked over to where the bananas were drying. She lifted each and every basket to show me that none of them contained dried bananas. Not a single dried banana could be found.



At that moment, I don't know what came over me that caused me to feel ashamed. I thought to myself, "*Why am I so selfish? Why have I made my mother stress because of dried bananas? There aren't any dried bananas but I want to force them to be. It's impossible for my mother to find them for me.*" I saw the despair painted on my mother's face. I thought to myself, "*Ripe bananas are also sweet. If there aren't any dried bananas, ripe bananas can be eaten instead. From now on, I will not make my mother stress or be bothered because of me.*" I felt ashamed that I had made my mother feel distressed. I stopped crying and wriggled out from my mother's arms. I crawled over to the ripe bananas and pointed at them. My mother picked up a ripe banana and gave it to me. I proceeded to eat it. My mother hugged me saying, "My little one, how adorable you are. Now you can eat normal, ripe bananas." From that moment on, I never again asked her for dried bananas. If there were ripe bananas, I would eat them. This incident happened when I was a little over one year old. Afterward, I knew that I would not be selfish like I had been in the past.

There were two things I remember being an innate part of me and quite unique to my character, even as a young child. I couldn't eat raw foods or the ten prohibited meats.<sup>5</sup> No one could trick me into eating them. For instance, when they tried to pass snake meat as chicken or horse meat as beef, or toss raw shrimp with spicy fish dip, the instant it went in my mouth I would throw up. This innate trait was with me the day I was born. Even in my teens, I continued to be this way. I always realized that my food was different from other people's food. My parents reproached me for this many times. They said that once I had my own family, I would encounter issues with

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<sup>5</sup> Ordained monks are prohibited from eating ten types of meat: human, elephant, horse, dog, snake, lion, tiger, leopard, bear, and hyena.

food. No woman would fully cook the fermented fish before mixing it into chili paste or papaya salad. No woman refrained from eating raw food. I was the only person in the world who ate this way. Many times, upon being invited to parties, I would hand them a monetary gift and return home to eat. When I was solicited to help build a home or work in the rice fields, I would always find an excuse to come home and eat. If, at an event, one of my friends who knew of my dietary restrictions was present, they would fully cook the food for me.

Everyone in my family liked to eat raw foods. Fully cooked foods were only occasionally found in our meals. Sometimes, all I could eat was soup stock with rice. When there wasn't a fire to cook the food, I would eat rice and salt. It was enough to survive. Whenever my siblings pitied me, they would cook the raw salad over the fire. Whenever my parents got irritated, they would hit me with a cane and force me to eat the raw food. But I couldn't. It was just my nature. I experienced a lot of suffering during my youth. I wanted to eat the raw meat salads that my siblings ate, but I couldn't. At times, all I could do was salivate as I watched them eat. I was forced to suffer from hunger because I didn't know how to cook.

Thinking back on my younger years, it was a constant struggle, a test of forbearance. My siblings were always coming up with ways to trick me into eating raw foods. One way was to run the food through the flames for a quick second and then pass it off as cooked. Once I put the food in my mouth, I'd throw up. That's how I knew that it wasn't fully cooked. When my brothers and sisters got their hands on some crab, shrimp, or clams, they would make a raw seafood salad out of it. Then they would say, "If someone doesn't eat it, that means they don't want any." In truth, my older siblings all knew that I couldn't eat raw food. I never fell for the traps laid out by my parents and

older siblings. No one in the world could change this part of my character.



## **Thoon's Childhood Character**

Luang Por Thoon did not write about his childhood in detail. So, his students set off to interview his childhood friend in Ban Nong Kho, Maha Sarakham province. Ms. Petch Thipsriraj recounted their childhood adventures, providing us with a greater understanding of Luang Por Thoon's adolescent personality. Her stories highlight young Thoon's innate leadership and how he often directed them to play religious, virtuous games.

When Thoon was three years old, his group of friends would entertain themselves with childish games like "snake eating its tail," or playing market. But Thoon refused to take part. Instead, he would propose a game of monks and temples. He would direct the game, and he would be the temple's abbot. Some of the boys were given the role of novice monks (*sāmañera*) or male lay devotees (*upāsaka*), while girls played the part of female lay devotees (*upāsikā*). The temple's clearing served as the stage and the children would act out typical temple scenes. The abbot would sit on a raised platform and the *sāmañeras* would be nearby, ready to serve. The lay devotees would bring savory and sweet foods to offer to the monks. The monks' alms bowls, fashioned from coconut shells, came complete with their customary stands. Plates and trays were crafted from stitched banana leaves and coconut shells. The food, represented by dirt and an

assortment of leaves, was first offered to Abbot Thoon. He would take a small portion and send the rest on to the less senior monks, in the exact style of forest monks. Every element of the game came from young Thoon's own imagination. Once the food was offered, all the devotees would raise their palms together at their chests and receive the monks' blessing. Abbot Thoon would mumble an incoherent blessing and at its conclusion, the devotees would raise their joined palms and say, "Sādhu." The monks would pretend to eat in the alms bowls, while the devotees would form a circle and eat the remaining food. Once the monks finished eating, the sāmañeras would take the alms bowls, wash them, and put them away. After the devotees finished eating, they would clean up and stow the containers in their proper place. Abbot Thoon would then partake in the monk's customary duty of sweeping the temple grounds. When the devotees were ready to leave, they would bow to Abbot Thoon and then return home.

This game was enacted on countless occasions. No one taught them to play this way. Rather, these games originated from Thoon's own imagination. In fact, during those times, there was no presence of forest monks eating from alms bowls to serve as inspiration. Only house monks<sup>6</sup> who ate from plates were around. It's interesting to consider what prompted Thoon to play in this fashion. Absent an adult's direction or a model to emulate, how could Thoon have possibly imagined this game?

There was yet another game that Thoon enjoyed playing with his friends. He would position his friends at the front and back ends

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<sup>6</sup> A house monk, or "phra ban," is affiliated with a house temple, or "wat ban." Typically, house temples are associated with the Mahā Nikāya order (and brighter orange-hued robes, eating from plates, and more casual practice) while forest temples are associated with the Dhammayut order (and deeper brown-hued robes, eating from alms bowls, and more intense practice), however this is not always the case.

of two bamboo poles, and he would perch atop the center. This was called sitting atop a “salieng,” or litter. All the children shouldered the litter, calling out enthusiastically the entire time they transported Thoon. Many times, he would come crashing down. Nevertheless, he would get up and assume his seat atop the litter again. This activity was reminiscent of the processions for kings or princes of ancient Thailand. But, back in those days, the kids merely did it out of amusement.

Interestingly, a remark echoed by Thoon’s childhood friends, those who grew up with him, and elders who observed his behavior was how peculiar it was that Thoon, then only three years of age, was able to think up these games. All his acquaintances affirmed that he really had carried on like this, sitting on raised platforms while all of his friends sat below. While he gave his lecture, Thoon’s friends would sit attentively as he pointed and gestured. Their pretend classroom would be held at the temple or at home. Basically, anywhere there was an elevated seat. When they had taken in all the instructions, the children would bow in respect.

That a child would imagine and play these games was highly atypical. Thoon must have cultivated these perfections of character (*pāramī*) over countless lifetimes, such that they were distinctly embedded into this rebirth. What do you think of Thoon’s childhood behavior? What reasons could possibly compel three-year-old Thoon to behave in this way? Now let us return to his autobiography.



## Giving Rice to Beggars

When I was four years old, a severe drought plagued the land. Many neighboring districts were also affected. This resulted in people trekking from place to place in search of food. Most of them resorted to begging. They traveled in groups, each member holding a basket and begging for food from households, large and small. They didn't have anything to trade. Once they arrived at a house, they would sit, throw their hands above their heads, and wail about their suffering and hardships. The house owner would give them rice and food, as deemed appropriate. The band of beggars would then move on to the next house.

One day, I remained home with my younger sibling, who was a small child, as my parents and older siblings went out in search of kindling. This would be used to trade with other households for rice and food. The grains of rice they had previously acquired now filled a huge clay pot. That day, a band of five beggars came to ask for rice. They sat in front of the house, raised their joined palms at their chests, and asked for rice. They spoke of their hunger and suffering. I felt so bad for them that I invited them up to the house. I scooped up the rice from the huge clay pot and emptied it into the baskets of each of the five beggars. I gave them all the rice that my parents had acquired from various places. The beggars then asked for chili, salt, and fermented fish. So, I took all that we had and gave it to them.



I felt the most immense happiness. This feeling of bliss stuck with me throughout the entire day. At noontime, my parents and older siblings returned from the woods. They were famished. They started a fire and got ready to cook rice and other food. When they took the lid off the clay pot, they discovered that all of the rice was missing. The fermented fish, salt, and chili were also all gone. There was absolutely nothing left to cook with. When they asked me where the rice, fermented fish, salt, and chili were, I told them that I had given them away. My siblings yelled at me, and once my mother found out, she whipped me until my back was all red. My parents ordered me not to give away our rice, fermented fish, salt, and chili to anyone from that day forward.

That night, my body ached. Since being born, that was the first time I had experienced the pain of my mother's whipping me. I felt angry with my mother. I hadn't even had lunch. I ran away from home without telling anyone. I kept going until I reached a desolate field about one kilometer away from home. There, all alone, I laid down to rest. At that moment, hunger hit me hard. I was a child who was in the process of growing. It felt like I would die from this hunger, but I endured it. Each breath I took was exhausting. Then I got thirsty, so I walked over to a pond. The water was green, murky, and filled with ox and buffalo feces. But since I was extremely parched, I slurped up that putrid water. Before I got up to leave, I noticed a large crab hole. I stuck my entire arm in and found a large frog. I pulled it out and found a rope to tie around its waist.

Around 5 p.m., I heard an alarm sound, as neighbors were asked to help search for the missing Thoon boy. The villagers frantically searched every possible location but didn't find me. My mother, father, and older siblings combed through all of our relatives' homes, near

and far, but found no trace of me. It was nearly dark when I walked home with that big frog hanging from my shoulder. I found my mother in the process of yelling for me. She was yelling, "From now on, I will never hit you again! Please just come home!" At that moment I poked my face out so she could see me. She ran over and threw her arms around me. I knew that she really missed me. She only hit me because she was momentarily overcome with anger. I ran away because I was also momentarily overcome with anger. Thereafter, we went back to being a loving household.

In the year 1942, my parents moved us to Udon Thani. We fled to Ban Nong Waeng during World War II to escape the danger of fighter planes. Sometimes we ran into the forest or ducked down into holes in the ground. During nighttime in the village, it was completely quiet, and people weren't allowed to light fires. When we heard a plane overhead, we would scramble to find a safe place to hide. The children didn't know what was going on, and the sounds of their crying filled the forest. I was eight years old then, and had just started attending school. I had a remarkable memory, and whatever my teachers taught, I would remember in its entirety. My teachers were mystified as to how this was possible. I moved up from first, to second, to third, to fourth grade. At that time, fourth grade was the highest level being taught.

I would take one notebook and one pencil to school with me. I would write down whatever I learned that day into that notebook. Once I got home, I would fold those notes into paper airplanes to play with. My friends would take home assignments our teachers gave us for reading practice. I didn't have to practice reading any of those at home. Once the teacher wrote the sentences on the board at school, I would read them. Within two passes, I would have them committed



A B C D E F  
G H I J K L  
M N O P Q R  
S T U V W X  
Y Z  
H O M E A E I O U  
E R O S H T I E S

to memory. I didn't have to write them out like my friends did. One day, the teacher wrote a sentence on the board and made us all copy it down. I had no way out, so I took my pencil and scribbled into my notebook. The teacher asked if I had written down the sentence. I responded that I had. The teacher then called me up to the front and asked me if I could read what I wrote. I responded that I couldn't read it but had already remembered all of it. The teacher tested me, and I answered all of the questions without having to read anything from books. I was especially skilled when it came to mathematics. I never made a mistake when it came to addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division.

In elementary school, in fourth grade, I became a teacher to assist with kindergarteners and first graders. I taught the children nearly every day. It was not difficult to be a student teaching other students. I was good at it. For all types of sports, I was number one in our school, village, sub-district, and province. I knew how to make my peers happy. I didn't know how to steal. Whenever I found something, I would take it to the teachers so that the rightful owner could come to claim it. I was very determined that throughout my entire life, I would never take someone else's belongings. Stealing was something that felt very shameful. I didn't have what it takes to steal from someone. It made it so that my peers loved and trusted me. Whenever an issue arose between classmates, I would be the one to step in and resolve it. I would speak in a way that called upon reason.



## An Amazing Occurrence

During a school break, I tended to oxen at Nong Chan, which was about one kilometer away from our village. I was only eleven years old at the time when something amazing occurred. I was lying down underneath a tree, staring at a leaf as it swayed in the breeze. As I was staring at the leaf, I could see it very clearly. My mind and eyes locked on it with practically unblinking focus. As I intensely concentrated on the leaf, my body and mind (*citta*) were oddly light. I didn't know what was going on. I wasn't thinking about anything. My mind was perfectly still and focused. I wasn't reciting a meditative phrase (*parikamma*). I simply stilled my mind and focused on the leaf. After a while of staring at it, it was as if the leaf was stuck in my eye. I felt like I could see the leaf with incredible clarity. Then the leaf gradually started to shrink. I trained both my eyes and my mind on it, not letting it slip from my focus. The leaf progressively shrank until I could no longer see it, and then it ultimately disappeared. Once the leaf vanished, my mind felt faint and a bright light enveloped me, then radiated outward, casting the light onto everything. The light was soft, bright, and amazing. This had never happened to me before.

The light expanded far and wide. Wherever the light traveled, I could know and see things. If I wanted to know something somewhere, I would focus the mind (*citta*) and I would know and see it. Regardless



of whether that subject was near or far, it could be known and seen very clearly. If I wanted to see what people were doing in the village, I could see what each person was doing. Some were lying about, some sitting around talking. If I wanted to know what they were talking about, I could focus the citta and hear every single word. If I wanted to see something, I just focused the citta, and I would see everything. Nothing was hidden. I don't know how long this went on. While it was happening, I was physically numb. Then, the sensation slowly waned and dulled. I returned to reality and realized that I was taking a break in the fields with the oxen.

I reviewed each step that had occurred and tried to figure it all out. In all my life, this had never occurred. I retraced my steps from when I began to look at the leaf fluttering in the breeze. As I glanced at the leaf, I saw that it still continued to flutter in the breeze. I remembered that I had focused the citta on the fluttering leaf, and that I had stared at it. The citta was stuck on the leaf as if I weren't blinking at all. The leaf then appeared to drift down to my eye and I could see it very clearly. Then it shrank smaller and smaller. I focused the citta on the leaf, and eventually the leaf became so small that it ultimately disappeared. Then the citta felt faint and I couldn't tell where I was. What caused the light? At the time, I had no idea what it was. When I directed the citta to look at something I didn't know why I would know and see things. I had no clue why it was it happened.

As I retraced what had happened, the citta was filled with incredible bliss. It was a kind of bliss that really can't be compared to anything. It wasn't like the kind of bliss derived from worldly belongings. As I stood up to tend to the oxen, I felt a physical and mental high. I felt like I was going to fall over. If I focused, I could stand still. As I took a step forward, my leg and foot felt light, like it

wasn't touching the ground. I tried stepping on the ground to see whether or not it would leave a footprint. There was a footprint, though it didn't feel like I was stepping on anything or walking. Not long thereafter, the feeling waned. My body and mind felt normal, but I was happy throughout the entire day, like I hadn't a care in the world. When it was nearly dark, I guided the oxen home. After dinner, I told my parents about what had happened.



## **Telling My Parents about What Happened**

As I told my parents what happened, I could see that they were shocked. They told me never to return to that place because the ghosts there were evil. They said that ghosts in that area had immobilized people before, and I was lucky that they didn't take my life this time. Although my parents blamed ghosts, I didn't believe them. I thought about how if it were really a ghost, what would explain the physical and mental happiness I was feeling? What would explain the light radiating around me, how I could know and see things going on elsewhere, or why my mind felt happy the entire day? Thus, I didn't agree with my parents attributing the numbing sensation to ghosts. Though I listened and I didn't argue with them out loud, I argued in my mind.

From then on, I practiced generating the sensation by using leaves, fruit, and flowers as meditation objects. The feeling was exactly like the first time I had experienced it. I often practiced doing this on my own, just for fun. Eventually, it became habitual. But I never told my parents about it again, nor did I tell anyone else about it. The phenomenon would arise very quickly. Wherever I focused the mind (*citta*), that's where it would happen. All I had to do was use my eyes to stare at something until it became a single point. I would direct the *citta* to attach itself to that thing, focus on that single point, and

focus the citta on knowing and seeing the object clearly until it was stuck in my eye and stuck in my mind. Then I would experience the sensation in my mind, which was focused and still. I didn't allow the mind to sway. I trained my gaze and the citta on a single point and the familiar feeling would arise. If I didn't want it to arise, I would just get up, walk around, and look at something else. Or, I would wiggle my fingers or toes, or rock my body and the sensation would vanish. I would often practice generating the sensation because I enjoyed the feeling of physical and mental bliss that it brought me.

Sometimes, sound would trigger the sensation. To generate the sensation from sound, I would focus on some kind of sound. I would listen to it until it was clear and resonated continuously. I would train the citta on the sound with unwavering focus, and it would get softer and softer until it was barely audible. It was as if that sound was refined and delicate. I focused on hearing that delicate, refined sound clearly. Once the refined sound vanished, the feeling of faintness would arise in the mind. The bright light would occur in the mind, and the ability to know and see things would occur as before.

These sensations occurred during my adolescent years because the adolescent mind isn't yet littered with thoughts of sensual pleasures (*kāma*). After I turned fifteen, it became increasingly difficult to call on the aforementioned sensation. It required great effort because it was a period in which I was becoming a teen and the mind was starting to become preoccupied with worldly matters. As they say, worldly passions cause the mind to waver. The sensation slowly started to wane accordingly. If I had had a teacher (*ācariya*) to instruct me in the correct practice during those younger years, and my practice was continuous, I might have achieved real results. I might have had my questions answered and realized what was going on with the

sensation back when I was a kid. But I didn't have a teacher to show me the right path. So, I didn't know how to practice in any way. I didn't know what was happening because it was new to me. I didn't know if it had significance to the Dhamma, if at all. I didn't even know what to call it.

Telling my story may benefit you in some way. At the very least, it may help you realize that you have also experienced something similar. If you have, go to see a teacher for advice on how to find a way out, instead of continuing to play with the light. Enjoyment of this luminescence is a waste of time that further distances you from the path and fruit of enlightenment (magga-phala-nibbāna) without even realizing it. If you possess supernormal powers (abhiññā) or if you attain deep meditative absorptions (jhāna-samāpatti), you will lose your way even further. The chances of entering the stream of Dhamma will be slim. Instead, you will feed your conceit (māna) and ego (attā) and grow your wrong views (micchā-ditṭhi). You will not listen to others because you believe that you already know everything about the Dhamma. You will consider yourself to be a smart and accomplished Dhamma practitioner. You might even declare (vyākaraṇa) yourself to be an ariya-puggala, or one who has already attained a stage of enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> The purpose of this warning is merely to awaken you to reality. Once I left school, I tended the fields just like the other kids.

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<sup>7</sup> The four stages of enlightenment are stream-winner (sotāpanna), once-returner (sakadāgāmi), non-returner (anāgāmi), and fully enlightened (arahant).



## **Teachers with Good Intentions**

Once I left school, my two teachers visited my home to implore that I be permitted to continue my studies. The teachers told my parents, “Thoon is highly capable. His mindfulness (sati) and wisdom (paññā) are unrivaled. We have never met a student quite like Thoon. When we teach history lessons, he reads what is on the board once and remembers the entirety of it. He is skilled in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, and is even quick with mental math. None of the other students can compare. We want Thoon to continue his education in Udon Thani. We will help find a place for him to live and a school. That way, he will gain the knowledge to make significant contributions to the development of our country.”

As I sat there listening, I was filled with great excitement. I thought I was going to get to continue my studies. But my parents responded that we had just moved to this new house and we didn't have enough money for me to get an education. Once I heard that, I was very disappointed. At the same time, I understood where they were coming from, and decided to focus on working in the fields in order to raise money for our family. Although I only had a fourth-grade education, this was not an issue, because I could already read and write. What determines happiness and success in life is individual capability and decisiveness. With it as a foundation, knowledge and

intelligence are great additional supports. If you are knowledgeable, or even if you are comprehensively intelligent, but you lack decisiveness, you will not dare to make decisions. If you possess mindfulness and wisdom but are hesitant and unsure of yourself, you will vacillate and lack self-confidence. With personal decisiveness in your mind, you will be able to make swift and resolute decisions because you greatly believe in yourself. If you have the guts to be decisive, the plans that will lead to success will fall into place. Mindful wisdom in comprehensive intelligence will immediately bolster this decisiveness.

Thus, this decisiveness is a prominent characteristic in people. Children have their degree of decisiveness, as do adults. You must have strong personal decisiveness in your thoughts, speech, and actions in order to be a leader to others. If a leader lacks this personal decisiveness, even if they are knowledgeable and highly educated, it won't help them complete tasks. Whether personal tasks or tasks affecting society, they will be unable to accomplish or thrive at anything at all.

Looking back to those times, I possessed this personal decisiveness. When my peers couldn't see eye to eye, argued, disbanded, or anything bad happened, I would mediate and get both sides to arrive at a resolution. I would use reason to get them to compromise and work together toward mutual benefit. You can't go on thinking that you are the only one who knows what's right. In a group setting, you have to learn to forgive one another. Using force to control others doesn't win you their affection. To win people over, you must first conquer your own mind. Once you have defeated yourself, you will be able to defeat others. True winning is about the mind triumphing over itself. In other words, defeating bad people with good deeds.



## Ordaining as a Novice

When I was thirteen, I ordained as a novice monk (*sāmañera*) at Ban Nong Waeng. My ordination was merely in accordance with tradition. Northerners believe that their sons must ordain to repay gratitude to their parents or to lead their parents to heaven. These kinds of beliefs are widespread across all regions of Thailand. So much so that this tradition has been deeply ingrained into Thai culture. Northerners, in particular, have believed in this tradition for a long time and will continue to do so far into the future. This is a good tradition that should be maintained, as it provides benefits on a personal level as well as for the Buddhist religion as a whole.

I had been a *sāmañera* for three days when I was overcome with hunger. Because one of the Ten Precepts (*dasa-sīla*) that *sāmañeras* follow includes one prohibiting a meal after noon, I had to tolerate this intense hunger. That day, I could see an abundance of ripe mangoes hanging from a tree. It was around 4 p.m. I could no longer resist the desire, so I climbed the tree and filled a bag with mangoes. Then I went and sat in the pavilion by myself, eating the mangoes with salt. Soon thereafter, a member of the male laity, Ācariya Brahma, had come to scoop water from the well and discovered me sumptuously eating mangoes with salt. He walked over to me and asked, “*Sāmañera Thoon, what are you eating?*”



I told him, “I am eating mangoes.”

He said, “Why are you eating? Eating an evening meal breaks the vikāla-bhojanā precept (*sīla*).”

I instantly retorted, “I am not eating a meal. What I am eating is mangoes.”

The man told me, “Those mangoes are an evening meal.”

I cut him off and told him, “No. Meals are meals. Mangoes are mangoes. They are different.”

At a loss for words, he left me and went to fetch his water. Meanwhile, I continued to sit there, eating my mangoes until I was full. I even thought to myself that I would eat mangoes the next day as well.

That evening, the head monk learned that I had eaten mangoes. After the evening chanting, he questioned me about it. I told him the truth. He explained what each of the Ten Precepts entailed and I came to understand all that was prohibited. Then, he took a stick and hit me across my shoulders three times. Thereafter, I never broke any of the Ten Precepts. I was only focused on learning the prayers and chants that the teachers had chosen for me. I was a quick learner and surprised the teachers by being able to chant with them.



## An Embarrassing Fall

A day later, there was to be the funeral of a highly regarded member of the community. Many were planning to attend. Around 3 p.m. the head monk told me, “Sāmañera Thoon, you’re going to this event, too.”

I told him, “I don’t know how to do the funeral chanting,” but he forced me to attend and seated me at the end of the line of monks. I felt like everyone’s eyes were on me. As the elders chanted “kusalā-dhammā,” I kept my head down. I felt faint. When I glanced at people’s faces, they appeared in double or triple. After the chanting was over, I was incredibly embarrassed. My throat was dry and my breathing was shallow. When the chanting was over, they prepared to move the corpse from the house. My embarrassment made me dizzy. Everything appeared dark and hazy. While descending the steps, my vision blurred. Believing the ground to be nearer than it was, I tripped over three steps and landed in the middle of the crowd, to everyone’s laughter and amusement. Even more embarrassed, I hung my head in shame and I walked along until I reached the cemetery. Once I arrived back at the temple, I was determined to memorize the “kusalā-dhamma...hetu paccayo...” and paṁsukūla<sup>8</sup> funeral chantings. I spent all night reciting them and was able to commit the verses to memory.

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<sup>8</sup> A funeral ritual in which cloth is offered to monks on behalf of the dead.

That night, another village elder passed away. The next day at 3 p.m., the monks and I attended the ceremony to perform the funeral chanting. This time, I walked in there with my head held high, poised and dignified. I was confident that I would redeem myself. During the kusalā chanting, I don't know what caused the elder monks and other sāmañeras to slip up, but I ended up chanting solo for many verses until the other monks and sāmañeras could get back on track. The many people who attended the funeral were surprised. "How is it that Sāmañera Thoon memorized the kusalā chanting? He is a newly ordained sāmañera, and yesterday, he was completely unable to do the kusalā chanting." It became a great matter of discussion and analysis for the villagers.

After that, I studied and memorized the entire sets of seven and twelve Paritta blessings within a few days. This perplexed the monks and sāmañeras. "How did Sāmañera Thoon remember all of these verses?" The monks and sāmañeras came to me and asked me to share the magic spell that fixed the verses to my memory. I told them that there was no spell, but they didn't believe me. I didn't possess any magic or incantations. I was gifted with an outstanding memory. I had noticed this trait in myself as well, but couldn't explain it or pinpoint its cause or contributing factors. Maybe it was a virtue of past merits (*puñña*).



## **Impressed with the Ways of Kammaṭṭhāna Monks for the First Time**

One of my older peers had gained a lot of experience being a monk for the past three years. That year, on his way to attend Phra Ācariya Mun Bhūridatta's funeral, he stopped by his home village and temporarily resided in Wat Ban Nong Waeng. He was pleased to see me, as we were old acquaintances. His name was Phra Ācariya Som. He taught me about Dhamma practice, but I had insufficient time to practice with him because I was occupied with learning Dhamma scriptures (pariyatti). All I could do was wash his monk bowl every day. He never explained about the path and fruit of enlightenment (magga-phala-nibbāna), but he taught me "Bud-dho" as a meditative mantra (parikamma). I hadn't had a chance to use the mantra, but I couldn't help but admire and feel faith (saddhā) in his way of being. He was calm and collected in his every word and action. Whether he was standing, walking, sitting, or reclining, he was wholly composed. When he ate from his monk bowl, he did so in a composed manner, and he only took one meal per day. After his meal, he would use his hand-crafted wooden toothbrush to scrub his teeth clean. Even when it came to washing his hands, he washed them repeatedly until they were clean.

Observant by nature, I noticed Phra Ācariya Som's mannerisms and my admiration and faith (saddhā) in him grew. As I tossed out his trash, I picked out his used wooden toothbrush and I wondered, “*Why do monks of the forest tradition (kammaṭṭhāna) use these kinds of toothbrushes? They whittle down a piece of wood and delicately craft it so it can be used as a toothbrush. Kammaṭṭhāna monks must be very diligent. If a mere toothbrush is made this beautiful and refined, their Dhamma practice surely must be even more refined.*” I was determined that once I had completed my Dhamma studies, I would set out to practice mental cultivation (bhāvanā) with Phra Ācariya Som.

I always tried to observe Phra Ācariya Som and see if he was deficient in any manner. Whenever he came from somewhere, went somewhere, or did anything, I observed him. When he went on his alms round (piṇḍapāta), I noticed that he walked in a perfectly composed manner. When he ate from his monk bowl, he did so in a composed manner. He taught me how to wash a monk bowl, how to wipe it dry, and how to put the bowl cover on. My admiration and faith in him continued to grow steadily. He also taught me how to wash my robe, how to hang it dry, and how to put it away. When he spoke with laypeople, he used a gentle voice and was composed in his speech.

One day, Phra Ācariya Som told me to cut a stalk of bamboo into a few nine-inch pieces. He instructed me to slice them open and whittle them into a round shape. I couldn't tell what we were making. I asked him, “Phra Ācariya, what are you whittling this for?”

He told me, “There is a purpose. Just do it. You'll find out soon enough.”



While I whittled the bamboo, I thought, “*I wonder what this whittling is for.*” After I finished whittling down the bamboo stalks, I tied them into bunches and placed them in his room.

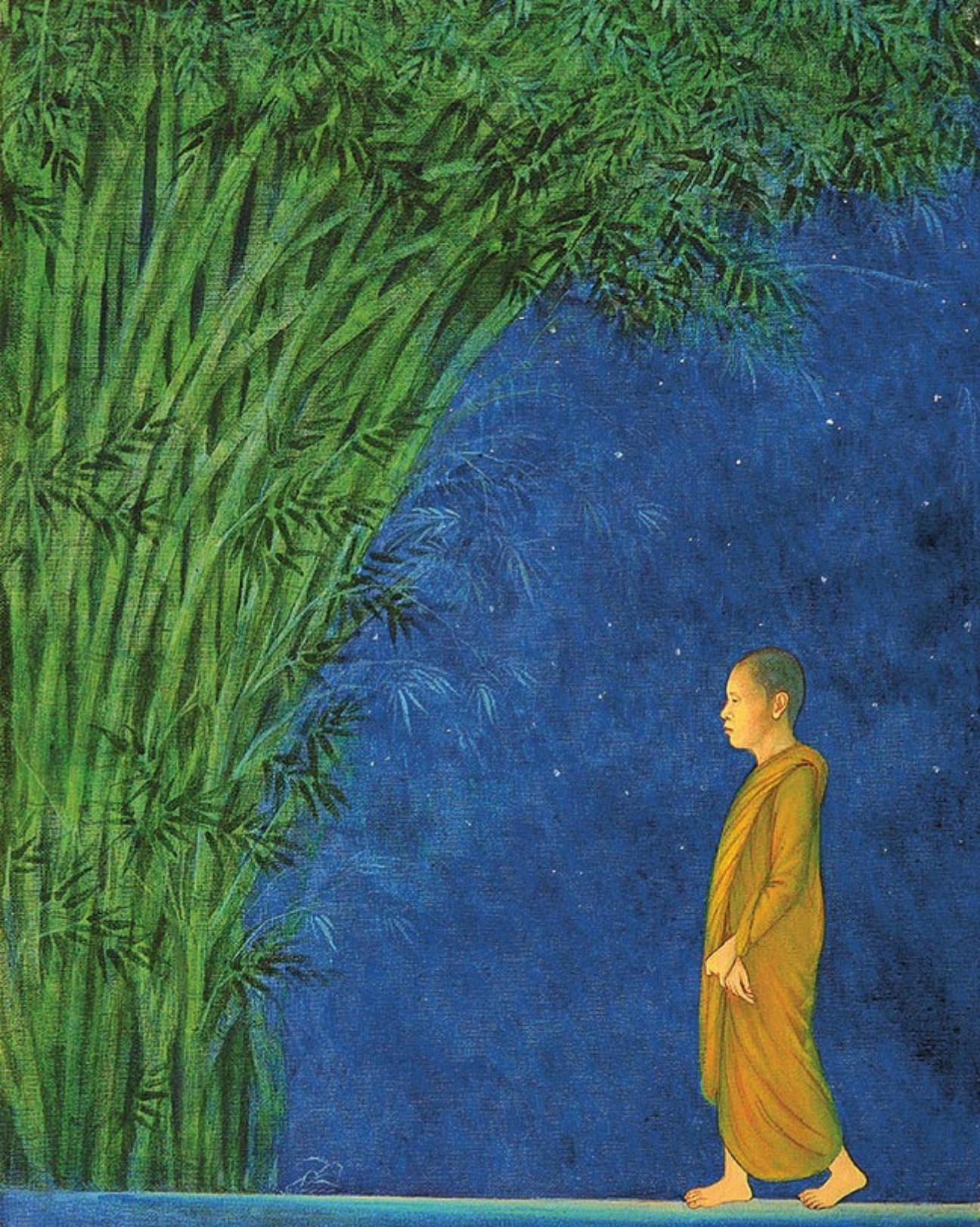
The second day, I went to the outhouse, which was a deep hole in the ground. I spotted one whittled bamboo stalk on the ground next to a bucket. In the bucket, there were two whittled bamboo stalks, or cleaning sticks.<sup>9</sup> I thought about how forest tradition monks are so meticulous that they take something beautiful like bamboo and whittle it down into a cleaning stick. As I sat there defecating, I reflected on the many other things about which forest tradition monks are meticulous. Right there in the outhouse was the first time in my life that the admirable ways of forest tradition monks were imprinted on me. I aspirated and was determined to become one of them in this lifetime.

At that time, I grew to be even more interested in practicing Dhamma with Phra Ācariya Som. I always compared the ways of forest tradition monks with non-forest tradition monks. It was really too bad that Phra Ācariya Som didn’t teach me Dhamma for the path and fruit of enlightenment during that time. If he had taught me how to develop insight (*vipassanā*), I surely would have known and seen the ultimate truth (*sacca-dhamma*). The most he taught me was “Buddho,” but never mentioned anything about *vipassanā* development. Perhaps he didn’t know for himself, or perhaps he knew but didn’t want to talk about it. I was very interested in Dhamma practice during that time.

The following day, Phra Ācariya Som had me prepare a path for walking meditation (*caṅkama*) in the woods near the outhouse and

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<sup>9</sup> The inner, more tender part of certain plant stalks can be used as a cleaning stick to wipe the butt after defecating.



told me, “I will teach you how to do caṅkama here tonight.” Once I had accepted, I had to follow his orders. At 7 p.m., he told me that it was time, and we walked over together. The moon and stars shone perfectly brightly that night. He said, “Sāmañera Thoon, walk from the outhouse path, from here to over there, and turn back toward the right, like this.” Then he demonstrated how to do it.

Along the meditation path was a group of bamboo stalks. Many monks and sāmañeras who walked to the outhouse alone at night told of seeing a hungry ghost (peta) bending the bamboo stalks to block the path. The peta had long hair, large eyes, and a cavernous mouth. This was precisely my path of walking meditation. All Phra Ācariya Som told me was to concentrate on “Bud-dho,” with every step I took. I was to take a step while thinking “Bud,” then another step while thinking “dho.” I was to walk normally and not think of anything else. I was to focus only on the meditative mantra (parikamma). Then, it was time for me to be brave and decisive. Just the previous night, the peta had spooked a monk so badly he had shrieked in fright. Although I hadn’t seen the peta before, I was afraid, thinking, *“If I really see the peta, I will not run away. If it comes down to life or death, I will fight him straight on. If the peta is going to eat me as I do caṅkama, then so be it.”*

Then, Phra Ācariya Som went to do walking meditation on his own path and I started out on mine. I was so afraid that I could hardly take my first step. But I had to overcome the fear and keep walking while focusing on the meditative mantra. Each time I came upon the bamboo stalks, I would feel my legs weaken. After a while, however, I grew accustomed to it and was able to do walking meditation in a normal fashion. At first, because I was new at it, my strides and

the meditative mantra were unsynchronized. But after some time, my strides and mantra fell into a harmonious rhythm.

About thirty minutes into it, my legs became very sore. This was because I had never done walking meditation before. I didn't want to stop for fear of being reprimanded by Phra Ācariya Som for lacking forbearance. I had to get over it and continue walking. After an hour had passed, Phra Ācariya Som still hadn't stopped walking, which meant that I couldn't either. I was determined to persevere. At that moment, my mind had become steadfastly focused and I grew motivated. My fatigue disappeared. My mind was filled with a blissful sensation. As I was doing walking meditation, I experienced a moment of calm. I felt physically and mentally light. My mind was replete and awash with bliss. I felt like I would be able to continue walking like this all night.

Around 9 p.m., Phra Ācariya Som told me to take a break and escorted me back to my monk hut (*kuṭī*). I didn't want to stop. I wanted to do walking meditation for the entire night. But since he brought me back to the *kuṭī*, I had to follow. After he went to bed, I couldn't sleep. So, I got up and went to do more walking meditation at the temple's clearing all by myself. Near daybreak, I finally returned to my room to get some rest. That was how I learned to do walking meditation. But the techniques were those of tranquil meditation (*samādhi*), not insight (*vipassanā*) in any way.

The next day, Phra Ācariya Som had some business to attend to with Luang Pu Boonchan at Ban Champa. He invited me to go along, so I took leave of my parents and embarked on the journey with him. It was a journey filled with intense suffering. I don't remember what I was carrying with me, but I know that it was heavy. I carried my

monk bowl and Phra Ācariya Som's umbrella-tent (klot). After four kilometers, my monk bowl felt like it was growing heavier. We hadn't taken any breaks, I was tired, the load was weighing down on me, and I was consumed with hunger. I was accustomed to two meals a day—breakfast and lunch. But that day, I had only had breakfast and was too excited to eat much. When I felt overcome with suffering, tears streamed down my face. I wanted to ask Phra Ācariya Som to stop for a break but was too afraid. I had to keep on going.

At the six-kilometer mark, Phra Ācariya Som allowed us to stop for a short break. Then we headed out again. We reached Wat Pa Ban Champa around 4 p.m. When we arrived, the monks and sāmañeras were sweeping the temple grounds. Two sāmañeras came to take our things and show us to the pavilion. I saw that all of the monks and sāmañeras wore dark ochre-colored robes. I stood out as the only one in an orange-colored robe. The temple grounds were clean, orderly, and attractive. This made me more and more devoted to (saddhā) and impressed with the ways of the kammaṭṭhāna monks. All of the monks and sāmañeras were equally composed in deportment. They spoke in gentle, composed tones, only communicating what was necessary. I was innately observant by nature.

At that time, I was so utterly exhausted that I just wanted to get some sleep because it was nearly dark. The sāmañeras put me up in a new kuṭī that I would have all to myself. It was a brand new kuṭī that hadn't been slept in yet. It was about one hundred meters from the main hall, in a dense forest of large trees. There was a small path leading to the new kuṭī. It had a bamboo floor and a straw roof. Inside, there were two bunches of ripe bananas hanging on a string. That night, I couldn't catch a wink of sleep because I was so hungry. My stomach grumbled and growled. I glanced at the ripe bananas and



my hunger intensified. So, I got up to grab the ripe bananas. As I was about to peel one, I thought, “*Hey Thoon, you are a sāmanera and must uphold the Ten Precepts (dasa-sīla). You have been good about keeping the precepts thus far. You cannot break the precepts now.*” After thinking this, I got back into bed and continued to stare at the ripe bananas. That night, I got up to eat the bananas a total of three more times. Each time, I felt shame and put them back down. Owing to hunger, I hardly got any sleep. That night, I fully experienced the suffering that comes from wanting.

I woke up early and headed to the pavilion. When I glanced under the kuṭi, I noticed something strange. There was a long dirt mound covered with dried and wilting leaves. Upon closer inspection, I saw a tray and small cups with food in them, as well as flowers and incense sticking out of the mound. I didn’t think much of it, assuming it was probably some auspicious tradition related to new kuṭis. I figured it was probably just a customary offering in deference to the house spirits presiding over the kuṭis. When I arrived at the main hall, I told a teacher (ācariya) about it. He asked if I was afraid. I told him I wasn’t. He told me, “A woman who had died while pregnant was buried under the kuṭi just two days ago. Her husband and relatives brought food for the ghost to eat.” Upon hearing that, I began to feel afraid. But then I told myself, “*Last night, how had you been able to sleep? In the following nights, you’ll be able to sleep as well.*” I reassured myself that I had upheld my precepts and the ghost couldn’t do anything to me. The person who had died and I who am alive are the same in being of the four elements (catu-dhātu).

When it was time to go on the alms round (piṇḍapāta), the teacher helped me with my bowl and taught me, “When on piṇḍapāta, you must remain composed. Do not look at the face of the person

giving alms. Confine your eyesight to your bowl. When walking, look only at the feet of those walking in front of you. Guard your thoughts. Do not think about this or that. Just keep on walking after them." I went on alms rounds in that village for ten days and never saw anyone's face. When it was time to eat, the teacher passed the food along and I scooped a good portion into my bowl. Once I finished my meal, I washed my bowl and put it away in my kuṭī. Then, like the other sāmañeras, I did walking meditation.

The teacher asked me if I was still scared of ghosts. I told him that I was. He told me, "This entire temple was a cemetery. All the kuṭīs are built over graves. The one that you are staying in was built over a pregnant woman who just recently died." As I listened, I couldn't help but be scared. But there was no escape. Though I was afraid, I had to swallow my fears and remain there. I thought of the other sāmañeras, "*They are small sāmañeras, just like me. How can they stay here? If they can do it, so can I.*" Once I was determined to endure and fight, I was able to stay on as if everything was normal.

After sweeping the temple courtyard one day, I walked over to the water pot to get a drink of water, but there wasn't a metal bowl anywhere. I only saw a bamboo flask with a spout on one end and a piece of cloth tied to the other. I had no clue what the contraption was. As I walked to the main hall to obtain a metal bowl, a sāmañera walked by and told me, "Do not use the metal bowl to scoop water. Instead, use the dhammakaraka to scoop and filter the water." I didn't know how to use a dhammakaraka to filter water. I noticed a couple of bamboo stalks with cloth tied on one end, hanging there. I grabbed one and examined it in wonderment. "*So, this is a dhammakaraka.*" I submerged the bamboo flask and pulled it back up, but all the water flowed out. I did this many times, and the water flowed out every



time. I was so thirsty. As I stood there trying to figure out how the dhammakaraka worked, a younger sāmañera walked by and asked, “Elder sāmañera, what are you doing?”

I asked, “How do you filter the water?” and he demonstrated that if I submerged the dhammakaraka and covered its spout with my finger right before pulling it up, the water would remain in the pipe. This really got me thinking. Because it was something that I was not accustomed to, even the easy appeared to be difficult.

During my stay there, I learned a great many things about the forest tradition (kammaṭṭhāna). I sat and thought about the ways of the kammaṭṭhāna monks. From the temple grounds, the path to the huts, the main hall, chamber pots, and various other things, everything was clean, organized, and put away in its place. Even water was filtered for drinking. Other utensils (parikkhāra) like kettles or cups were all clean and sanitary. These all factored into my positive impression of the kammaṭṭhāna monks from that moment on.

Many days later, Phra Ācariya Som brought me back to Wat Nong Chan and then left to attend the funeral for Phra Ācariya Mun, as planned. At the time, I was in the process of simultaneously completing my primary and secondary level Buddhist studies. I had already completed my primary level Buddhist studies and could remember every verse and every grouping, and I could recite all of it from memory. Thereafter, I went to Maha Sarakham to earn my advanced level Buddhist studies degree. After completing all three levels of studies, I was so confident in my comprehension and memory of all the material that I was willing to bet money on it. Many people challenged me, and I was able to answer every question.

Back in those days, it was customary for two monks to sit on raised preacher's seats (dhammāsana), and for one monk to ask a question and the other monk to answer. There was intense pressure to quickly answer questions about Dhamma topics. If one monk didn't have sufficient knowledge, he wouldn't be able to answer the other monk's questions. The questions centered on topics like: the Buddha's history; the Buddha's cultivation of perfections of character (pāramī) in his ten final lifetimes as a Bodhisatta; the five hundred lifetimes in which the Buddha cultivated his pāramī; the Buddha's history from the very beginning (paṭhama-sambodhi); the world's very first era following the creation of the universe (paṭhama-kappa); how humans arose in the world (paṭhama-pannā); the past Buddhas who cultivated their pāramī in the wisdom-based (paññā-dhika), faith-based (saddhā-dhika), or diligence-based (viriya-dhika) focus; how each Buddha became enlightened; our Buddha's Buddha era (bhadra-kappa); the fire, water, and wind that will cleanse the world at the end of this era; and how the world was created. These topics and countless other topics were of great interest to me. I wanted to be a great preacher who could sit on either of the two seats (dhammāsana) with confidence. I was very committed to my studies, and eventually I did sit on both seats (dhammāsana) with complete confidence. I was not afraid of anyone.

Soon afterward, my parents ordered me to return home. Every day, my old friends from the village would come out to play with me and tell me about worldly things. Initially, being around my friends had no effect on me. But the more they talked, the more I found myself slowly getting sucked back into the realm of worldly affairs. Eventually, I disrobed in order to work the fields and earn a living, as was customary for villagers during those times. I continued to practice



chanting and I would constantly review and reflect on the knowledge I had acquired. During auspicious annual events in the village, “mor lum” Northeastern-style singers would be invited to perform. The singers would ask and respond to questions according to their relative knowledge. If someone couldn’t answer, the villagers would boo them off of the stage. I loved events like this and would make it a point to attend no matter how far I had to travel. I didn’t care about girls. After I purchased food, I’d find somewhere to sit and listen. Sometimes I sat there listening to the performances until it started getting light out again. If the singers didn’t stop, I didn’t leave. The riddles were very educational, and because I had previously studied the material, the performances greatly captured my interest. But when the singers started singing about mundane love and romance, my ears shut off because there was no knowledge to be gained. I was very fixated on acquiring knowledge. I enjoyed reading ancient Dhamma books in Khom<sup>10</sup> script, like ancient texts from Vientiane, Laos. I often sought out ancient texts to read, because I wanted to advance my knowledge.

When I was eighteen, I accompanied my brother to sell Thai oxen. Our group had sixty oxen. Once combined with the entire group’s stock, there were six hundred oxen to sell. Northerners call someone who sells Thai oxen, “nai hoi.” That time, there were around one hundred of us traveling together and I was the youngest. When it came to accommodations, my group always had an advantage. When we traveled into town to acquire food and materials, my peers and elders would designate me the head nai hoi. If there was a home where there was an unwed daughter from a family of good standing, my elders would take me there. The elders would exalt my virtues

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<sup>10</sup> Khom Thai script is an ancient 15<sup>th</sup> century variant of the Khmer script that was originally used in Thailand. Khom was mainly used for writing religious texts.

in order to get a better deal on the supplies like rice, chili, salt, and fermented fish. We always got lower prices and sometimes were given items for free. But it was also a trip filled with immense suffering. At some places, thieves lurked nearby, awaiting an opportunity to steal our oxen. We had to stand guard all night. After four months, we returned home.

When I was nineteen, my father took me to live in Ban Khi Lek, Ban Dung district, Udon Thani province. Ban Khi Lek had been relocated and renamed Ban Kham Phu Ngoen. When I was twenty, my parents had me ordain as a monk again. I spent the rains retreat (vassa)<sup>11</sup> at Wat Chainat Wararam in Chai Wan district. I didn't have any difficulties with my studies because I had previously completed my primary, secondary, and advanced level Buddhist studies. After I had ordained, I came to learn of the Dhammayut order of monks. In those times, the Dhammayut and Mahā Nikāya monastic orders were at odds.

At that time, Luang Pu Boonchan from Ban Champa had established a temple in Ban Noi Nong Tum, Chai Wan district. We crossed paths while on alms round (*piṇḍapāta*), and I recognized him. The next day, I went to visit Wat Pa Santikawat to observe Luang Pu Boonchan's code of conduct and to see if he was still as orderly as I remembered. In the waste pile was a wooden toothbrush, just like Phra Ācariya Som had used back when I was a *sāmañera*. At that moment, I felt a strong desire to become a monk of the Dhammayut order. But it was impossible to do at that time, because the Mahā

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<sup>11</sup> A vassa, or "rains," refers to a monastic rains retreat that lasts for three lunar months (from the first day of the waning moon of the eighth lunar month to the full moon of the eleventh month, usually July through October) during monsoon season in South and Southeast Asia. During the rains retreat, monks remain in one place (typically a monastery or temple) and practice intensively. Monastic seniority is measured by the number of rains retreats spent in a monastery since ordination.

Nikāya order was in the process of obliterating the Dhammayut order. So, I planned to disrobe from the Mahā Nikāya order and re-ordain in the Dhammayut order at another time.

During that time, there was a village chief named Peng who was skilled at using the abacus. He came to the temple and taught the monks and sāmañeras how to use it. At first, I observed how it was used, and then I practiced with some of the monks and sāmañeras. The instructor had an adding technique, starting from  $1+2+3$  all the way up to 10. After he demonstrated each mathematical function's technique once, I was immediately able to follow suit. The instructor was amazed by my knack for the abacus and my ability to understand all four functions so quickly. Namely, addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Whatever number he set as the basis, I could use the abacus to add, subtract, multiply, and divide it. I became proficient at using the abacus to calculate within a single day. Thereafter, I became the one teaching the monks and sāmañeras how to use it. I even invented a new addition technique so that we wouldn't have to use the Chinese method anymore. I went out and bought an abacus to use as a basis for a novel design, one unlike any other. The original design is divided into two sides, with two balls on one side and five on the other. I designed and crafted an adaptation with one ball on one side and four balls on the other. Anyone who saw my invention was perplexed as to how it worked, because they couldn't follow my thinking.

Around that time, a clerk from the sugar factory came and saw how proficient I was with numbers and calculations. He was pleased with what he saw and spoke to me about work. He said he was going to quit soon, and he implored me to take over his job as a clerk at the sugar factory at Ban Nong Lak. So, I decided to disrobe, thinking that

I'd earn some money first and then ordain as a Dhammayut monk later on.

There were four others who were also going to disrobe on the same day. That morning, flowers in hand, we went in to see our preceptor (*upajjhāya*) together. He allowed the four of them to disrobe but refused my request because he had high hopes for me. He had seen my abilities and expected for me to become a leader of the monks one day. However, I eventually talked my preceptor into accepting my request. Upon seeing me in commoners' clothes during the lunch offering, the laypeople were overcome with tears. They, too, had hoped I would become a high-ranking ecclesiastical chief officer (*gaṇādhipati*) who would govern the Buddhist monastic order (*saṅgha*) in the future. Thereafter, I went to apply for the clerk position at the sugar factory and was hired. They gave me a starting salary of one thousand baht per month, and increased it to two thousand baht, then to three thousand baht. After working there for only three months, the sugar factory closed.

My parents wanted me to get married and had already found a suitable girl for me. I told them that I had some business to do in Vientiane first. I was there for three months. I narrowly escaped becoming a son-in-law in Laos and returned to Ban Dong Wai, Bahn Phue district. I had a friend there who had grand plans to grow sugarcane to sell to the factories. The government gave us twenty-five acres and we purchased an additional two hundred and seventy-five acres, for a total of three hundred acres. I resolved that if I didn't have one million baht in my hands, I wouldn't get married. We hired workers to clear the fields and plant sugar cane.

During that period, my thinking changed. A worker asked me, “This is such a large venture to embark on. Do you have a family yet?”

“Not yet,” I replied.

“Why not?” he asked.

I said, “I haven’t met a girl that I like yet.”

“What kind of girl do you like?” he asked.

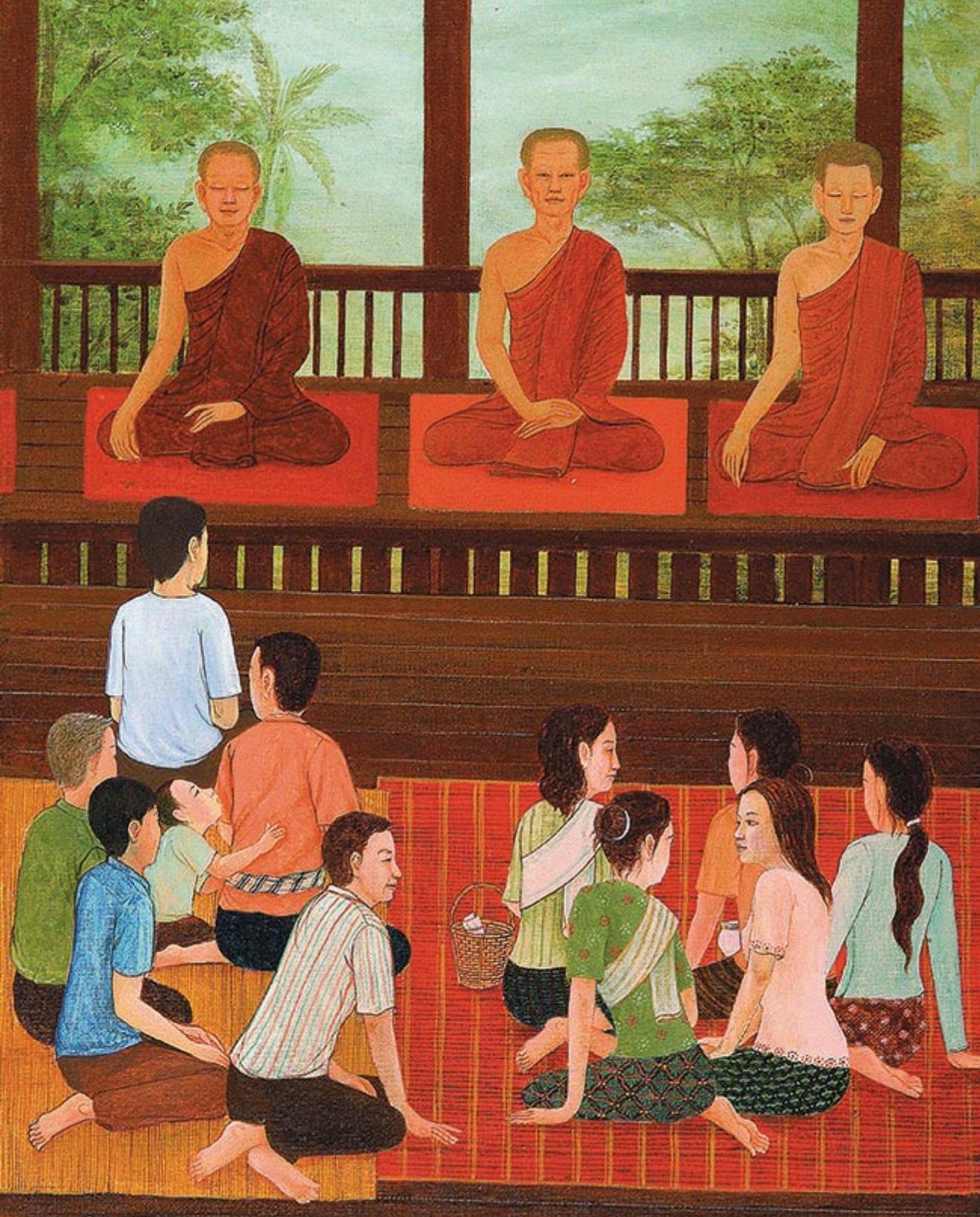
I told him, “First off, she would have to be someone who doesn’t eat raw foods, like fermented fish. Secondly, she would have to firmly uphold the Five Precepts (pañca-sīla). If the girl doesn’t meet both of these requirements, I will not get married.” My friend guaranteed that there was a girl who met those qualifications in a nearby village. I was interested. My friend wanted to obtain lucky lottery numbers in that village, and I wanted to check out the girl in the village. So, we went to make merit (puñña) during the holy day (uposatha) at that village’s temple.



## A Shift Toward Monkhood

We arrived at the temple and I noticed how clean and inviting everything appeared. My mind began to shift toward monkhood. I went up to the pavilion along with the rest of my party. At first, I just wanted to see the girl who was there to make merit (*puñña*) that day. But after seeing the monks and novices (*sāmañera*) in the pavilion sitting there composed and still, I started to feel full of admiration and faith (*saddhā*). I observed an elder monk who was perfectly composed. He sat there, unmoving. I observed him the entire time, and he sat composed, just like a wax statue. The other monks and *sāmañeras* were also sufficiently collected and composed. I started to reflect on the past, back to when I was ordained. That was like merely covering a plank of wood with orange-colored robes. These monks of the Dhammayut order were what I wanted to become. I had wasted so much time doing worldly things after I had disrobed. Now that I had found a Dhammayut temple, I would definitely become a monk in this order.

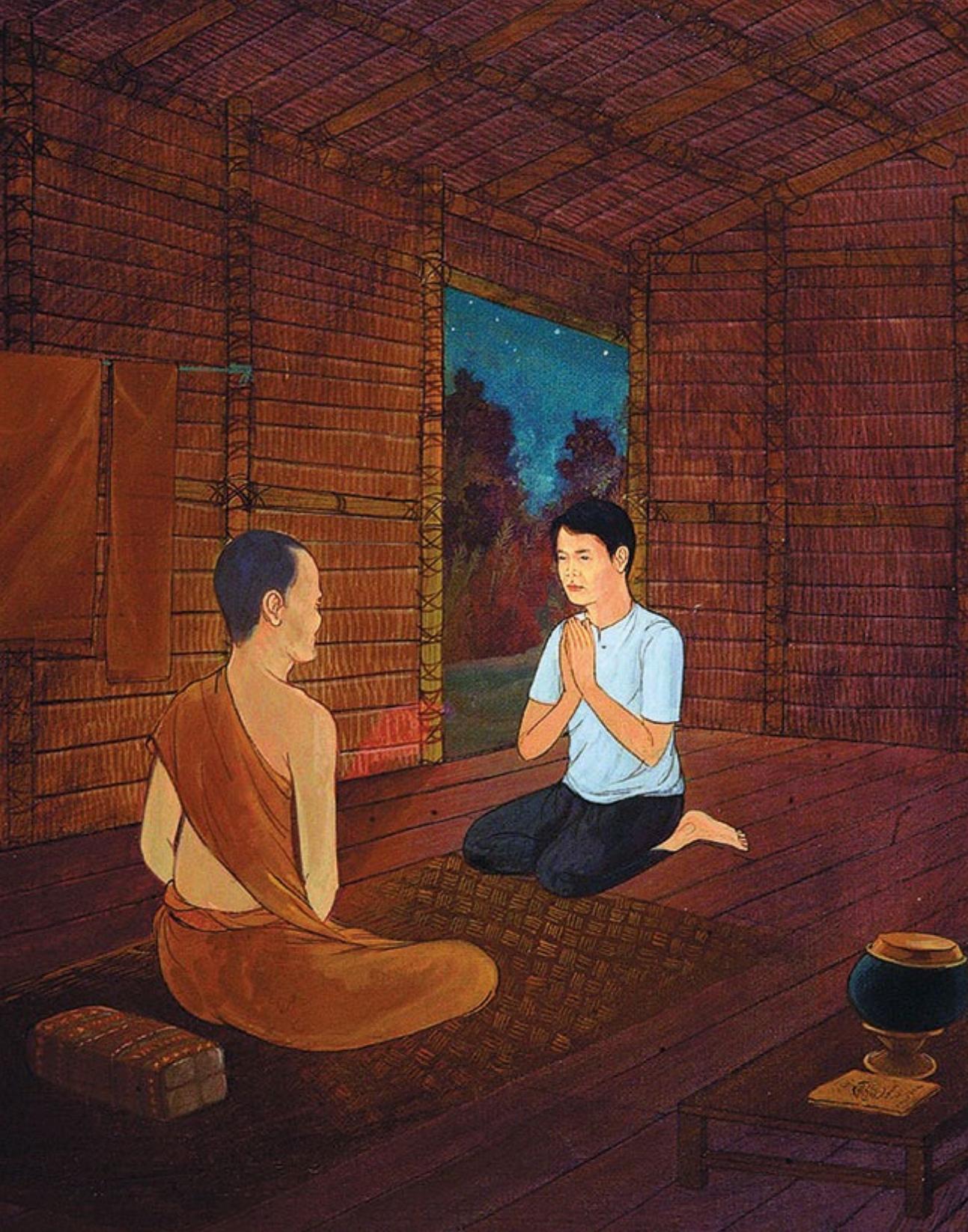
I was going to make the most of my life as a human by ordaining and leaving this world in ochre robes. Although I had gone to the temple with the intention of scoping out the girl, that was just a dream. I hadn't even seen what she looked like. That day, I reviewed my intent to disrobe from the *Mahā Nikāya* order in order to ordain in the



Dhammayut order. Now that I had found a Dhammayut temple, I was determined to ordain and spend the rest of my life as a monk. Whatever good or evil would befall me, I would remain in ochre robes until my dying day. After thinking about ordaining for some time, one matter concerned me. I told myself that if I had already become a monk and was curious about worldly matters, I would lack the information to dispel the curiosity. Of course, I was thinking in a worldly manner, siding with myself. But, no matter. The Buddha also passed through the world, and I was going to follow his example.

Thereafter, I rearranged my plans in order to be able to dispel curiosity in worldly matters. I told myself that the world was just an intermediate pathway. I vowed not to die in commoners' clothes. Ultimately, I was bested by my own defilements (*kilesa*). Although I lost, I didn't lose myself. I constantly used wisdom (*paññā*) to teach myself that, "*I will not get stuck in this world forever.*" I made a promise (*sacca*) to myself, man to man. During that time, I didn't know what mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*) meant at all. I had read manuals and knew the term, "mental cultivation practice" (*bhāvanā-patipatti*), but was clueless as to the actual methods. So, when I came to live with my wife's family, I found it difficult to adapt to my new lifestyle. I had never had a partner before. I had to figure out how to make the necessary mental adjustments.

On the day of a full moon (*uposatha*), Luang Por Boonma told me, "Thoon, come and visit me at the temple tonight." I agreed, and arrived at the arranged time. When I reached his hut (*kuṭī*) around 6 p.m., he was doing walking meditation (*caṅkama*). Upon seeing me, he walked into his *kuṭī*, and I followed him. We hadn't spoken at all when he reclined and asked me to give him a massage. I had no idea what I was doing so I simply squeezed along his legs. He told me,



"That is enough," and sat up. Then he asked me, "Do you want to hear a sermon?"

I responded, "I do, sir."

He told me, "Listen carefully, now. Arise, cease. Arise, cease." Then he asked me, "Do you understand?"

"I do, sir" I told him.

He continued the sermon, "Arise, cease. Arise, cease. Alright, go home now."

After hearing the short sermon, "arise, cease," I experienced great mental bliss. My mind was so replete and happy, it was difficult to put into words. It was as if something had compelled me to feel the Dhamma. It was as if I had understood and realized the great depth of how all things "arise, cease." I paid my respects and headed home. Once I came down from the kutī, it felt as if a great clarity of wisdom had arisen within me and I understood the truth that everything in this world arises and ceases. Whether that thing is occupied by consciousness (*viññāṇa*) or not occupied by consciousness, it will arise, persist momentarily, and cease.

Although I only lived one kilometer from the temple, it took me many hours to get home, as I spent much time in wisdom contemplation of "arise, cease." I stood at times and walked at times. What were the things that arise and cease in this world? I understood the entire scope of it through wisdom. I knew and saw what caused things to arise and what caused things to cease. I knew and understood it all. It was odd to me that I could have such a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter without previously having ever thought about it. The more I probed into "arise, cease," the wider my

knowledge and realization expanded. The knowledge and realization were very clear. I saw that naturally occurring things and human-constructed things are all subject to arise and cease. Even our bodies that have already arisen must cease as well.

When I got home, I lay down and thought in a continuous manner about how everything arises and ceases. This entire world is comprised of things that arise and cease. Some arise slowly and cease slowly. Some arise quickly and cease quickly. Some arise slowly and cease quickly. Some arise quickly and cease slowly. How slowly things arise or how quickly things arise, or how slowly things cease or how quickly things cease, is contingent on their relative nature, just like humans and all types of animals (*tiracchāna*). Even beings born on the same day will die at different times. Nothing that arises at the same time will cease at precisely the same time. Everything has its own set of causes and factors.

As I was contemplating “arise, cease,” it felt as if my own life wouldn’t last for much longer before it too would cease. I told myself that since I knew that I would also cease, why should I waste my time with worldly happiness? While I still have time, I must make haste to cultivate good deeds. The opportunity only lasts as long as the breaths do. Whenever the time for my last breath comes, the opportunity to cultivate goodness will cease immediately. I didn’t sleep a wink that night. I spent all night thinking about “arise, cease” with great delight. When I awoke the next morning, I continued to think about “arise, cease” continually. The more I thought about it, the greater my understanding of arise and cease became. I knew that I had come to a true understanding and realization of arise and cease. It was correct and clear. It was authentic wisdom of the right view according to the truth of the world.

The following day, I heard practitioners of mental cultivation (*bhāvanā-patipatti*) discussing the calmness of the mind (*citta*), the symptoms of the *citta*, and the characteristics of physical and mental bliss. When I asked them about meditation (*samādhi*), they all answered in the same way, “Concentrate on the meditative mantra (*parikamma*), ‘Buddho.’ Breathe in and think ‘Bud’ and breathe out and think ‘dho.’ Train your steadfastly focused awareness (*sati*) only on ‘Bud-dho,’ do not allow the mind to wander to external subjects, and forbid all thought.” I wasn’t sure if what they were saying was accurate. I went to ask Luang Por Boonma about it, so that I could understand. “Is what they said about how to meditate correct?”

He told me, “What they said about meditation is correct.” Then, he gave me a couple of other tips on meditation. The instant I got home, I sat down and meditated. I achieved results during my first attempt at meditation that night. The *citta* was calm and focused. Both my body and mind were in a state of bliss. Thereafter, I meditated every day. The *citta* would converge into an unwavering state of serenity every time, and it reached that state quickly, too.

However, my wisdom-based personality was still deeply entrenched in my mind. After I meditated and the *citta* attained a state of steadfastly focused concentration (*samādhi*), I would want to contemplate. So, I picked the familiar topic of “arise, cease” to contemplate and fused it with my focused concentration. During that period, Luang Por Boonma had never taught me how to develop continuous insight (*vipassanā*). I didn’t know the methods of developing continuous insight either. I thought it odd that when the *citta* had briefly achieved steadfastly focused awareness through meditation, I would always pull up the topic of “arise, cease” to contemplate. The more I thought about “arise, cease,” the more my mind clearly

understood the depths of its application. I was able to form comprehensive clarity and eradicate doubts related to that which I used to be attached. My progress solidified my faith (*saddhā*) in my method of practice, my faith in the Buddha, my faith in the Dhamma, and my faith in the Ariya-Saṅgha. I was certain that my practice was correctly aligned with the path and fruit of enlightenment (*maggaphala-nibbāna*).

The next day, I told Luang Por Boonma about my technique and results. He firmly reassured me, “That’s right. That’s right. Keep doing this often, and the citta will come to release its attachments on its own.” Then he told me, “Be diligent in your contemplations. Think of everything in terms of ‘arise, cease,’ and apply everything to the Three Common Characteristics (*tilakkhana*). That is, *anicca*, or impermanence; *dukkha*, or mental and physical suffering—and contemplate in order to know and see the cause of suffering, too; and *anattā*, or how something has ceased to exist in its original state, and the notion that nothing is ‘animal,’ ‘person,’ ‘self,’ ‘me,’ or ‘you,’ whatsoever.” From that lesson, I accelerated my efforts at contemplating. I knew that there was a lot of work to do each day and that I could not just sit down, train my mind on meditative mantras, and meditate for long stretches. If I were to meditate, it would only be during a break from work. Afterward, I would have to grab an axe or hoe and return to working the fields.

While I was working, I would constantly think about arise and cease according to impermanence, suffering, and not-self. I contemplated as I worked. My mind enjoyed dwelling in the Dhamma. I constantly sought out various Dhamma examples (*upāya*) and used them to teach myself with wisdom, in the process. *“Why am I so infatuated with this world when nothing even belongs to me? Even my body does not truly*

*belong to me. Everything is only here to be relied on momentarily. Soon it will disintegrate. Nothing lasts forever.*

*“Even the crops growing in front of me are impermanent, as they are all subject to arise and cease. What material elements (vatthu-dhātu) in this world can truly be mine? None of the material elements in this world are of actual significance or value whatsoever; they are only used to nourish and protect this clump of elements<sup>12</sup> (dhātu) and enable our daily survival. The body and mind (dhātu-khandha) that relies on external elements for survival cannot endure for long. This body and mind (dhātu-khandha) will cease due to its own causes and factors. If this is true, then why am I so attached to the world? All of these material elements belong to the world; no one can claim ownership. I am also one of the world’s sentient beings<sup>13</sup> relying on and consuming material elements for temporary survival. This is the way of the world, and this is how it will always be into the future, without any end in sight. If I were to be reborn, I would have to find a way to survive in this world, just as before. There would be no end in sight.”*

Therefore, when it comes to Dhamma practice, if you possess strong mindful wisdom, there will be no obstacles to your practice at all. You can practice mental cultivation anywhere you may be. There is no need to carve out a specific time or location. You can even contemplate at work, if your mindful wisdom is sharp enough. Whatever you are looking at, simply form an understanding of how that item arises and will cease to exist in a short time. Or use wisdom to contemplate so that you know and see how everything falls under

<sup>12</sup> The physical body is a clump of elements—earth, water, wind, and fire.

<sup>13</sup> Sentient beings are beings with the capacity to perceive or feel sensations. In Buddhism, the term refers to all living beings with consciousness that are subject to rebirth. Inhabitants of the six realms of existence—heavenly (arūpa-brahma, rūpa-brahma, devas), human, animal, demon (asura), hungry ghost (peta), and hell (naraka)—are all sentient beings. Plants are not.

impermanence, suffering, and not-self. Once you follow these guidelines for wisdom contemplations, you will be on the correct path. Don't doubt your practice. If your contemplations correspond to the Three Common Characteristics, then your wisdom contemplations are correct and your practice is correct. I achieved results from this same method, and that's why I want to share it with you all—so that you can apply it to your own practice, as well. Don't just sit around and concentrate on meditative mantras or only practice meditation. That being said, don't neglect meditation. When you have free time, take a meditative rest-break, as appropriate. But for the most part, you must employ wisdom in thinking about "arise, cease" on a regular basis. All of the examples (*upāya*) that you use to reinforce your wisdom must be examples of your own reasoning. If you can do this, you will never be stuck in a corner. You will be able to use this wisdom to fix problems that arise all by yourself. You must train your wisdom to become comprehensively intelligent so that problems will be fixed in time. This is the true meaning of, "one is one's own refuge."

I used my own material possessions as the basis for models (*upāya*) of wisdom contemplations. This is because material possessions are material elements (*vatthu-dhātu*) of a rudimentary level; material possessions are material elements that were created afterward.<sup>14</sup> While your wisdom is at a rudimentary level, you must contemplate rudimentary subjects until you become more seasoned in that mode of thinking and can form comprehensive clarity within your mind. Draw parallels between the external objects and the elements within you—namely, the four elements (*catu-dhātu*) of earth, water, wind, and fire. Contemplate so that the impermanence in the internal elements is as evident to you as the impermanence in the

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<sup>14</sup> Material possessions do not arise organically, but are created from the rudimentary elements.

external elements. Know and see the characteristics common to all elements (sāmaññalakkhaṇa-dhātu). Know and see how the internal elements and external elements are subject to the same condition of impermanence. The moment you assume a possession as your own, mental suffering will instantly be tied to that object. Wherever you find yourself, you can channel your wisdom to contemplate self-belongings and the four elements in accordance with the Three Common Characteristics, because these are physical phenomena (rūpa-dhamma) perceptible to the naked eye. Using these Dhamma models in wisdom contemplations will allow you to understand and realize the truth with your inner eye, with your mind's eye.

Once you develop comprehensive wisdom of the truth of reality through this process, your mind will become progressively smarter and more thorough. You won't need others to make decisions for you, because you will be fully capable of deciding what is right or wrong. Why would you rely on others to make your decisions? Practitioners tend to ask for approval or answers from others. If the person being asked to decide has consummate knowledge of the subject, they can make the correct decision. However, for the most part, people tend to form conclusions based on their manuals; their decisions are based on what they believe the answer should be, which can prove utterly incongruous with the practitioner's meaning. Often, they claim to be experts on various Dhamma topics. But sometimes, things that occur in actual applied practice (paṭipatti) don't correspond to their knowledge of the manuals. This is because knowledge of the manuals is merely knowledge of Dhamma in name. When face-to-face with real Dhamma, they won't even realize what it is. This is called knowledge without realization, or realization without knowledge.

That is why it's imperative to train in generating both technical knowledge and personal experience at the same time. If you know some Dhamma, you must also see that Dhamma. If you see some Dhamma, you must also know that Dhamma. Then you can genuinely claim to truly know and truly see the Dhamma. If you know something but haven't seen it for yourself, that knowing can be wrong. If you see something but don't know it, that seeing can also be wrong. Thus, for an understanding to truly be right, knowing and seeing must go hand in hand. In Pāli, this is called *ñāṇa-dassana*—knowing followed by seeing—and *dassana-ñāṇa*—seeing followed by knowing. Once your practice corresponds to these guidelines, “Buddho” has taken root within you.



## Tied to the Mango Tree

Although I had practiced analyzing and successfully cutting ties with a considerable number of objects, I could still feel the fine threads of attachment deep in my mind. I contemplated this repeatedly, but I still couldn't pinpoint the subject of this lingering attachment. One day at around 4 p.m., I walked out to the fields. I saw a mango tree that I had gotten from a friend who was the district agriculturalist. I was especially fond of it, for it was a good strain. I had planted five mango trees next to each other so that I could graft the branches and propagate more trees. I glanced at a mango tree standing at about a meter high. While staring at the tree, I could feel my intense love and attachment to it. It was so palpable that I exclaimed to myself, "All of the world's material belongings converge here, in this mango tree!" It was incredibly clear in my mind. I sat down to gain a clearer understanding of it. I thought, *"If I died at this very moment, I would be reborn as a worm crawling around the tree. However, if I were able to cut ties with this mango tree, all of my concerns for worldly material belongings would be cut loose with it."*

I sat and used wisdom to analyze the mango tree in terms of arise and cease and the Three Common Characteristics (tilakkhaṇa). I internalized (opanayiko) the mango tree and compared it to my body, thinking about the arising and ceasing of the four elements



(catu-dhātu). I applied the four elements to impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and not-self (anattā). I reflected inward and outward until the Three Common Characteristics were apparent. The mango tree was elemental (dhātu)—comprised of the four elements. My physical body was a temporary basis for my mind. The mango tree was also a temporary existence. Soon, both the mango tree and the four elements would return to the earth. My body was impermanent. The mango tree was impermanent. I experienced mental suffering because of my attachment to this mango tree. My four-elemental body was not-self and the mango tree was also not-self. The mango tree would die upon this earth, revert to dirt, and cease to be a mango tree any longer. Both my four-elemental body and the mango tree would rot and decay and return to the earth.

After using wisdom (paññā) to contemplate this over and over again, my mind came to know and see according to the truth. Everything must arise, as normal, and must cease, as normal. Upon truly understanding and truly seeing this through the wisdom of right view, the lingering threads of attachment to the mango tree in my mind were instantly cut free. My mind was no longer bound to this mango tree.

Thereafter, I thought of another mango tree that I had planted nearby. I walked over to visit the special strain. Just the sight of the special mango tree evoked the bonds of attachment I had to it, which were much stronger than to the previous tree. I used wisdom to contemplate in the same manner I had previously. It was nearly dark at that point. No matter how I contemplated, I couldn't destroy the attachment. This mango tree was impervious to my previous successful methods (upāya) of contemplation. I returned home to meditate (samādhi). Once my mind entered a steadfastly focused state of

concentration (samādhi), I contemplated the mango tree. But at the end of the night, the bonds were still strong and fully intact. There was no detachment whatsoever.

On the second day, I applied wisdom to contemplate the mango tree but found that I was still attached to it. At night, I sat down, meditated, and used focused concentration to further contemplate the tree. Eventually my mind became weary from all the thinking, so I used serene meditation to rest for a bit. Once I withdrew from meditation, I resumed contemplating with wisdom. I continued to apply the same methods of contemplation as from before. At that time, I looked inward and could see that my mind and my wisdom were both very refined. I could know and see the arising and ceasing of the four elements and the arising and ceasing of the mango tree very clearly.

Around midnight, the mind (citta) cut all lingering bonds to the mango tree with one fell swoop. I instantly knew what I had attained. I understood full and well that all worldly ownership ended here. There were no other material belongings to pull me into the illusion of ownership. From the past up until that very moment, I had been clinging to belongings, but now that was all behind me. Now, and going forward, belonging and possession would no longer exist for me.

Therefore, combining focused concentration (samādhi) with wisdom contemplation (paññā) is the most effective technique for contemporary times. It is contemplating the arising and ceasing of all worldly objects in terms of: impermanence, suffering, and not-self; both internal and external elements; zooming in and out of yourself; coarse and refined themes; and both subjects with consciousness

(viññāṇa) and subjects without consciousness. You must contemplate in order to clearly know and see the causes and contributing factors (paccaya). The truth is that we have no power to control things, because both the things that we like and dislike are all subject to their relative natures.

That night, I savored the fruits (phala) of my practice. I clearly knew that from that moment forward, there was nothing in this world that could engender greed in me. My wisdom had destroyed greed-based defilements (kilesa). Therefore, there was no longer any greed nor anything for which to feel greed. My mind was no longer burdened with worldly objects, and I had completely cast off all bonds to worldly belongings. Whether I already owned or would later come to acquire them, possessions were merely elements (dhātu) to be relied upon while I was still alive in this world. I had previously believed the body and mind (dhātu-khandha) to be my “self.” However, that is just a conventional reality (sammuti). The truth remains that there is no self (anattā). This doesn’t change. You can call something an “animal” or a “person,” but it is only a conventional reality (sammuti).

Sakkāya-ditṭhi is the view that the physical body and its four elements are “self.” Wisdom had made it clear that the conglomeration of our four elements and the conglomeration of the four elements of others were all subject to not-self. The arising and ceasing of elements must naturally occur in accordance with their relative causes and factors. Nothing can prevent aging. Nothing can prevent death. To shed sakkāya-ditṭhi is to eliminate wrong views from the mind. Previously, I had held the ego-affirming view that the four-elemental body was “self.” But once I saw the body as mere physical elements to temporarily rely on, I arrived at the clear understanding and realization that they are merely the four elements—there is no identity

embedded in them whatsoever. The clinging to the notion of self instantly vanished. All that remained was the mind and body leaning on one other for the time being. I also came to understand that the lifespan of the four elements must correspond to their respective roles. These four-elemental tangibles cannot be forced to obey. My mind shed the notion that these four elements are “self.” That’s all.

Vicikicchā—skeptical doubt about the Buddha, skeptical doubt about the Dhamma, skeptical doubt about the Ariya-Saṅgha, skeptical doubt about the path and fruit of enlightenment—had vanished from my mind because I knew and saw with wisdom that the Buddha was real. The Dhamma was real—if the Buddha’s teachings were followed, true results would emerge. The Ariya-Saṅgha was real—following the Dhamma would lead to the attainment of a level of enlightenment. I had no hesitations about the concept of good kamma and bad kamma. I knew it was true that those who commit good deeds will receive good results. It was true that those who commit bad deeds will receive bad results. I had no doubts about the existence of hell (naraka), hungry ghosts (peta), or demons (asura)—they were real. I had no doubts about heaven (sagga), heavenly beings (devatā), the king of heavenly beings (Indra), and divine beings of the Brahma realm—all of it really existed. I had no doubts about rebirth. Past lives were real. Future lives were real. If you were to die while you still hadn’t extinguished mental intoxications (āsava) and defilements (kilesa), you would be reborn. I did not wonder whether it was true that life forces (viññāṇa) could be reborn into a multitude of different realms. I knew it was true. Those established on the path to enlightenment as a stream-enterer (sotāpanna) have absolutely no doubts about the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Ariya-Saṅgha, the path and fruit of enlightenment, the existence of heaven and hell, or that the presence

of mental intoxications and defilements within the mind warrants rebirth.

Silabbata-parāmāsa is clinging or attachment to rites and rituals. Doubts about what constitutes morality (*sīla*) or breaking precepts do not exist for sotāpannas. That is because morality and precepts are naturally established directly from the Dhamma within the sotāpannas themselves. They are not established through a ritual. Even if sotāpannas go through the motions of the precept-taking ritual with a monk, the actual precepts within them are unaffected. Their precepts are pure on their own and do not need to be consciously upheld. There is no trepidation about tarnishing or breaking the precepts. The moral precepts are just a reflection of the Dhamma. With true Dhamma in the mind, bad thoughts, bad actions, and bad speech result in feelings of shame. This morality directly results from Dhamma; this morality does not waver and is free from doubt because morality is so deeply entrenched in the mind.

It is what is called “Adhi-sīla,” great morality, and “Adhi-citta,” the mind (*citta*) that is firmly established in Dhamma. Both morality and the Dhamma are firmly established in the mind. “Adhi-paññā”—wisdom that is comprehensive in terms of morality (*sīla*), wisdom that is comprehensive in terms of the truth (*dhamma*), and wisdom that is comprehensive in terms of the mind (*citta*)—simultaneously exist in the same place. It is morality based on intention that is untethered to precepts. For instance, if you were to unknowingly step on an animal and kill it, you wouldn’t have broken the precepts. From the sotāpanna level of attainment onward, there is no tarnished morality, because those who have entered the stream of Dhamma have *uttama-sīla*, or highest morality. It is *samuccheda-virati-sīla*, or morality completely detached from notions of intention or

non-intention. It is morality that is wholly pure and absolutely free of doubts or hesitations.

When I had previously read manuals mentioning sakkāya-ditṭhi, vicikicchā, and sīlabbata-parāmāsa, I didn't know what they denoted. I didn't concern myself with these concepts because I figured that they were beyond me. They were for noble individuals (ariya-puggala) to know and eliminate. As a commoner (puthujjana),<sup>15</sup> it wasn't a necessary concern. Attaining a level of enlightenment and becoming an ariya-puggala was a grand achievement and not a likely one for my lifetime. Even if I were to be reborn another hundred times, I still would not have any expectation of attaining enlightenment and joining the ranks of the ariya-puggala. I hadn't paid any attention to those concepts since reading about them way back then. But on that auspicious night, as my mind entered the stream of Dhamma, I fully understood the meaning of sakkāya-ditṭhi, vicikicchā, and sīlabbata-parāmāsa.

During the Buddha's time, once commoners (puthujjana) who had never attained enlightenment before did attain enlightenment, they would immediately comprehend the true meaning of the three defilements (kilesa) of sakkāya-ditṭhi, vicikicchā, and sīlabbata-parāmāsa, as well as how to shed them. Not having any prior technical knowledge (pariyatti) of them didn't matter. So long as the mind (citta) achieved enlightenment, the three defilements would automatically be eradicated within that moment of awakening. During the Buddha's time, those who attained enlightenment didn't have technical knowledge to study and didn't know about eliminating defilements at all. Yet, individuals would wholly transform into ariya-

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<sup>15</sup> "Commoner" in this context refers to attainment. A puthujjana is a common, non-holy worldling who has not attained any level of enlightenment.

puggalas without anyone to serve as witness or issue a declaration (*vyākaraṇa*). The experience of attaining a level of enlightenment is the same in contemporary times as it was during ancient times. The individual experiences self-awareness of their achievement, or *paccattam*. This independent cognizance renders outside corroboration unnecessary. Even if the Buddha were to be seated there during the precise moment of attainment, there would be no need for an announcement. This is how it transpired back then and how it transpires for modern day people who attain a level of enlightenment, as well. There's no need to proclaim your achievement and no need for recognition. This is the convention of all of the Buddha's disciples (*sāvaka*), both in the past and in the present. All this was made clear to me during my own night of awakening.



## An Encouraging Omen

One night, after using wisdom to contemplate various universal truths (sacca-dhamma), I settled into silent meditation (samādhi) to rest my mind (citta). Upon entering a state of tranquility, a boundless luminescence glowed around me. The dazzling light radiated around the world. Right then, I noticed a glass vehicle floating down toward me from a great distance. When there were twenty yards between us, it halted its descent and remained suspended mid-air. I could plainly observe the glass vehicle at this point. An assortment of gleaming glass ornaments amplified the vehicle's brilliant, radiating aura. There were bows and arrows, spears, swords, and many other weapons held inside. Seated in the vehicle was a bejeweled king, surrounded by glistening, sparkling gems.

Then there was an announcement. "Hear this, Thoon. I am Phra Ya Dhammadikarājā. I am here to warn you that henceforth, the human world will start to turn toward chaos and disaster. Humans will fight, murder one another, and employ various weapons to wipe out entire civilizations. Those who hold true to morality (sīla) and righteousness (dhamma) will become an elusive, rare breed. Ordained individuals who maintain their virtue and lead significant, meaningful lives will also become scarce. Thus, Thoon, it is time for you to ordain and serve as a strong force in the propagation of Buddhism. Teach



the people how to lead moral, virtuous lives. Educate them on how to be charitable (*dāna*), uphold the precepts (*sīla*), and practice mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). In the near future, many perils (*bhaya*) will befall the human realm. Brutal fire-based natural disasters (*aggi-bhaya*), water-based natural disasters (*udaka-bhaya*), wind-based natural disasters (*vāta-bhaya*), and land-based natural disasters (*paṭhavī-bhaya*) will ravage the Earth. Wars will break out in every corner of the world. Once the wars reach their maximum violent intensities, humans will be unable to prevent them. You will be the one to inhibit these wars.”

“How can I stop these wars?” I asked.

Phra Ya Dhammamikarājā picked up a bludgeon and said, “This is how—point the bludgeon’s head at them, and they will die. Next, point the bludgeon’s shaft at them and they will be resurrected. They will fear you. Then, you will tell them to stop fighting wars. Therefore, you must ordain now. It is time for you to lead people to Buddhism. Thence, your goal of achieving enlightenment (*nibbāna*) in this lifetime will attain fruition.”

Once Phra Ya Dhammamikarājā finished dispensing his orders, the glass vehicle gently drifted higher and higher into the sky until it was out of view. There were numerous celestial beings (*deva*, *devatā*) in his great procession. The dazzling radiance gradually waned with their departure. Then, an intense wind rushed in from the east. It thundered like a forest being felled. The wind surged toward my house with six men on its tail. The leader of the group had a body as dark as charcoal. The five men ran behind him. Suddenly, the devastating force of the wind made contact with my house, which trembled on the verge of collapse. Those around me became alarmed

and frightened. They shrieked and screamed, “What’s happening? It’s like the wind is going to bring the house down!” At that moment, I withdrew from the meditative state and recounted the story to those around me but omitted certain details. I knew they opposed my ordination, but I also knew that I would definitely ordain in this lifetime.



## A Vision of Elder Ouan

Before moving onto my ordination as a monk, I must first recount an important incident. Namely, the occurrences surrounding Elder Ouan. He was originally a resident of Ban Koh Narai, who had been interested in mental cultivation practice (*bhāvanā-paṭipatti*) for over thirty years. He had vowed to uphold the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*) for his entire life, and he also upheld the Eight Precepts (*aṭṭha-sīla*) every full moon day (*uposatha-sīla*) without fail. During that time, Elder Ouan moved into a house directly across from mine in Ban Non Somboon. He loved and cared for me as if I were one of his children. Sometime later, Elder Ouan built two small monk huts (*kuṭī*) at the temple. The two *kuṭīs* were set apart by twenty meters and a bathroom was to be erected at the halfway point for the occupants' joint use. The two *kuṭīs* had already been completed and construction on the bathroom was set to begin when Elder Ouan fell ill. So, his children and grandchildren transported him back to Ban Koh Narai, Ban Phue sub-district for treatment. His symptoms never ameliorated, and he passed away surrounded by loved ones.

Upon hearing the news, I went to participate in Elder Ouan's cremation ceremony. I constantly contemplated death, thinking about how one day in the future I would also die just like Elder Ouan. There was no escaping death. Elder Ouan was over seventy years old. He

was a strong man, an industrious worker, and a diligent practitioner. Despite this, he had died and left behind his loved ones. Although I was still young, it was possible that I would also drop dead soon, just as small mangoes can fall from the tree. I was the same way. I could die within the next couple of days, in fact. Plenty of children die at a young age. There is no way for us to know when our final day will come. That entire day, I was consumed with thoughts about death.

As I performed the watering ceremony on Elder Ouan's corpse, the colors and details of his final outfit were imprinted on my mind. I returned home after the cremation, never once thinking that Elder Ouan would feel downhearted. In fact, I was confident that he would be reborn in a heavenly realm due to his many noble deeds. He gave charity (*dāna*) on a continuous basis and never wavered from the Five Precepts or the Eight Precepts. He had prayed and chanted regularly. I was certain he would go to heaven (*sagga*) or the Brahma realm.

That night, I entered my usual tranquil meditative state. In a vision (*nimitta*), Elder Ouan walked toward me. I thought, “*Why is he here? He had cultivated many wholesome deeds (*kusala*), so why wasn't he in a blissful state (*sugati*)?*” As he approached more closely, I wanted to ask him, “*Elder, why aren't you in heaven? What are you doing here?*”

Just then, Elder Ouan came in and embraced me from behind. Once his arms made contact with my body, a chill propagated through my entire body. I told him, “Elder Ouan, don't hug me too tightly. I'm cold. Please loosen your hold.” He obliged and slackened his embrace. I asked Elder Ouan, “Elder, what are you doing here? You cultivated so much merit and virtue. Why didn't you go to heaven?”



He whispered in my ear, “I am still worried about the bathroom that hasn’t been built.”

I asked, “Where do you want to build the bathroom?”

He replied, “At the midpoint between the two kuṭis that have already been erected.”

I told Elder Ouan, “No problem, Elder. Tomorrow, I’ll tell Mr. San and all our relatives in Ban Koh to have this bathroom constructed as soon as possible. Just wait to rejoice (anumodanā) in the merit of building this bathroom.”

Elder Ouan accepted and said, “Okay, tell them to finish it quickly. I’ll be waiting around here.” Thereafter, he released his hold and my mind (citta) withdrew from the meditative state.

I applied my wisdom to delicately comb through this vision and arrived at a clear understanding, which I will explain later. The next morning, I dashed over to tell Mr. and Mrs. San all about Elder Ouan and the bathroom. Upon listening to what I had to say, Mr. and Mrs. San were stunned, “We do recall Elder Ouan mentioning building the bathroom. If you hadn’t mentioned it, we would have forgotten all about it.” I, on the other hand, first heard about it from Elder Ouan only the night before. I directed Mr. San to quickly mobilize all our relatives to build the bathroom at Ban Koh Narai. They were to finish it within two days, in time to dedicate the merit to Elder Ouan, who was waiting nearby to rejoice in its completion. If they completed it all swiftly, Elder Ouan would be able to anumodanā and make his way to heaven. Otherwise, he would be stuck in this existence as a hungry ghost (peta) for a long time.

Once Mr. San heard this, he jumped on his bike and frantically pedaled away. He explained everything to our relatives, who hurriedly loaded the tools and equipment into a ten-wheeler. A team of around thirty people was assembled. I pointed out the location for the bathroom, and they immediately got to digging and laying down the pipes. The group of woodworkers worked speedily as well. As a result, the bathroom was completed within that very same day. The next day was a full moon uposatha day. All the relatives joined in a ceremony to dedicate the merit from the *kuṭis* and bathroom to Elder Ouan.

That night, I sat down to meditate, pondering whether Elder Ouan had received the merit dedicated to him. Once my mind entered a tranquil meditative state, I saw Elder Ouan walk toward me. He appeared bright and happy. The skin on his body and face glowed. His clothes were attractive. Elder Ouan stood near me and said, "Thoon, I no longer have any worries. If you hadn't helped me, who knows for how long I would have been a hungry ghost. I thank you for helping me. Without your help, I would still be a hungry ghost waiting to build the bathroom, stuck in a perpetual state of despair in this world. May you cultivate a lot of merit and uphold the precepts without fail. And tell others about my story. Tell them not to be attached to anything. Once you cling to something, your mind is obscured by that attachment and you have no chance of making it to heaven." Finally, Elder Ouan concluded by announcing, "Now, I'm on my way to heaven." With that, he floated upward into the sky until he was no longer visible. My mind withdrew from meditation and I contemplated attachment in a clear manner.

I reflected on all that transpired with Elder Ouan and decided that it was an exemplary cautionary tale of the harmful consequences of attachment. I will now explain about attachment to possessions.

The mind's attachment is a bond so strong that to even be aware of it is a challenge. It restrains and obscures our minds. Despite the piles of money invested into cultivating merit, your mind (citta) can be rerouted in the final moments before departure. If your mind is anchored to something, it will refuse to leave. It does not matter how much merit you have accumulated; it cannot compel you to relinquish that attachment. Now, your merit doesn't disappear; it is embedded in your mind. However, the strength of attachment is greater. It leads your mind astray without your knowing it. The duration of attachment is contingent on many things. While some minds find their way back slowly, others realize the way back more quickly. The rationale for letting go of attachment is an intricate topic because its causes and factors vary for each individual. Just as each person's character is unique, so is the degree of being consumed by attachment.

Consequently, attachment overpowers merit (puñña) and wholesomeness (kusala). That is why the Buddha told Venerable Ānanda, "People who go to heaven are few, like the horns of the ox. Those who cannot go to a blissful destination or heaven are like the hairs on the ox." The number of hairs and horns on an ox are incomparable. This is because the strength of the mind's attachment is deeply embedded in that which we love. Our attachment dictates our next existence (bhava) and rebirth (jāti). The wise contend that if your mind is heavily inclined toward wholesome (kusala) and meritorious deeds (puñña), those good credits will lead you to heaven. If your mind is heavily inclined toward unwholesome (akusala) and demeritorious deeds (pāpa), those bad credits will unequivocally lead you to a bad destination (duggati). People often take a straightforward view of this without pausing to consider each component on its own.

For instance, they believe that a heavy inclination toward the good indicates making a large measure of merit—namely, extensive donations of the four requisites (*catu-paccaya*): monk's robes, every conceivable variety of savory and sweet foods, shelters for monks, and medicine to cure various diseases. It follows then, that a heavy inclination toward the bad indicates making a large measure of demerit, such as extensive killing, extensive stealing, extensive adultery, extensive use of words in harmful ways, and extensive intoxication. This thinking is partially correct but still doesn't align with the objective. The correct meaning is as follows—the term "a lot" of merit or "a lot" of demerit means a mind heavy in merit or a mind heavy in demerit. This is not absolutely determined by deeds. Rather, the weight of this "a lot" inclination is decided at the critical instant in which the mind (*citta*) is about to depart the body, in its final breath. This instant is very important. In the moment right before the *citta* is to leave the body, a mental image (*nimitta*) will appear for a brief moment. For example, even if an individual had killed a lot and had only committed a few good deeds, if their mind is inclined toward the good in the moment that they die, when the *citta* leaves the body, it will immediately depart for a blissful destination. Or suppose someone had performed many good deeds—giving charitably, upholding the precepts, practicing mental cultivation fervently—but is weighed down with concerns or worries about something at the moment the *citta* takes off, the mind will despair, be depressed, and cling to those things, and they will definitely depart for a realm of suffering (*apāya-bhūmi*). The good merit cannot help at all.

Elder Ouan had been charitable, honored the precepts, and dedicated himself to mental cultivation practice. Not once in the course of thirty years did he break the precepts. But before dying,

Elder Ouan's citta was consumed with wanting to build the bathroom and he was worried that he would not get to it. Because of this small wrong view, he immediately became a hungry ghost. If I hadn't intervened at that time, who knows how long he would have inhabited that bleak existence.

Another thing that we should understand is that if someone is about to die, dress them in new clothes and bundle up any belongings that were precious to them. Or, place those items into a bag and position the bag beside them. Inform them that you have set aside their belongings. This way, once their citta has exited their body, they will recognize that these items are theirs and can be immediately taken with them. I have had extensive experience with this, such as with my father and Elder Ouan. The outfit they were wearing at the time of death is what sticks with them until they receive their family's dedication of merit.

Thus, attachment to anything will instantly alter the rebirth destination. This is because the mind is mercurial, fragile, and extremely quick. Over the course of an ordinary day, we think and feel many things. We are inadequately aware of what our mind pegs for our subsequent rebirths. The only course is to practice Dhamma and employ mindful wisdom to break the mind. Train yourself to understand that nothing can truly belong to you. Practice such that your mind is free from worries over any issue. That way, when you die, you will immediately set off for a blissful destination.



## Ordination

I had high hopes for what I was determined would be the final ordination of my lifetime. In my view, the layperson's life was filled with burdens that hindered my ability to continuously practice mental cultivation (*bhāvanā-paṭipatti*). So, I decided to realize my intent to ordain as a monk. Though obstacles stood in my way, I was able to overcome them. I went to the temple and reported to the senior monk (*ācariya*). Once he uttered the words, "Thoon, you may take ordination," I felt like the weight of the world was instantly lifted from my shoulders. I delighted in the bliss and freedom. There were no worldly burdens weighing down my life. I felt incredibly confident. I resolved to entrust the rest of my life to monasticism.

On the actual ordination day, I felt absolutely fulfilled. I told myself, "*Today, I will become a monk. In doing so, I must ordain both my body and my mind. I must not be heedless. I intend to practice for my own benefit as well as that of others. I will practice wholeheartedly in this lifetime.*"

Once it was time, I entered the ordination hall (*uposatha*) at Wat Photisomporn in Udon Thani province. Phra Dhammachedi (Joom Bandhulo) was my preceptor (*upajjhāya*) and chose my monk alias, Khippapañño. Phra Udomñāṇamolī conferred the precepts (*kammavācācariya*) and Phra Chao Khun Candopamācariya served



พระธรรมชาติ จอมบันধูล  
พระปัลลว

Phra Dhammachedi  
(Joom Bandhulo)  
Upajjhaya



พระอุดมนาณมาโน  
พระกรรมวาจาจารย์

Phra Udomñāṇamoli  
Kammavācācariya



พระคันดอปามาการ  
พระอนุสัพนาการ

Phra Candopamācariya  
Anusāvanācariya



พระทูน ขี้ปปานโน

Phra Thoon Khippapañño

as mentor (*anusāvanācariya*). I took higher ordination as a monk (*upasampadā*) on July 27, 1961, approaching the age of twenty-seven.<sup>16</sup> After ordaining, I spent my first rains retreat (*vassa*) at Wat Khem Wanaram in Ban Non Somboon, Ban Phue district, Udon Thani province.

Ever since I was a novice monk (*sāmañera*), I had aspired to become a monk of the forest practitioner (*kammaṭṭhāna*) tradition. However, the timing was never right. Now that I had finally realized that ambition, I made the resolution (*adhiṭṭhāna*) to fully commit myself to Buddhism. I was dedicated to practicing mental cultivation to my fullest ability. Even if my life perished, it would not be important. What was important was that I give my all. I was fortunate enough to ordain in this lifetime. I would not waste my life as I had in the past. I would practice purposefully in this race against time.

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<sup>16</sup> By American standards, he was 26 years old. On your 26<sup>th</sup> birthday, Thais would say that you are fully 26 and approaching 27 years of age.



## The First Rains Retreat, 1961

As I entered my first rains retreat (vassa), I sought a code of conduct to follow. What Dhamma metaphor (upāya) would allow my diligence to flourish and bear fruit? I landed on the topic of truthfulness (sacca). If my mind were established in truthfulness, I would be rooted in reality. I wouldn't lie to myself. I would take my code of conduct seriously. With truthfulness as a firm foundation, my practice would remain steady; it wouldn't slacken or ease up. There would be no stalling my arrival at my final destination. Therefore, I must use truthfulness to compel myself to fully accelerate my practice. If I wasn't strong in truthfulness, I would not be able to prevent myself from dozing off or playing with friends, both of which would eat up precious time for actual practice. Every waking day, night, and hour is a golden opportunity for practice. Thus, in this rains retreat, I will fully dedicate myself. I will pour all of my mindfulness, wisdom, faith, and diligence into these efforts. Whatever posture I may be in, I will practice tirelessly and continuously.



## A Compelling Vow

The day we entered the rains retreat (vassa), I laid out my code of conduct. I made a vow (sacca) to adhere to this code of conduct in order for my progress to remain steady and my practice comprehensive. I was confident that I would reach the end of suffering by the end of the rains retreat. The end of suffering and the breaking free from the cycle of rebirth (vatṭa-saṃsāra) felt like a mere arm's reach away. I was confident that I would reach my goal within seven days from the start of the rains retreat. I wasn't being boastful; I really felt that way at the time. As I was setting my resolution (adhiṭṭhāna), I could visualize the end of suffering, or enlightenment (nibbāna). How would this feeling change? Read on to find out.

The first day of the rains retreat commenced with maximum effort. I relied on my vow to place enormous pressure on myself. I was fearless and willing to sacrifice my life for this effort. I would not regret my death if it came about from my true diligence. In fact, my death would pay homage to the Buddha, pay homage to the Dhamma, and pay homage to the Ariya-Saṅgha. I was constantly mindful of my ambition to reach enlightenment within seven days. I accelerated my efforts and poured all my mindfulness (sati) and wisdom (paññā) into the endeavor. I exerted constant and continuous diligence as I practiced in the three postures (iriyāpatha)—standing, walking, and

sitting down. Even as I walked to and from the temple during alms rounds (*piṇḍapāta*), I was continuously diligent. As I took my meals, I was calm, composed, and diligent. While sweeping the temple grounds or wherever I was, I exerted diligence at all times. In every moment and every task, I exerted constant diligence.

Constant diligence meant regularly employing mindfulness and wisdom to contemplate the universal truths (*sacca-dhamma*) of this world. The suffering that arose from exerting effort in the three postures was irrelevant. Despite straining the four elements (*catu-dhātu*) and five aggregates (*pañca-khandha*) to their limits, I had to persist. I decided that if my great efforts exhausted the four-elemental body and the five aggregates, I would willingly accept it. I wasn't the least bit afraid of death because I had cycled through death and birth before. But in this moment, I would exert full effort. If the four elements and five aggregates would burn out on me, so be it. So long as my mind was afflicted with the cause of rebirth, I could be reborn again. I was ready, should my life end within the seven-day deadline.



## A Cautionary Omen

The seventh night from the start of the rains retreat (vassa) was a critical, decisive night. It would be the final day of my life. If I could attain release from rebirth and enlightenment (nibbāna), it would happen tonight. And if I couldn't, my life would certainly end tonight. At that time, I was overcome with immobilizing physical pain. My body aches intensified so severely that I could hardly continue my walking meditation (caṅkama). My body and mind (dhātu-khandha) could not withstand the strains of my extreme diligence. No matter, I would have to rely on my vow (sacca) to compel myself. I employed mindfulness (sati) and wisdom (paññā) to habitually remind myself, *"See here, Thoon. You are a forest practitioner (kammaṭṭhāna) monk. You are a determined, brave practitioner. You are willing to sacrifice your life in this noble pursuit. This trivial pain is not even one one-hundredth of a sliver of what the Buddha experienced. His diligence caused him to lose and regain consciousness many times. Yet, he never wavered in his diligence. And if you hope to follow in his footsteps, do not succumb to this pain. If you must really die, then let it be in tribute to the Buddha, in tribute to the Dhamma, and in tribute to the Ariya-Saṅgha."*

These truths (sacca) invigorated me, and I accepted my imminent death. I pressed forward with my extreme diligence. I resumed my regimen of walking meditation, sitting meditation, and continually

contemplating all of the world's conditioned phenomena (saṅkhāra) in accordance with universal truths (sacca-dhamma) and the Three Common Characteristics (tilakkhaṇa) of impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and not-self (anattā). Once I became weary from wisdom contemplations, I would direct the mind (citta) to rest through meditation. After I withdrew from meditation, I would resume contemplating all conditioned phenomena in a continual manner. My practice was unrelenting in this way.

At one point, the citta was in a state of tranquil meditation. I don't know how long I was in that tranquil state, but as the citta withdrew from it, spontaneous knowledge arose that, "*The fruit isn't mature, you cannot force it to ripen right now.*" Then, I analyzed this knowledge and came to understand it in a rational manner. I had only practiced for seven days. My spiritual faculties (indriya)<sup>17</sup> were not ripe yet. It was impossible to compel myself into enlightenment right now. I had to wait for my spiritual faculties to develop and mature. My aspiration for enlightenment within seven days was nullified. Yet, I clung to the hope that on the final day of the rains retreat, my spiritual faculties would have fully matured. That day would decide with absolute certainty whether or not I would achieve release from suffering. So, I reset my aspiration for the final day of the rains retreat. Meanwhile, I remained focused on maintaining a high caliber of practice. I was very serious about it. My mindful wisdom stayed steady, and my practice was strong and focused. A month into the rains retreat, I experienced yet another omen (nimitta), but I did not believe it.

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<sup>17</sup> The five spiritual faculties are faith (saddhā), concentration (samādhi), effort (viriya), mindfulness (sati), and wisdom (paññā).



## A Vision of a Warning from an Anāgārika

My practice at that time could be characterized as grueling and torturous. I wasn't worried about death. My body was malnourished and I wasn't eating well or sleeping, but I believed it to be a mere physical inconvenience. I didn't consider it important. I was focused on fighting through it and staying true to my vow (sacca). One night, as the mind (citta) was calm in meditation (samādhi), I experienced a vision of a white-clad lay attendant (anāgārika)<sup>18</sup> walking toward me with a walking stick in hand. He walked up to my hut (kuṭī) and sat with his legs to one side. He was respectful, but he did not bow to me. He only raised his hands in the lotus position at his chest (vandana) in a gracious greeting.

He said, "Venerable sir, your current state of practice is too strained. If you exert this kind of diligence without allowing your body to rest or sleep, you may find yourself at death's door. Subsequently, you will not realize your goal of attaining the path and fruit of enlightenment (magga-phala-nibbāna) in this lifetime. Therefore, you should allow your body and mind (dhātu-khandha) to rest and sleep. Once it is restored, properly functioning, and not weak, may you establish your practice on the middle path (majjhima). Once your practice is both aligned with the middle path and steady, your

<sup>18</sup> The Pāli term "anāgārika" is a common translation for the Northeastern Thai term used here, "ta pa khao." It refers to an eight-precept lay attendant who wears white.



determination to achieve enlightenment will certainly be fulfilled in this lifetime." Once he finished his speech, he respectfully placed his palms together at his chest (*vandana*) and took his leave.

I withdrew from the calm meditative state and considered from where the anāgārika had come. There were no anāgārikas in this vicinity. At that time, I truly believed him to be a real anāgārika. He seemed familiar to me, although I could not place him. He was around forty years of age, with glowing skin and a beautiful aura. His sole objective was to warn me.

I thought about his warning, about scaling down my diligence and allowing my body some rest. I objected to his advice, thinking, *"Decelerating my efforts will not do. And who was this man? He could have been anyone from anywhere, or even Māra<sup>19</sup> trying to fool me. If his deception had proved successful, I would have distanced myself from my goal of enlightenment. My current efforts have not even born fruit, and if I listen to Māra and slacken my diligence, I will fall right into his trap. He must definitely be Māra in disguise, trying to lead me astray. I will not fall for it. In fact, from this point on, I will put forth maximum effort. I will beat Māra at his game. I will not oblige his entreaties to lessen my efforts. Henceforth, I will intensify my efforts and extract all of the mindfulness (*sati*) and wisdom (*paññā*) I possess to utilize in my contemplations of the universal truth (*sacca-dhamma*). There will be no rest or sleep. Rather, I will employ mindfulness and wisdom to train the mind at all times. Wherever I am, I will engage mindfulness and wisdom in contemplations in a continuous manner. Māra will never fool me again. I will make Māra fear my diligence. I will strengthen the mind, I will not pull back my efforts, and I will not listen to Māra."*

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<sup>19</sup> Māra is the personification of evil and temptation.

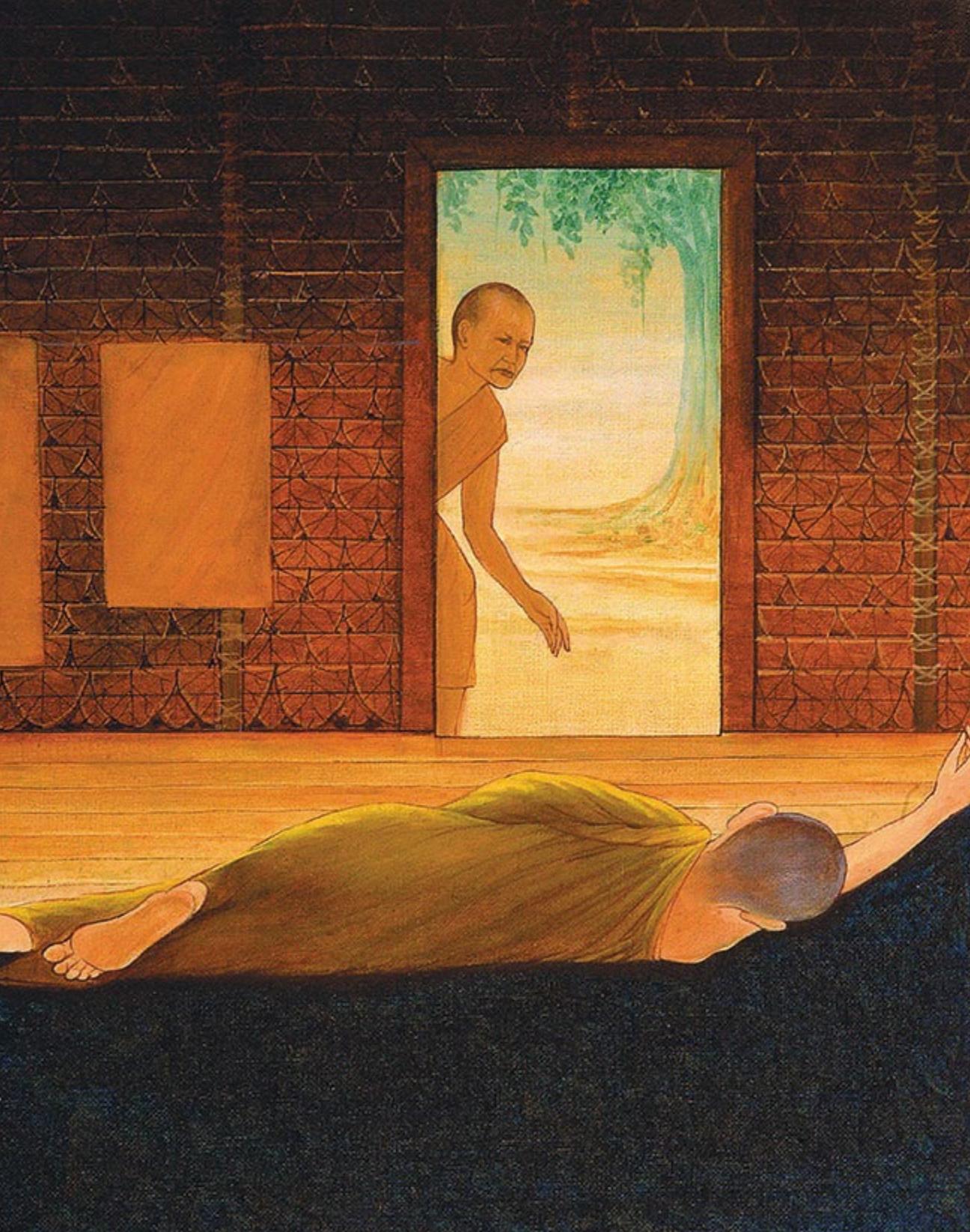


## Losing and Regaining Consciousness

From then on, I accelerated my diligence. I put full effort into walking meditation (caṅkama) and sitting meditation (samādhi). I exercised vigilance in ensuring that I did not sleep or eat and was composed in mind, thought, and speech. Mindful wisdom (sati-paññā) was my bedrock. I constantly contemplated on various things according to the truth of reality, without fail. In this period of intensified diligence, my body and mind (dhātu-khandha) exhibited signs of exhaustion. It abruptly weakened, teetering on the verge of collapse. I came down with malaria and developed a fever during my fasting period. Subsequently, I endured extreme physical suffering. As my body and mind became increasingly distressed, the weakness and exhaustion intensified. I could hardly muster up the strength to breathe. I thought to myself, "*I don't have much time before I die.*" There was no medicine to reduce my fever. I had not slept or eaten in three days. I was determined to follow through with my seven-day vow (sacca), though I was burning up from malaria.

Then, I made a bold decision. I thought, "*This is going to be my final day. I had ordained only two months ago, and this is where it all ends. There is no other way. All I can do is be mindful of each inhale and exhale until my breath runs out.*" Once I was resigned to my imminent death, I did not feel the least bit afraid. I thought, "*It would*

*be entirely improper for me to lie dead in this hut (kuṭī). Since I am going to die, it would be better to do so on the walking meditation path.*" As I thought of this, I tried to steady myself. I grabbed hold of the kuṭī wall in a feeble attempt to stand up but could not find my balance. I lost consciousness and collapsed in that very spot.





## According to My Peers

My peers related the following account to me. As I collapsed in my hut (*kuṭī*), my friend in a neighboring *kuṭī* heard the strange, heavy thud. He thought, “*Something must have happened in Phra Thoon’s kuti*,” and walked over to see. This monk’s name was Phra Liab. He had entered into a one-month vow (*sacca*) of silence. He had vowed to adhere to the ascetic practice (*dhutaṅga*) of refraining from sleeping or lying down (*nesajjika*) for fifteen days as well. Once he came over to inspect my *kuṭī*, he saw me in a peculiar state. He entered the *kuṭī* and jostled my foot many times, to no avail. When he glanced at my face, he realized that I had died. He dashed out of my *kuṭī* in search of the senior monks (*ācariya*). Once he reached the others, he could not speak, as he was afraid of breaking his vow of silence, so he mimed the act of dying. The *ācariyas* could not understand his pantomime, so they grabbed a pen and paper for him. Phra Liab wrote, “*Phra Thoon has died*.” Alarmed, the *ācariyas* rushed over to investigate. They confirmed that I had really died. They directed the others to sound the emergency bell and head over to see the dead Phra Thoon in his *kuṭī*, immediately.

After the bell rang out, the monks and novices (*sāmañera*) dashed over to my *kuṭī*. Only four individuals could enter, as the small *kuṭī* would collapse under any additional weight. They proceeded to

squeeze and massage my body with frenzied urgency. The monks were united in somber resignation of my death, all of them lamenting, “It’s such a shame.” They were greatly saddened by the loss. Some said, “He’s been dead for too long, it’s impossible to revive him. He’s been dead since noon, and now it is four in the afternoon. All that remains is to have the sāmaneras gather up firewood and cremate him.” An elder monk replied, “Don’t say that. There’s still some warmth in his body. Let us continue to massage and stimulate his body until it stiffens and all body parts have gone cold. At that point, we will gather up firewood to cremate him. But right now, let us help revive him. The firewood and cremation are a matter for later.” This is what the ācariyas told me.



## **Revived by My Peers**

I had been dead for four hours. My consciousness returned with a slight yet discernable flutter of breath against a cotton pad. The flutter became increasingly perceptible as my breath progressively hardened. My eyes quivered and blinked faintly. My peers yelped loudly in an attempt to hasten my revival. Eventually, I regained consciousness. At that time, I couldn't remember anyone's face. All I could remember were the echoes of "Venerable Thoon! Venerable Thoon!" reverberating in my ears. I opened my eyes slightly but was unable to speak. My friends dribbled water into my mouth, little by little, until I was able to speak. My voice was small and weak, as I was incredibly exhausted. Finally, I was restored to full consciousness. However, I was unable to sit up on my own, as I was still very fragile at that point. I could not breathe comfortably. My friends hoisted me up into a sitting position and waved herbal snuffing balms under my nose in order to stimulate my heart.

Once I could speak, the senior monks (ācariya) asked me what had caused all of this. I confessed my diligence, coming down with a fever while fasting, refusing to die in the hut (kuṭī), trying to steady myself against the kuṭī's walls in order to die on the walking meditation (caṅkama) path, and losing consciousness, all of which has been detailed above. The ācariyas listened to me speak of my punishing

diligence and shook their heads. They said, “Your diligence is too extreme. Not sleeping, not eating, coming down with malaria, and limiting yourself to three postures (iriyāpatha)—what body and mind (dhātu-khandha) could endure that? Now, you’re lucky you had a friend nearby. Otherwise, we would have had to cremate you.”

One ācariya said, “Your diligence is too intense. Even if your practice is correct, it is in excess of moderation. As one of the strings of the three-stringed lute, it would break. No one can maintain this level of diligence. I often observed your efforts on many occasions, throughout the day and night. I had no clue as to when you found time to rest or sleep. I have to admit that I cannot be diligent like you. I thought of warning you on several occasions. However, knowing that everyone is determined to attain release from the endless cycle of rebirth, I did not want to obstruct your momentum and diligence. You are fortunate that your peers saw what happened. Otherwise, you would have died and decayed in your hut, alone. You have only been ordained for two months and are twenty-seven years young. You have many years ahead of you to disseminate Buddhism.

“Your practice must be established in the middle way (majjhimā) in order for you to attain the path and fruit of enlightenment (magga-phala-nibbāna). It is the way of the noble ones (ariya-puggala). If you had died, you would have immediately forfeited your chance at the path and fruit of enlightenment in this lifetime. Henceforth, may you tone down your diligence and lessen the strain placed on your body and mind (dhātu-khandha). Be mindful of your body and mind’s balance. Resting and sleeping is food for your body and mind. Your body and mind still require this kind of food and nourishment. Exercise moderation. If you are attaññutā, or one who knows oneself, your practice will thrive. This is the middle way. It will lead you to the end

of suffering. If, in this life, you are determined and diligent, one day you will definitely achieve enlightenment."



## Recalling the Anāgārika's Warning

The teachers' (ācariya) warnings and teachings about the middle path roused my memory of the white-clad lay attendant's (anāgārika) similar admonishment. I had been certain that he was just Māra trying to test my diligence. But his warning foretold precisely what had come to pass. Beforehand, I was only filled with daring courage, focus, and determination to break free from the chains of suffering. No one could interfere with or obstruct my diligence. I felt that the sooner I could achieve enlightenment (nibbāna), the more time I would have to teach others. Consequently, I am grateful to every ācariya who brought me back to life. May the merit (puñña) that I have cultivated supplement and assist their goals of achieving freedom from suffering.

After I came to, the ācariyas called upon a doctor to prescribe medicine for my malaria and nursed me back to health. I made time to rest more, sleep more, and eat more in order to prevent my body from weakening. Once I had my normal vigor back, I laid out new plans for practice. What kind of practice would fall within the guidelines of moderation? What was the middle path (majjhimā) for me? It made me think about the Buddha and his diligence as he practiced at Dungeshwari. He refrained from sleeping and eating for forty-nine days. If Indra had not appeared before him to pluck the three-stringed lute, who knows what would have become of the

Buddha. The Buddha realized that his practice was strained—just like the taut string of the lute—and the only recourse was for it to break. Once he resumed eating, his body rejuvenated, and his mindfulness (*sati*) and wisdom (*paññā*) returned to normal functioning. Subsequently, he was able to practice the middle way and become fully enlightened. After I reflected on the Buddha's life, I reflected on my own practice and came to understand that my practice was similarly strained significantly beyond moderation.

One night, I ruminated on the true identity of the *anāgārika* who had come to warn me. Who was he and where did he come from? That night, as my mind (*citta*) entered a tranquil state of meditation, I realized that he was the leader of celestial beings (*deva*) in the heavenly realm of *Tāvatimśā*. In order for this man to descend to help someone, that person would have to be approaching an undeserved fate. He will only descend to help in this type of situation.



## Establishing a New Course of Practice

I took a step back to recalibrate my course of practice. I analyzed whether my prior practice was correct or incorrect. I found that while the models and techniques used in contemplation were absolutely correct, losing and regaining consciousness proved that I had over-burdened my body. It couldn't handle it. My physical breakdown made that apparent. If you try to compel unripe fruit to ripen when it can't, what you end up with is rotten fruit. If you push a car's engine past its thresholds, it may break down. In that same way, my practice taxed my body's limits. I did not fuel my body and mind (*dhātu-khandha*) with the basic foods and liquids that it required, nor did I permit it to rest. Nor did I allow my body full, deep sleep—yet another vital form of nourishment. All combined, the body received insufficient nourishment and broke down.

Once I understood how to be flexible with my body's needs, I was able to restructure my practice plans. I would treat my body in accordance with what is righteous (*dhamma*). I would give it the food that it required, but not in excess of moderation. Overindulgence would water the weeds of laziness and inactivity, encourage excessive sleep, and feed a rotund belly. It would allow for defilements (*kilesa*) and desires (*tanhā*) to sprout and threaten the cultivation of

mindfulness (*sati*) and wisdom (*paññā*). Consequently, my practice would not progress.

Being righteous (*dhamma*) toward the body and mind (*dhātu-khandha*) means giving it adequate rest and sleep, enough food to be balanced and functional, and not allowing it to weaken or deteriorate too much. Walking meditation (*caṅkama*) and sitting meditation (*samādhi*) should also be conducted with moderation and balance in mind, such that it adheres to the middle way (*majjhimā*) for the body and mind. In short, it is about understanding the needs of a healthy body so that it can be used to support mindful wisdom. As mindfulness and wisdom are key foundations of practice, composing and resting the mind through meditation would not be cut from the regimen. Nor would the employment of mindfulness and wisdom be decreased or curtailed. These two elements would serve as the links of an interconnected chain. In this new blueprint for practice, mindfulness and wisdom would be the main foundation.

As for walking meditation and sitting meditation, these postures (*iriyāpatha*) would be used to support my diligence. Meditation is purely a mental matter, whereas standing, walking, sitting, or lying down are simply the body's natural postures that can be applied and adapted in order to further diligent efforts. Standing, walking, sitting, and lying down are the supporting players, while the main players are mindfulness and wisdom. However, in this day and age, people are inclined toward sitting meditation, as if concentration (*samādhi*) can only be exercised through sitting. This paradigm stems from a lack of understanding about concentration. Concentration directly has to do with the mind (*citta*). It does not matter whether you are standing or sitting, or in any other posture. So long as the mind is in

a steadfastly focused state or in a tranquil state, that is true concentration. Consider how when it comes to eating, satiety is the critical measure. You can eat while standing, walking, sitting, or lying down. There is no requirement for eating to only be done while sitting. Likewise, concentration does not have a sitting requirement. It can be done while sitting. The belief that concentration cannot be established while standing, walking, or lying down is incorrect.

Thus, those who practice concentration (*samādhi*) must be proficient in all four postures in order to be comprehensive and whole. These pervasive, limiting views of concentration (*samādhi*) may be attributed to the instructors' own deficient understanding. What's worse, the incorrect teaching that wisdom will arise once the mind (*citta*) is calm in meditation continues to spread and promote flawed understandings. Consequently, unwitting practitioners who are infected with this wrong paradigm immediately accept it to be true.

At this point, I had formed an understanding of the middle path. It was my personal middle path, though. Next, I directed mindful wisdom toward understanding universal truths in a manner aligned with the Three Common Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*)—namely, impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*). All contemplations adhered to this foundation. Whether the subject was physical phenomena (*rūpa-dhamma*) or mental phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*), internal or external, animate or inanimate, coarse or refined, near or far, me or you, the Three Common Characteristics would be applied. This was done in order to develop a profound understanding and realization of the truth in that subject as it pertains to the truth of the changing of the elements, the truth of the suffering of the elements, and the truth of the cause of physical and mental suffering. I was constantly applying wisdom in these contemplations

in order to see the truth of not-self (*anattā*), or the cessation of existence in a supposed form. There was no “animal,” “person,” “self,” “me,” or “you.” Everything was subject to these universal truths. Everything naturally arises and ceases. Without sufficient wisdom, these truths would never come to light.

Therefore, wisdom shines the light and illuminates the path for the mind’s eye. If someone is walking in the dark without a flashlight or with a dim flashlight, they will easily get lost. Or if the flashlight is bright but the person is blind, they similarly won’t get anywhere. Likewise, if our minds don’t have wisdom illuminating the way, even with these truths attached to our bodies or in our minds, we will be incapable of knowing or seeing them. For instance, the five aggregates (*pañca-khandha*) of tangible form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), memory (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) all exist within us, but we are unable to realize them because we lack wisdom. We lack the mind’s light. The eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind perceive visible forms, sounds, scents, tastes, touch, and mind-objects (*dhammārammaṇa*), but we are oblivious to these processes. Despite these components and processes existing within us and constantly demonstrating uncertainty, we do not know or see them. This is because we lack the wisdom to contemplate them in a way that effectively eliminates any doubt or ambiguity.

Each and every one of these components must be contemplated with wisdom so that the mind can truly understand and realize the truth. Thence, the truth of impermanence and the ways in which it exists in the world will be revealed. All of these truths are innate to us; they do not come from somewhere else. Understanding and realizing the truth in this manner is called *sammā-ditṭhi*, the wisdom to perceive in the true, correct way. The process of purposely thinking

about these universal truths (sacca-dhamma) in an indisputable manner is called right thought, or sammā-saṅkappa. Right thought compels the mind to understand and realize in an illuminating fashion.



## Using Wisdom to Contemplate Suffering

In using wisdom to contemplate suffering, center the contemplations on your own body and mind. Suffering is derived from the body. What are the causes of suffering? What are the contributing factors? Wisdom (paññā) must be used to investigate the cause of suffering so that the mind knows and sees these causes clearly. However, once the cause of suffering has been clearly understood and realized, it cannot simply be shed or released. This is because it is sabhāva-dukkha, or suffering that exists with the body and mind (dhātu-khandha). This suffering is born at the same time as the body. While the body and mind exist, the condition of suffering (sabhāva-dukkha) must also exist. The only recourse is to acknowledge and accept this suffering. In other words, simply be conscious of suffering as the truth of suffering.

There are tactics to temporarily avoid physical suffering. For instance, if you experience physical suffering from a prolonged period of sitting in one position, you can readjust your posture or modify your sitting style. This is a natural method of circumventing suffering for the short term. When it comes to lying down, there really isn't any position that is comfortable forever. At first, you may think one position is comfortable, but lying in the same position for a long time can bring about discomfort. So, then you have to move about and continue to alter your position. This is how we avert suffering. When

you experience physical discomfort from standing for a long time, you can avert that suffering by walking, sitting, or lying down. If you walk for a long time and experience aches and pains, you can avert that suffering by standing, sitting, or lying down. We can temporarily avert suffering by alternating among the postures (iriyāpatha).

Therefore, understand that this condition of suffering cannot be eliminated. Merely be conscious of it. These characteristics of suffering are universal for all worldly beings. It is called dukkham ariya saccam,<sup>20</sup> or suffering is a truth that cannot be avoided. Even the Buddha and the noble ones (ariya-puggala) were subject to this kind of suffering.

There is another kind of suffering called transient suffering (cāra-dukkha). It can enter from the body and proceed to affect the mind. An example of this is weather that is beyond moderate, such as extreme heat or extreme cold. Anything that affects the body in a manner beyond moderation can cause physical suffering. This is called miscellaneous suffering (pakiṇṇaka-dukkha). It is suffering that occasionally affects us at times. When the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind sense-bases experience displeasure, this produces suffering in the mind. All suffering convenes in the mind. Mental suffering stems from sense-base (āyatana) perception. Mindfulness and wisdom must be employed to find a way to avoid this suffering. However, avoiding mental suffering is unlike avoiding physical suffering from various postures.

When mental suffering that stems from the sense-bases arises, mindfulness and wisdom must be used to teach the mind to clearly discern the resulting suffering (dukkha), harmful consequences

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<sup>20</sup> Dukkha ariya sacca: the Noble Truth of suffering.

(dosa), and future perils (bhaya) of that displeasing outcome. Likewise, the mind must also discern the results of a pleasurable outcome that leads to a preoccupation (ārammaṇa) of love. A preoccupation of love is impermanent and subject to change. As they say, where there is love, there is hate. Or in Pāli, “Piyato jāyate soko,” affection begets sorrow. If you are wise enough to realize the preoccupation (ārammaṇa) of love and realize the preoccupation (ārammaṇa) of hate, you will know how to protect yourself and prevent that suffering from arising.

All suffering is caused by desire. We create the cause of that desire, and the result corresponds to the cause that we have created. The suffering that we are all experiencing at this moment comes from our refusal to accept the consequences that we have caused. We create a bad cause but desire a good result. Once we do not receive the desired result, we experience mental suffering. No one desires suffering, but it is our own actions that cause it. The suffering that all worldly beings face stems from desire. Therefore, desire causes all forms of suffering. This truth is evident all around us. Our place of birth or the status we are born into is unimportant because our suffering congregates in the four elements (catu-dhātu) and five aggregates (pañca-khandha). This suffering is coupled with our mental and physical existence until the day we die. In our past lives, in our present life, and in our future lives, we all experience suffering once we are born. Suffering results from all kinds of desires. Once we eliminate desire (taṇhā), from where would suffering arise? The Buddha taught that the wheel of desire perpetually turns toward suffering, cycling in accordance with its governing principles and irrespective of time.

Not-self (anattā) is that which has been the cause of constant disappointment. Because we do not know or see this, we wholeheartedly

trust in the notions of self and self-belongings. We don't want to part with anything. However things have been, that is how we want them to remain forever. We don't want to be affected by death. We don't want to die, and we don't want our children or grandchildren to die, either. We want to hold our loved ones close to us in an eternal embrace. Be that as it may, we cannot escape the truth. As much as we love or worry about them, we must still die and go our separate ways.

Imagine that you have built a house to temporarily reside in. Once this house becomes dilapidated, you must abandon it and build a new house elsewhere. And once that house becomes uninhabitable, you must abandon it and build a new one elsewhere once more. There is no end to this cycle. Similarly, the mind builds its existences (*bhava*) and rebirths (*jāti*) and temporarily resides in the four elements and five aggregates. Before long, the mind's four-elemental, five-aggregate residence will become uninhabitable, breaking down in accordance with the principles of not-self (*anattā*). It will cease to exist in that identity (*attā*). There will be no more "human" or "animal" at that point.

Likewise, the physical body will correspondingly decompound into the four fundamental elements of earth, water, wind, and fire. The mind (*citta*) will seek out a new rebirth-existence in accordance with its cultivated causes and conditions. The mind takes sole responsibility for its actions, speech, and views, however right or wrong, or good or bad in nature. The actions and speech are not held accountable in any way, regardless of whether it was a meritorious (*puñña*) or demeritorious (*pāpa*) deed. Rather, it is the mind that bears full culpability for all outcomes, good or bad, stemming from acts fueled by the mind's desires.

Therefore, it is critical for us to train the mind and develop the mind with mindful wisdom. The models and parallels that will effectively teach the mind can only come from comprehensive, encompassing wisdom that is aligned with universal truths (*sacca-dhamma*). Thus, the Buddha's teaching, "Cittam dantam sukhāvaham," the mind (*citta*) that is constantly trained by wisdom will be rewarded with knowledge, intelligence, and happiness; "Cittam rakkhetha medhāvī," only a thoroughly wise mind (*citta*) can care for itself. Therefore, developing the mind, teaching the mind, and nurturing the mind must be done with choice Dhamma models and parallels. The mind has been guided by defilements (*kilesa*), desires (*taṇhā*), and mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) for much too long. Consequently, it has lost its way and become ignorant of universal truths. Therefore, the mind must be frequently trained through wisdom.



## A Vision of Three Paths of Walking Meditation

One night, as my mind (citta) settled into a serene state of meditation (samādhi), I saw three walking meditation (caṅkama) paths before me. The first path, although overgrown with weeds, was still discernible. It appeared never to have been used. The second path also contained weeds, but they were not as dense or thick as the first path. The third and final path was clean and smooth, as if it had been regularly used for walking meditation sessions at every hour. At that time, I was walking on the third path. There was an announcement, "Withdraw from that path and take the second caṅkama path, which is the middle path." Straight away, I switched over to the second path, which was the middle path. Suddenly the walking meditation path widened enough to permit the passage of a large vehicle. The path stretched far beyond my line of vision. A large, magnificent white horse, outfitted with a harness and saddle, trotted over to my side. The voice said, "Ride this horse." I immediately leapt onto the horse's back. Then the voice said, "Ride along this path. This is the path that leads to the end of all suffering." The horse swiftly carried me along the path.

At the same time, there was another person riding a smaller red horse along that same path. He yelled up at me, "Let's race horses! Let's race horses!" I did not respond, because I thought that racing



would be pointless; his horse and my horse were of disparate stature. My horse swiftly galloped past the man. As we neared my final destination, the end of the path became clearly visible. Then, my horse soared up into the sky like a rocket launched into outer space. We climbed so high above the clouds that when I glanced down at the human world, I could not even see it. I was securely fastened onto the horse's back.

The horse then soared into outer space, where it was vast and limitless. The voice directed, "Ride this horse to circle the universe three times," and the horse rapidly dashed through the rounds. The voice then instructed, "Ride this horse to descend to the human realm." We dove downwards. Forty meters above the ground the voice commanded, "Ride this horse to inspect the entire human realm." We shot up forty meters into the air, where there was a dense forest of majestic trees. As we dashed toward the trees, they parted for us, allowing us to pass expeditiously. We flew in all eight directions, knowing and seeing the entirety of the world. Thereafter, the voice commanded, "After knowing and seeing the entirety of the human world, bring the horse back down to the ground." Then, the horse swooped down. The instant its hooves made contact with the earth, I withdrew from the meditative state.

I then used wisdom to consider the vision (*nimitta*). I reflected on the symbolism of the three paths and instantly understood the meaning. The first path, overtaken by weeds, represented a practice that was indulgent and lazy. The second path, with fewer weeds, symbolized a practice that was not always aligned with the middle way. Whenever the practice strayed from the middle way (*majjhima*), weeds would sprout, though not many. While the second path did not contain many weeds, the third path did not contain any at all.



It was clean and smooth, as if it had been sanded and polished. This pointed to a practice that was intense and consequently deficient in terms of rest and sleep. It was an excruciating, tormenting style of practice. If it were a string on the lute, it would be the string pulled so tight that it was on the verge of snapping.

Withdrawing from this third path to take up the second path meant practicing in accordance with the middle way (*majjhimā*). The path's expanding enough to accommodate a large vehicle signified a practice that was comfortable and without obstacles. The burdens of pressuring and compelling myself were absent from this path, and I would reach my destination in due time. The white horse that I rode along that path represented sharp and focused wisdom (*paññā*). Anything that I contemplated on would be exposed with comprehensive clarity. The man riding the small red horse who yelled out the challenge signified volitional thoughts (*saṅkhāra*) of worldly conventions (*sammuti*). At this point, these volitional thoughts were unqualified to compete with wisdom. Thus, a horse with a strong gallop will outrun a horse without a strong gallop. Likewise, a mind steeped in thorough wisdom will outrun volitional thoughts.

The vision was steeped in significance. It was a model of practice that instilled me with confidence in my practice and confidence in the middle path. I knew and understood what middle (*majjhimā*) was and what constituted an appropriate and moderate style of practice for me. As a practitioner, you must recognize where your individual balance lies. To illustrate, when it comes to cooking food, you eat for yourself. You must know what constitutes mild flavor and what constitutes strong flavor. Once you know both of these flavors, you will understand how to sharpen mild flavor and how to subdue strong flavor. Consequently, you will be able to create a flavor that is

delicious and appropriate for your tastes and your elements (dhātu). Likewise, practicing in accordance with your individual middle path necessitates understanding what constitutes lazy, relaxed practice and what constitutes severe, intense practice. Thereafter, once on the middle path (majjhimā), it will not be difficult to find Dhamma models to apply.

It is unnecessary for anyone to vouch for your being on the middle path. Practicing the middle way is individual; it isn't the same for everyone. It is just like how the measure of satiety is not the same for all people. Some can feel full after a single serving of food, while others require two or three to feel full. Similarly, the middle way for each individual follows the same principle. The Buddha spoke of “sukhā paṭipadā khippābhiññā,” a practice that is effortless, without obstacles, and achieves enlightenment quickly; and “sukhā paṭipadā dandhābhiññā,” a practice that is effortless but slow in achieving enlightenment. In practicing your own middle path, you must know it and see it on your own. No one can tell you what it is.

The omens and visions (nimitta) that arise from meditation are known as uggaha-nimitta, or mental images. These visions come in many forms and may incite feelings of love and may incite feelings of hatred. Some visions are of ghosts or other frightful images, filthy or repulsive things, mounds of riches pleasing to the eye, and many other things. Another type of nimitta is called supina-nimitta, or dreams. Whether you dream of something charming or frightful, or pleasing or displeasing, it is really a reflection of your mindset and your inclination to dream in a particular way. Uggaha-nimitta and supina-nimitta can serve to either benefit or harm. If you experience a vision (nimitta) but it isn't coupled with

a conceptualized image (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*),<sup>21</sup> those visions will be worthless. Or if there is a conceptualized image, but the interpretation of it is incorrect, there is no benefit gained and it may even turn out to be harmful. However, if you can interpret and apply the vision correctly, there is great benefit to be gained.

Therefore, it is crucial that practitioners accurately interpret the vision so that it can be applied as a model in wisdom contemplations. It will greatly motivate your practice. If your wisdom is subpar, dull, and lacks rationality, even great visions can go to waste. For instance, suppose that you experience a meditative vision of your body rotting and decaying, consumed with repulsive filth, or reduced to bones, and once you withdraw from meditation you are indifferent. There is no *paṭibhāga*, or wisdom to interpret and apply it, and the vision is rendered meaningless. If you dare believe that you have experienced and conquered filth (*asubha*), you will be severely mistaken. What you have experienced is merely an image of filth. A true understanding and realization of filth only results from mindful wisdom contemplations. Only then can your mind truly experience disenchantment (*nibbidā*) with the subject matter.

Once I interpreted these visions, I was immediately able to determine the topic at hand. I realized that they all related to my way of practice. Thenceforth, I understood how to lessen the pressure I placed on my body and mind (*dhātu-khandha*). I consumed a moderate amount of food so that my body would remain stable and avoid fatigue. While I didn't compel myself to conduct as much walking meditation or sitting meditation, my mindful wisdom was steadily working.

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<sup>21</sup> After a mental image (*uggaha-nimitta*) arises, further concentration and investigation leads the mental image to give way to an abstract idea or concept, or conceptualized image (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*). In simplified terms, an acquired image (*uggaha-nimitta*) is when the object is stuck in the mind's eye and a conceptualized image (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*) is when the mind gets the idea of the object.

Whether I was standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, my wisdom was steady and continuously progressing. It was clear to me that diligence in any method required a strong foundation of thorough mindful wisdom. The various postures (*iriyāpatha*) merely served to supplement mindful wisdom and to alleviate physical strain on the body. Diligence of the mind required channeling mindfulness and wisdom in constantly contemplating on the universal truths (*sacca-dhamma*) of the world. That was true diligence.

Upon laying down this new foundation for practice, my practice became aligned with the middle way. I was diligent but did not strain myself as before. As a result, when I applied mindful wisdom in the exercise of analyzing universal truths, comprehensive clarity arose much more easily. I grew confident that this way was the middle way, and I was aware that I was truly established on the middle path.

As the rains retreat approached its third month, my mental cultivation practice was firmly established in the core methods (*upāya*). The progress was noticeably continuous and flourishing. I was injected with a high dose of motivation and self-confidence. I was certain that if I could maintain this steady progress, the path and fruit of enlightenment (*magga-phala-nibbāna*) would be mine within this lifetime. My old resolution that the final day of the rains retreat would determine whether I died or attained enlightenment was null and void, because I now understood what my middle path was. Although I was now established on the middle path, I did not know how short or long the path ahead of me was. But I remained confident. Like traveling to a new destination, you must commit the map and the route to the final destination to memory. Even though there are many intersecting paths, you must not lose focus of the direct route to your destination. Similarly, when a practitioner clearly

understands their own middle way, they will not lose their way or be deterred in any way. There will be no guessing when it comes to how to practice.

This is maggā-maggañāna, or knowing the way to practice that is correctly aligned with the path and fruit of enlightenment. How slowly or quickly enlightenment is reached is contingent on the individual practitioner. It is like driving a car that is already on the direct path. Driving fast or slow is up to the car and the driver. If the car is good and the driver is good, the destination will be reached quickly. If the car isn't good and the driver isn't good, the destination will be reached slowly. Just don't let the car break down mid-journey. Similarly, even if your practice is already established on the middle path, it is your character that determines the outcome. For instance, the outcome will be determined by whether you are a quick attainment (khippābhīññā) type or a slow attainment (dandhābhīññā) type.

There are four types of knowledge (abhiññā): sukhā paṭipadā khippābhīññā—ease in practice, quick attainment of enlightenment; sukhā paṭipadā dandhābhīññā—ease in practice, slow attainment of enlightenment; dukkhā paṭipadā khippābhīññā—difficulty in practice, quick attainment of enlightenment; and dukkhā paṭipadā dandhābhīññā—difficulty in practice, slow attainment of enlightenment. The type you correspond to is unimportant as long as you can break free from the Three Realms in this lifetime.

Seven days before the end of the rains retreat, I intensified my efforts just in case I could cross the finish line in the nick of time. If I made it, it would be my good fortune. If not, no big deal. As it turned out, I didn't make it in time. My spiritual faculties (indriya) were still young. The fruit was still young; it could not ripen within three months.

I would definitely get to reap the fruit in the future, and I knew that at that time, it would be ripe and taste sweet. I would maintain my practice, further develop the spiritual faculties in a continuous manner, and remain composed in action, speech, and thought at all times. My practice must be steady and firm. I would not submit to laziness. Wherever I was, I would remind myself that I should not take life for granted. We don't know when maccu-māra, or death, will arrive at our door and close off our chances of attaining the path and fruit of enlightenment. Seeing as maccu-māra is still allowing us the opportunity, we must take full advantage of the time that remains and pour ourselves into practice.



## **Post-Rains Retreat Dhutaṅga**

After the rains retreat (vassa), I approached my friend, Kru Ba Khambhun, who had ordained the same year as I did. I invited him to join me as I journeyed into the forest to practice the thirteen austeries (dhutaṅga). We sought the advice of the senior monks (ācariya) who had completed forest treks in the past. They advised us on how to survive in remote forests and how to deal with food. “You won’t be able to choose what you want to eat. Whatever the locals eat, that’s what you’ll eat. Make yourselves easy to care for. Do not be preoccupied with food. Sleeping will not be comfortable. If you arrive in a village that is unaccustomed to making merit (puñña) and all they offer is plain rice, then that is what you must eat. Some villages will build you a bamboo stretcher to sleep on, while others might provide a sleeping mat and pillow. In some villages, you might have to sleep on the ground. Take special precautions so that you don’t contract malaria, because there won’t be any medicine for you. Study the various herbal remedies that grow in the forest, so that you can care for yourselves in the event of sickness. Before settling down to sleep, you must first pray and dedicate merit to the guardian spirits in that area. Do not believe in magic and sorcery.

“Those who go on dhutaṅga are to put all their faith in the universal principle of cause and effect (kamma). If you haven’t

committed past bad deeds, then enemies will be unable to touch you. But if you have committed past bad deeds, then you will have to accept the consequences of those deeds (*kamma*). Most importantly, have faith in the virtues of the Lord Buddha, have faith in the virtues of the Dhamma, and have faith in the virtues of the Ariya-Saṅgha. Maintain your constant diligence. This is very important, as those who are established in morality (*sīla*) and righteousness (*dhamma*) will come to no harm. Thus, the Pāli saying, ‘Dhammo have rakkhati dhammadārim,’ one who safeguards Dhamma will be safeguarded by Dhamma and will not decline but will always prosper.”

After absorbing and processing this advice, the two of us took our leave of the senior monks and embarked on our forest adventure. We had never been on dhutāṅga before. We packed requisites (*parikkhāra*) we deemed necessary for daily use, filling our monk bags and alms bowls to the brim. Initially, the bag, alms bowl, umbrella tent (*klot*), and canteen did not feel too heavy. However, as we went further along, all these requisites began to feel extremely heavy. We settled down in the forest, a considerable distance away from the nearby village, but near enough to go there for alms (*piṇḍapāta*). Some households were familiar with dhutāṅga monks and so we got a measure of food to eat. Some households were unfamiliar with dhutāṅga monks and offered only plain rice, so all we ate was plain rice. Some households offered bananas. Oh, how much value a single ripe banana contains! Detailing the burdens of dhutāṅga is an extensive tale in and of itself. There were no comforts to be found in the forest, but I was pleased to have followed in the footsteps of the holy individuals (ariya-puggala) that came before me.



## A Vision of a Sea of People

One night, I experienced a vision (nimitta). There was a sea of millions and millions of people—male, female, very old, old, middle-aged, adults, and children—joyfully frolicking within their various subgroups. The adults danced and sang jovial melodies. Everyone appeared to be intoxicated, as shame and embarrassment were noticeably absent. The men caressed and kissed the women and the women caressed and kissed the men. With arms draped around each other's necks, their bodies undulated with the music as they splintered off into smaller groups. The teenagers embraced and kissed one another, singing and swaying to their own rhythm. Stripped of shame and consciousness, they converged in a great orgy. All notions of "husband," "wife," "children," or "grandchildren" vanished as they reduced themselves to raw, animalistic behavior. White-haired old geezers, with one foot in their coffins, embraced and danced with young girls. Meanwhile, the young girls were perfectly willing and delighted to embrace the discordant pairing. Their age difference must have been that of a father to his child, grandchild, or even great-grandchild. Everyone was inebriated. The drunks and drug addicts attacked and murdered one another with various weapons. A multitude of broken skulls, crippled legs, and corpses were splayed across the grounds.



Those who wish to be free of suffering  
and experience eternal bliss,  
Follow this road

Then there was an announcement, “Those who wish to go to a supremely blissful place, a place free from suffering in the cycle of existence (*vatṭa-samsāra*), where you are free from rebirth in the human realm, follow this path.” My eyes gazed over the path, which was large enough to fit a car. At the mouth of the road, where the announcement came from, there was a large door outfitted with a sign that conspicuously stated, “Those who wish to be free of suffering and experience eternal bliss, follow this road.” The announcement was on repeat. Some people stood there, read the sign, and walked away uninterested. Some walked four to six meters along the path, glanced back at their friends convulsing in song and dance, and ran back to join them. Some walked twenty to forty meters along the path, glanced back at their friends enjoying themselves in play, and ran back to play with them. It appeared that no one was interested in going to the supremely blissful place where they would be free from suffering. Those who heard the announcement paid it no mind, while others seemed not to hear it at all. The scene before me was like a massive world festival filled with sounds of flutes, drums, and loud noises that echoed and reverberated throughout the world.



## **Desiring to be Free of Suffering Right Now**

Upon hearing the announcement and reading the sign on the door, I was greatly motivated to follow the path. But there was no way for me to get through the mass of people. I had to figure out a way to circumvent the large crowd. I headed east and then curved back toward the original path. Once I found the path, I searched for a way to merge onto the main road. I saw a small trail only wide enough to fit a single person. On that trail were the footprints of those who had travelled the path before me. There were fresh footprints intermingled with the old, but I could not discern to whom they belonged.

An announcement sounded overhead, “This is the path that Phra Ācariya Mun took his followers on. Follow this path.” Upon hearing this, I was determined to follow the path. I hurried along the narrow trail with the resolve to join the large, main road in front of me. This main road was elevated eight meters, with large wild bamboo stalks jutting out along its side. I ascended two meters, encountering soft, mushy soil that slid and collapsed under my every step. I tightly gripped the bamboo stalks above me while bracing my feet and pushing off another clump of bamboo below. It required enormous effort, but I eventually climbed up to the main road.

Looking down from where I stood, I could see many large clumps of bamboo had collapsed. The many older clusters that had fallen



over the years told me that those who came before me had also braced their feet on the bamboo clusters. My eyes scanned the mouth of the road and I waved to the pulsating sea of people, beckoning them to join me. Some strode along the path a few meters, then glanced back toward their friends and returned to partake in the merriment. But the vast majority were uninterested in following me. Let them be. I would not waste my time waiting for them. Some placed their palms together at their chest and rejoiced in my feat, but were not ready to join me. As I took my first step on the path to the end of suffering, my mind (*citta*) disengaged from the meditative state.



## Analyzing the Vision

As my mind (citta) disengaged from the meditative state, I analyzed the vision (nimitta) and found that the world has always existed in this state. Everyone is infatuated with one another, clinging together through the bonds of love and desires for sensual pleasures (kāma-guṇa). The sensual pleasures based in tangible form, sound, scent, taste, and touch lure us into worldly infatuations and make it difficult for us to escape the chains of this world. The world will continue to exist in this way for perpetuity, without any end in sight. We will persist in seeing the wheel as a lotus flower,<sup>22</sup> seeing evil as good, seeing black as white, and seeing wrong as right for eternity. I have lived in this world for an eternally long time.

Going forward, I will no longer permit myself to be infatuated with the world. Those who find the world to be an endearing place to live in can continue to do so. It is utterly impossible to expect everyone to simultaneously realize the suffering (dukkha), harmful consequences (dosa), and perils (bhaya) of the world. Only those who are wise and possess sufficiently thorough mindfulness (sati) and wisdom (paññā) to realize the comprehensive truth of the world will have all revealed to them. Nothing remains concealed, thus the saying, “Natthi loke raho nāma”—there are no secrets in this world.

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<sup>22</sup> The Thai adage “seeing the wheel as a lotus flower,” refers to seeing the wheel of rebirth as attractive. In other words, to mistake evil for good.

With mindfulness and wisdom, no secrets can remain hidden. Everything will be exposed through mindfulness and wisdom. You will know and see how the world came to be, how the world currently exists, and how the world will continue in this way for posterity. Those who come to be born into the world will subscribe to these norms and encounter these common experiences in every lifetime. Who will be pulled into the world's captivating ways and who will resist this enchanting pull is a matter of having sufficient mindfulness and wisdom. Those with strong mindfulness and wisdom will be able to break free of the world, those with moderate mindfulness and wisdom will maintain their state in the world, and those with mediocre mindfulness and wisdom will be utterly lost and mesmerized by the world's ways.

I applied mindful wisdom in teaching myself, *"Are you still going to be pleased with this world? You've been born and what worldly belongings have you acquired? Where in this world can true happiness be found?"* The assumption that sensual pleasures are the source of happiness is a false one. Rather, they are the direct source of pain and suffering. Sensual pleasures are a sugar-coated poison. The first taste is sweet, but once the sugar dissolves, the poison immediately kicks in. The same applies to the wrong understanding of sensual pleasures. Sensual pleasures are like bait. Once a blind fish bites, the hook sinks into its mouth and it can't wriggle its way free. Its mouth is in pain and it dies along with that hook. The mind that is lost in sensual pleasures is the same way. It will never be able to lessen the suffering that stems from its attachment to sensual pleasures.

I myself have a history of being attached to sensual pleasures. I was attached to sensual pleasures in my past lives, and my current life is the same as my past lives. When I am reborn, the sensual

pleasures in those future lives will mirror those in my current life. That night, I had to use wisdom to teach myself throughout the entire night. I taught myself to clearly understand and realize all the suffering, harmful consequences, and perils inherent in sensual pleasures. This would serve as a metaphor (*upāya*) to help immunize me from any naïve notions or wrong understandings about sensual pleasures. I used that night's meditative vision as an example of how the world operates, drawing parallels and making comparisons, so that the mind would arrive at a clear understanding of the reality of this world.

What causes people to be attached to this world? The main reason is our contentment with sensual pleasures, namely, attachment to the sensual pleasures derived from form, sound, scent, taste, and touch. These bonds are so strong that breaking them is a great challenge, but it isn't impossible. With strong mindfulness and wisdom, and by constantly applying metaphors (*upāya*) to teach yourself, your mind may eventually understand and realize the truth in a rational manner. Wisdom must go in and fix whatever it is that has the mind deluded and spellbound. Through constant contemplation, the mind will gradually believe the truths as wisdom has presented them. One day, the mind will be able to know and see the truth in a profound manner. The mind will clearly understand and realize the suffering, harmful consequences, and perils of those delusions. Once the mind knows and sees things wisdom's way, it will automatically cast off its wrong views. This is how wisdom is used to teach and train the mind to no longer be deluded.



## Going on Dhutaṅga to Other Locations

From there, we traveled onward to other locations until we reached Ban Khok Tang Khaen, Suwanakhuha district. This was where Luang Pu Mahā Boonmee had once spent a rains retreat (vassa). There were many monk huts (kuti) with cogon grass thatched roofs, so we stopped to rest and practice mental cultivation (bhāvanā-paṭipatti) there. After ten days of practice, I experienced another meditative vision (nimitta). That night, when my mind (citta) entered a serene state of meditation (samādhi), I saw a vision of an autonomous sewing machine. No one was around. A steady stream of finished clothing flowed out from the machine and began to pile up. Whatever outfit I wanted to see produced would pour out from the machine.

Then, the citta withdrew from the meditative state. The citta felt faint and light. Spontaneous knowledge and thoughts arose in my mind. I don't know how it happened, but I had acquired an amazingly comprehensive knowledge of everything, regardless of whether it pertained to worldly or Dhamma matters. It was as if I could answer anyone's question about anything. Whether the issues were worldly or Dhamma related, nothing was beyond me. I forced my travel companion, Kru Ba Khambhun, to ask me questions. When he asked a short question, I would reply with a long answer. This annoyed him. After taking our meal, he would disappear into the

forest. I felt a great desire to speak the Dhamma to someone and to answer Dhamma questions because this knowledge was constantly flowing out of me. It got to the point where I could no longer practice. Each day, I had to walk around the temple grounds, hunting for a person to ask me a question or for a person to listen to my Dhamma.

One day, a devotee made an offering of sugar cane juice. After having made the offering, he wanted to go home. But I grabbed his arm and said, "Wait. Listen to the Dhamma first." So, he stayed and I spoke on the Dhamma for about two hours. It was getting dark out. He said, "Kru Ba, I have to hurry home. The oxen and children are waiting in a small hut. My house is far from here. I ask permission to leave." I don't know where all of this Dhamma came from, or how the words flowed and connected as they did. But after that day, the devotee never brought any more sugar cane juice. He had probably had enough of the monk who liked to hear himself talk.

Then, when the holy day (uposatha) arrived, there were around ten devotees who followed us back to the temple with our food. After we had finished our meal, one of the devotees said, "Kru Ba, we haven't heard a sermon from a teacher in a long time. We respectfully request a sermon from you." The instant I heard that they wanted to hear the Dhamma, the Dhamma within me began to flow in response. "*Today will be my day to divulge all the Dhamma!*" I assumed that the Kru Ba in charge<sup>23</sup> would direct me to give the lecture. As I was preparing myself to deliver the sermon, the Kru Ba in charge said, "Devotees, we are both newly ordained monks. We don't know how to give sermons. It is too bad you wanted to hear a sermon."

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<sup>23</sup> Monk seniority is determined by the number of rains retreats earned and the date and time of monastic ordination. Although both Kru Ba Khambhun and Kru Ba Thoon were equal in vassas, if Kru Ba Khambhun ordained at an earlier date, he is effectively the senior monk in charge and Kru Ba Thoon must defer to him as a matter of respect.

When I heard this, I wanted to yell, “I know how to give a sermon!” I so badly wanted to say it, but I held my tongue because the monk in charge had already spoken. But the Dhamma was aching to show itself. It was jumping up and down in my mind. I was itching to give a sermon. After the devotees had left, I composed myself and spoke with the monk in charge. “Kru Ba, why didn’t you give them a Dhamma sermon just now?”

He replied, “I don’t know how to give a Dhamma sermon.”

“If you don’t know how, why not tell me to give the sermon in your place?”

He said, “Oh yeah. I totally forgot. I don’t know what kamma obscured that from my view. The next uposatha, you’ll definitely get to give the sermon.” There were seven more days until the next uposatha. I kept thinking about how time crawled toward the uposatha. On the full moon uposatha, a great number of devotees filled the temple. After finishing our meal, Kru Ba immediately asked the devotees, “Would you like to hear a sermon?”

They all replied in the affirmative. “Yes, sir. We would like to hear a sermon.”

“Today, Kru Ba Thoon will be giving the sermon.” My mind beamed in acceptance of those words. Next, we went through the ceremonial requesting of a Dhamma teaching. I chose “Kusalā-dhammā akusalā-dhammā”<sup>24</sup> as the lecture topic and expounded on it in an uncommonly elaborate and expansive manner. I don’t even know how the words flowed out of me. I concluded the lecture after approximately one hour.

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<sup>24</sup> “Kusalā-dhammā akusalā-dhammā,” or skillful phenomena, unskillful phenomena, is the first line of the Dhamma Groupings List (*Dhamasaṅgañī Mātikā Pāṭha*) that is traditionally chanted at funerals.

Then, many male devotees crawled toward me, grabbed my feet and placed them on their heads. They said, “We have listened to sermons from many and none of them spoke as well as you did. It’s amazing that you have only been ordained for one vassa and are able to speak on the Dhamma in this manner. Once you have the experience of more vassas, your Dhamma sermons will probably be unrivaled.” Everyone, including the monk I was with, acknowledged that I had done an excellent job. No one had ever heard a teacher give such a great sermon on “Kusalā-dhammā akusalā-dhammā” as I had just done.

Thereafter, the devotees returned home. As I was giving the sermon, I had no idea how the Dhamma flowed from me. I thought that after giving the sermon, the Dhamma would surely be exhausted. Little did I know that other topics of Dhamma would sprout in its place. In fact, the new Dhamma was even more plentiful. While all of this was happening to me, I realized that new monks should not expose their knowledge in this way, but I couldn’t contain myself. All I wanted to do was give sermons and answer questions. As the desire intensified, I was at a loss for what to do with myself.

One day, I went to the bathroom. It was a one-meter-deep hole in the ground with stepping planks on either side of the hole. As I was crouching over the hole doing my business, I glanced down below and saw a swarm of worms warring over feeding rights to feces. I used wisdom to contemplate and see that the worms were content with filth. They were attached to foul things and believed them to be good and valuable. They spent all day and night eating. These worms were deluded into seeing the bad as good and the putrid as fragrant. I internalized the worm metaphor and compared it to my own situation. I was also deluded into believing that I was skilled at



↓  
Contemplating on the worms eating feces

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speaking the Dhamma and capable of solving every problem, regardless of topic. I believed myself to be better than others. All the knowledge that arose within me was like those deluded worms feeding on feces.

As I was defecating and internalizing the metaphor of the worms eating feces, the mind (citta) suddenly settled into a calm state. The well of knowledge and the ability to answer any question instantly dried up and vanished. I could no longer recollect the knowledge. This was how I solved my problem. Without the worms as my teacher, my talkative condition would have likely persisted for quite some time.

Thus, metaphors and examples of Dhamma that can be applied to solve our problems exist everywhere. Only, how thorough and intelligent will you be in applying wisdom to solve your own problems? There are no rituals or specific procedures, like walking meditation (*caṅkama*) or sitting meditation, required for wisdom contemplations. There is no protocol, for you can contemplate anywhere and at any time. If you know the cause of your problem, you will know where to focus. Then you will be able to draw on a relevant metaphor to quash the cause, resolve the issue, and your problem will simply disappear from your mind. Regardless of the problem's worldly or Dhamma nature, you can always contemplate it in a comprehensive manner.



## Spending My Second Vassa at Yod Thon

After leaving Ban Khok Tang Khaen, I continued on dhutanga until it was time to enter the rains retreat (vassa). This year I would spend the vassa at Yod Thon in Si Chiang Mai district, Nong Khai province. There were ten monks and novices (*sāmañera*) in our group. There was an expansive forest with a great assortment of native wildlife. There were tigers, wild bison, wild boars, muntjac,<sup>25</sup> deer, and much more. The monks and *sāmañeras* familiar with the terrain knew where tigers thrived and where fierce ghosts resided. When I arrived, they arranged for me to go to those locations. Jan Dai cave was situated approximately two kilometers away from the group. As the skies darkened, I heard a Kru Ba whisper to a *sāmañera*, “Keep it a secret. Let’s see how brave and able this forest tradition (*kammaṭṭhāna*) monk will be.” Upon hearing this, I wondered what he meant. So, I strolled over and asked them what they were talking about. But the Kru Ba and the *sāmañera* evaded the question and said, “Oh, it’s nothing. There is a courageous and purposeful forest tradition monk here this year. We’ll see how well he practices mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*).”

Once it was time, the *sāmañera* escorted me to Jan Dai cave, which was near Khok Hom cave. The cave came with a raised platform

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<sup>25</sup> A species of small deer also known as barking deer or rib-faced deer.

and a path prepared for walking meditation (*cānkama*). Before dusk, the sāmañera took his leave of me. He took a few steps and turned back to say, “Kru Ba, don’t grab your alms bowl and flee the cave in the middle of the night!” and he hurriedly took off. I thought to myself, “*Something strange will surely happen tonight,*” and told myself, “*Whatever happens, I will not flee the cave. If I have to die, so be it.*”

I went about setting up my monk umbrella tent (*klot*), cleaning the cave, and procuring water. I focused on walking meditation and found great solitude in that moment. After the sun had set, from somewhere off in the distance, a tiger began to roar in intervals. Once one tiger began to roar, two to three other tigers responded in kind. One tiger roared over here, another roared over there. They threw their thunderous bellows at one another while all the animals in the vicinity kept still and silent. There was heightened caution in the dark. As the tigers’ roars drew nearer, I began to feel afraid. In that moment, I made a solemn asseveration (*sacca-adhitṭhāna*) within my mind, “*If I have ever committed demerit (*pāpa*) and bad kamma toward these tigers, I am ready to pay retribution. But if we have no past kammic relationship, may the tigers not harm me.*” And then I continued to contemplate and practice mental cultivation.

That night, my mind (*citta*) couldn’t settle into meditative calm. Because the tigers’ roars weren’t that far off, I was forced to listen to them in a state of high alert. I kept my eyes peeled so that I would see the tigers approach. I didn’t catch a wink of sleep throughout the entire night and early morning. Once it was time, I left the cave to go on my alms round (*piṇḍapāta*). The monks and sāmañeras observed me, but I didn’t exhibit any symptoms that would give me away. I acted nonchalant, as if nothing had happened.

When I met up with the monks and sāmañeras, they asked, “How did it go? Was the mental cultivation good last night?”

I gave a short reply, “The mental cultivation was good last night.” When the timing was right, I went and asked Phra Ācariya Somboon, “Ācariya, what can I do to prevent a tiger from coming near?”

He responded, “It’s not difficult at all. In the middle of the night, make a fire in the cave. Because the tiger is afraid of fire, it will flee on its own.” Now I knew what to do. That night, I built a fire and did walking meditation. Then when it was time, I entered the cave and did sitting meditation. As for the tigers, they continued their fierce concert of roars. I hadn’t slept at all the previous night. Feeling sleepy now, I reclined and fell into a slumber.

I awoke around 2 a.m. and noticed the fire had significantly diminished. Afraid it would be extinguished, I hurriedly pulled open the netting of my klot in order to build up the fire. The instant I pulled the net aside, I saw a tiger sitting in front of the fire. Once the tiger spotted me, it leapt into the forest. I ducked back under the klot. There was no more sleeping that night. All I could manage was to sit and recite meditative mantras (parikamma). At the slightest crack or crunch, my eyes would fly open. I wondered, *“How long had this tiger been sitting beside me? The wide mesh on my klot would have allowed it to see me clearly. It could have eaten me if it had so desired. But I didn’t have a kammic relationship with this tiger.”* I told myself, *“From now on, none of the other tigers will eat me either. From now on, I will cultivate as much mental fortitude as possible. I will train myself to be proficient in meditation so that I will have the strength to battle my fear of tigers. In every posture, my mind will always be composed and focused in concentration. As for using wisdom (paññā)*

*to contemplate the Three Common Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*) according to universal truths (*sacca-dhamma*)—well, those efforts will have to be trimmed back for now. I have to fortify my mind's strength first.”*

The following day, I had the chance to ask some huntsmen whether tigers were truly afraid of fires in the middle of the night. They told me, “You mustn’t do that, Kru Ba. Once the tiger sees the fire, it will head straight for it. It thinks that there must be a dog sleeping by the fire, so it comes to collect its next meal. You’re lucky that the tiger didn’t snatch you off to eat, Kru Ba. Don’t build a fire anymore, alright? If the tiger is hungry, it might eat you.”

The next night, I did walking meditation and sitting meditation as usual. Suddenly, it was as if a gigantic door had slid over the cave’s mouth, sealing it shut. There was a single door panel. In that same instant, I heard knocking on the door and a woman’s voice, “Ācariya, ācariya, open the door.”

I knew that women were not allowed to be with a monk one-on-one. So, I told her, “No. Women cannot come in. I am alone here and you are forbidden from entering.”

The woman said, “If you don’t open the door for me, I will open it myself,” and she really opened the door and entered. I didn’t have time to steady myself before she embraced me from behind and said, “Ācariya, you must disrobe and come live with me as my husband. I liked you from the moment I saw you enter this cave.”

I told her, “I have resolved to be a monk for my entire life. I absolutely will not disrobe and spend my life as a layperson.”

She presented an ultimatum, “If you don’t promise to disrobe, I will suffocate you to death with my embrace.” At that, she squeezed tighter, constricting my breath.

With the outlook appearing bleak, I hatched a plan. “Wait a second. I am going to spend the vassa here in this cave. At the end of the vassa, we can discuss it.”

She agreed. Before she released her grip, she said, “Don’t forget your promise. I will return to collect it at the end of the vassa,” and she walked out. My mind (citta) withdrew from the meditative state. The cave was the same as usual. Nothing had changed. The door that sealed the cave’s opening was nowhere to be found.

I applied wisdom to consider what had just happened. What was the woman supposed to represent? I immediately understood that it was a personal matter. If I had interpreted her to be an actual ghost, I would only worry. I contemplated and decided that for the time being, I would have to regularly exercise deep meditative calm in order to cultivate the mental strength to combat my fears. The more I focused on meditative mantras, the more the mind became calm and concentrated. One night, the citta felt a strong need to enter a calm meditative state. So, I directed the citta into a deep state of calm. At first, I relied on pairing the citta with the meditative mantra of “Buddho, Buddho.” Once the mind began to feel serene, I stopped the recitations. Then, I focused mindfulness on every inhale and exhale. The heightened awareness of each breath ensured that the mindfulness never faltered. When I inhaled, I was keenly aware of the coarse quality of the breath. Then, I trained the awareness on each progressively refined breath until they were as refined and delicate as could be. Thereafter, I released all mindfulness of breath

and directed all heightened concentration toward “poo roo,”<sup>26</sup> or focused consciousness. I didn’t direct this focused consciousness to observe my breathing at all. I only focused on monitoring the focused consciousness.

I can’t even pinpoint when the citta converged into calm that night. At daybreak, the citta withdrew from the meditative state. Upon coming out of meditation, it felt like I didn’t have any breath. Even if I had breath, it seemed like I wasn’t breathing. There was a perpetually still quality. To even think of the “Buddho” mantra felt so rough and raw. Likewise, watching my intake and outtake of breath felt coarse and harsh. My only recourse was to train my focused consciousness on focused consciousness. Whatever posture I found myself in, I was constantly in a state of equanimity, or *upekkhā*. This persisted for around seven days.

Deep down, I knew that these symptoms were unequivocally misaligned with the path and fruit of enlightenment (*magga-phala-nibbāna*). It was likely just an advanced stage of an immaterial meditative absorption (*arūpa-jhāna*). Now that it had happened, I needed to find a cure. I considered which teacher (*ācariya*) would be able to help me fix it and realized that no one could. I would have to find my own way out of the situation. I searched for Dhamma metaphors to draw the citta out of the stillness but found my wisdom out of commission. It was simply still at all times. Previously, I had contemplated Dhamma metaphors to the point of unobstructed clarity. Now, I could not think or contemplate anything at all. Ordinarily, the four elements (*catu-dhātu*) were merely be the four elements; they were not linked to or colored by the citta’s symptoms in any way.

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<sup>26</sup> When translated directly from Thai, “poo roo” means “one who knows” or “the knower.” It is a sharp, focused consciousness.

I recognized that allowing the mind to be pleased with this state of equanimity would be a sure path into the Brahma world (brahma-loka). But my sole determination was to achieve the path and fruit of enlightenment. Therefore, I had to find a way out of arūpa-jhāna.

I realized that I had to read as much as I could. Once I prescribed myself this cure, I picked up the monastic code of discipline (pātimokkha)<sup>27</sup> and read it. On the first attempt, I didn't want to read it but compelled myself to. That time, I read silently. The following times, I read aloud. The longer I read aloud, the more the citta started to peel away. As I became aware that the citta had begun to extract itself from the arūpa-jhāna meditative state, I intensified the reading. After reading for three days, the citta fully exited the serene state and returned to normal.

I purposefully considered the cause of the tranquil symptoms. I understood that it stemmed from my extreme fear of tigers as well as my scheme to prevent the female ghost from coming to collect on my promise. I had focused on reciting mantras and was constantly meditating in every posture. I trained the citta on one-pointedness of the mind (ekaggatā). This unblinking awareness of the citta produced an unwavering state of meditative calm. Ultimately, the citta fell into the aforementioned arūpa-jhāna.

It was lucky that I had cultivated a wisdom-based personality. Otherwise, I would have certainly died in that serene state of arūpa-jhāna. There was no way out of the meditative absorption. If I had died, I would have wasted my life. My life would have been meaningless. I wouldn't have made it to enlightenment. My experience with arūpa-

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<sup>27</sup> Pātimokkha is the code of monk's rules that is recited on all full moon and new moon days (uposatha) before the assembled community of fully ordained monks.

jhāna was a critical lesson. I would not lead the citta into this kind of deep meditation anymore.

Thereafter, I laid new plans for practice. When I meditated, it would only be to achieve adequate calm before channeling that strength toward continuous wisdom contemplations. I would not allow the mind to constantly dwell in a continuous state of calm like I had previously. The only exception would be when the citta needed deep rest from a state of meditative tranquility. I would permit it on occasion. But I decided that once the citta had released from the meditative state, I would have to immediately use wisdom to contemplate. Normally, whatever posture I found myself in, I would regularly and constantly use wisdom to contemplate universal truths (sacca-dhamma). In other words, I would more frequently contemplate than meditate. My habitual contemplations were like a daily routine. Whenever I was tired from thinking, I would direct the citta into steadfastly focused concentration in order to draw strength to continue my wisdom contemplations.

Thus, tranquility concentration (samatha-kammaṭṭhāna) and insight concentration (vipassanā-kammaṭṭhāna) are interlinked techniques. You cannot disregard either one. Which technique you start or end with is a matter of each practitioner's style and personality, or a matter of time. Sometimes, you enjoy practicing meditation before wisdom. Sometimes, you enjoy using wisdom before meditating. This is referred to as meditation to train wisdom or wisdom to train meditation. Do what works for you or what fits with your personality. It's like when you are walking toward a destination. Whether you step left before right, or right before left, you alternate between the two and eventually reach your destination. The two modes of practice follow the same principle. Once you fully understand this, your practice

will be free of obstacles. You won't become confused and question whether your practice is correct or whether your practice is incorrect. You won't worry about this at all. You will not waste your time on any doubts or reservations about practice.



## A Warning for Meditators

I hope that by explaining my experience with practicing mental cultivation (bhāvanā-paṭipatti), you will observe the causal links that culminated in the meditative (samādhi) incident and adapt them to your own practice in a way befitting your personality. If you were to meditate and your mind (citta) gets a taste of calm, you experience an extremely deep and refined tranquility, or your meditative calm persists for so many days that it turns into an immaterial meditative absorption (arūpa-jhāna), you must have a method of extracting yourself from the meditative absorption prepared in advance. If you, as a practitioner, lack a foundation of wisdom, you will surely drown in arūpa-jhāna until your dying day. You won't have any means of extricating yourself from the meditative state. There is a widespread belief that once the citta enters a state of calm, wisdom will arise. This is untrue. Obviously, those who promote this view have no experience with refined states of meditative tranquility. Their senseless words have led many people to wrong understanding.

A single person with wrong views can lead hundreds of thousands of others to have wrong views. Once wrong view has arisen, it becomes the cause of wrong thought. The speech, action, and livelihood that sprout from the root of wrong view will all be wrong as well. Similarly, the efforts expended in various tasks, the

establishment of mindfulness (sati), and the practice of meditation will all be wrong. It is like a bag of counterfeit money. While it resembles legitimate money, you cannot take it to be so. Fake money will always be fake. Likewise, as long as wrong views lurk deep in your mind, your mind will forever have wrong views (micchā-ditṭhi). Consequently, it will be difficult to reform yourself. Your foolishness and irrationality will unwittingly develop into wrong views (micchā-ditṭhi). Because you mistakenly believe your wrong views to be right views, you will encounter many problems.

Thus, I wish to impart this food for thought for the determined practitioners out there. Use your discretion wisely and in a way befitting your resolve to walk in the footsteps of the Buddha and the many holy ones (ariya-puggala). You must study the historical accounts of the holy ones so that you understand how they each started their practice. What methods (upāya) did they employ that led them to the universal truth (sacca-dhamma)? You must adopt and tailor your views to those methods in order to develop sammā-ditṭhi, or views that are correct and righteous. These right views will be the platform upon which other right views congregate. If you lay the proper foundations of Dhamma practice from the start, the rest of your training will follow that correct trajectory. Everything will progress smoothly and effortlessly. This is what is meant by one truly being one's own refuge. As someone who is rational, you will be capable and decisive. Thus, it will truly be "maggā-maggañāṇa-dassana-visuddhi,"<sup>28</sup> knowing and seeing the path to purity.

Before you travel to an unfamiliar destination, you must study the map well. Regardless of the many offshoots and convoluted paths, you must recognize and understand the main course in order to

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<sup>28</sup> Also translated as purity of knowledge and vision of what is and is not the path.

follow it accurately. Your map must be aligned in the right direction. You must have tools, like a bright light, on hand and you must travel with caution. If you are thoroughly versed on your prescribed course, you are guaranteed to reach your destination. The practice of mental cultivation is the same. Practitioners must study and understand the principles of sammā-ditṭhi, or wisdom aligned with the truth, because this is where practice begins. If you misinterpret the meaning of sammā-ditṭhi, it will immediately transform into micchā-ditṭhi. If this happens, you will unwittingly understand things incorrectly. You will mistakenly assume wrong views to be right views. Your practice will immediately encounter problems. Your desire to attain enlightenment will be left unfulfilled.

Thus, before you dive into practice, you must be fully prepared with mindfulness, wisdom, faith, and effort. Wisdom is the mind's light. Once your wisdom is thoroughly steeped in reason, your decision making will be correct, swift, and in time to matter. You won't have any hesitations or doubts about practice methods, like what is proper or what is improper, or right or wrong. This is how practitioners follow in the Buddha's footsteps in the correct manner. You are one who is embarking on a journey. If you don't understand how to practice, you must study with those who are knowledgeable. That way, you will grow confident that your practice is correct and true.

It is most critical that you are careful not to ask questions of those who are lost. You are also lost. The person pointing out the way is just as lost as you are. It'll turn into the blind leading the blind. You won't make it when the blind lead one another. There is nothing that can help that type of situation. Consider it bad luck. One day in the future, you might encounter someone with good eyesight who will undoubtedly guide you to shore. With strong wisdom, it isn't difficult

to seek out a teacher who is practicing correctly. You must train yourself to be righteous (dhammā-dhipateyya) and use reality as your touchstone. Whenever someone presents the Dhamma to you, you must instantly deploy your mindful wisdom to assess its rationality. In this way, it will not be difficult to select that which is righteous (dhammā-dhipateyya).



## **Accustomed to Living Among Tigers**

It was initially scary living among tigers, but after some time had passed, I grew accustomed to it. The days in which I didn't hear a tiger roar felt incomplete somehow. I was absolutely confident that tigers would not harm me in this lifetime. One day, I went on a solo forest walk and didn't return until it was dark. I suspected I had enough water in my bamboo flask, but I hadn't actually checked. When I woke up, I discovered there was no water in the bamboo flask so I couldn't wash my face or brush my teeth. That morning, a tiger was roaring near a well thirty meters away from where I was. The roaring was so thunderously loud that everything in the vicinity trembled. I sat waiting for the tiger to leave the area so that I could get water. I waited for so long that the sun had risen, but the tiger still hadn't finished roaring. So, I yelled very loudly, "Hey, tiger! Why in the world are you roaring over here? The sun is already up. Go find somewhere to sleep!" Then, the tiger was silent. Around ten minutes later, I descended to scoop water from the stone well. I noticed traces of the tiger there. After obtaining my water, I left for alms (*pindapāta*). I wasn't the least bit afraid of the tiger.

The following night, I awoke around 4 a.m. as daylight was nearing and began meditating (*samādhi*). I could hear breathing from somewhere on the stone slab above my head. I considered what the



sound could be and concluded that it was a tiger's breathing. A tiger had taken refuge there and fallen asleep. Its breathing sounded just like that of a sleeping cat's, only the sound was bigger. The sound was louder than the sound of a cat. I sat there listening to the sounds of the tiger's breathing and practicing mindfulness of my own breathing (*ānāpāna-sati*). I considered how all animals rely on breath to determine life or death. If breath enters but does not exit, or exits but does not enter, that is the end of life. The tiger sleeping on the slab above my head relied on breath just as I do. I experimented with syncing my breaths to the tiger's and doing *ānāpāna-sati*, but found that it was not possible; the tiger's rhythm was more drawn out than mine. The sky started to become light. Birds began chirping their morning songs as they prepared to leave to search for food, but the tiger still hadn't awakened. I left my position and tried yelling at the tiger. "Hey, tiger! Wake up! Why are you still sleeping? Find someplace else to sleep!" The breathing sounds then ceased. I left for *pindapāta* and returned to discover traces of an enormous tiger. I felt indifferent. I wasn't the least bit afraid because I had grown accustomed to coexisting with tigers.



## Courage from a Bengal Tiger

After the rains retreat (vassa), the rain dried up around February. I gathered dried leaves and strung them together to erect a makeshift bower by the stone slabs approximately one meter away from my usual shelter. There was a stone platform that was large, wide, smooth, and flat and sand flats made up of beautiful, fine sand. I set up my bower and umbrella tent (klot) there. I had been there ten days when around 5 p.m. one evening, three huntsmen descended the mountain with their equipment. They had camped in the forest during their hunting trip. They had shot and killed forest bison on many occasions. They came to see me and pressed upon me with great urgency, "Kru Ba, hurry! You must pack up quickly, before it gets dark out."

I asked the huntsmen, "What happened that you think I need to pack up?"

They responded, "That same large Bengal tiger is back again. It has a taste for humans and has already devoured many people from the Phu Fah and Phu Luang regions. If it sees a human, it will eat it straight away. It doesn't like eating other animals as much as it does humans. This Bengal tiger customarily ventures into this territory once a year. We just encountered fresh tracks today. If it comes into this area, it will frolic in the very same sand flats that you are residing in and send its deafening roars reverberating throughout the entire

forest. We will escort you down the mountain first. In five days, it will have moved on from here. Then you can return."

I decided to tell the huntsmen, "I will not flee. If the tiger comes, let it come. If it is going to eat me, I'll let it eat me to clear our kammic debts."

The huntsmen refused to listen to me and began collecting my alms bowl and klot. They were determined to escort me down the mountain. They said, "No matter what, you have to put your safety first, Kru Ba."

I feigned anger and sternly told them, "I am not a forest tradition (*kammaṭṭhāna*) monk who is afraid of death. If I were afraid of death, why would I stay in a place like this all by myself? If the Bengal tiger is going to eat me tonight, then let it. Look, if we don't have shared kamma and have never done anything to each other, the tiger won't do anything to me at all." After their failed entreaties, they left the mountain.

At sunset, I could feel a sudden shift in my mind. The atmosphere in the vast forest was completely unusual. The normally bright and radiant moonlight appeared dim and dull. The familiar orchestra of animal sounds was so silent it seemed that there were no animals present at all. When night was fully upon me, that which had brought me pleasure and happiness now brought me worry and anxiety. When I turned to look at the stone slab and bower, my mind thought it was a tiger. To me, the sounds of leaves falling or branches snapping all translated to tiger.

The huntsman had said that around 9 p.m. the tiger would come prance in the area and send out its roars. It was already 8 p.m. The

fear and courage within me were equal in measure. I recalled from my childhood what the elders had told us, “When a large Bengal tiger ventures out to hunt in a certain direction, a wind will precede it. This wind serves to forewarn the various animals to be on alert. The animals that aren’t fated to die will smell the tiger coming and tuck themselves away in some safe hiding place. The animal fated to be the tiger’s supper won’t smell it coming. The wind is a kind of premonition or warning for the animals. This is what naturally happens with large tigers.”

As I was doing walking meditation (*caṅkama*), a soft breeze drifted along the grass in my direction. I flashed to the memory (*saññā*) of the elders’ words and was certain that the large Bengal tiger was on its way to me that very moment and that once the tiger spotted me, it would immediately attack and chew me up. If I were to flee, I’d be ashamed of being a scaredy-cat *kammaṭṭhāna* monk afraid of death. Wasn’t I the least bit embarrassed by what the celestial beings (*devatā*) would think? I was a *kammaṭṭhāna* monk who had dedicated my life to Buddhism. Kamma would decide what would become of my life. Having already arrived at this point, it was unsuitable to bow out now. Regardless of how I would fare, I offer my body and soul in tribute to the virtues of the Buddha, the virtues of the Dhamma, and the virtues of the Ariya-Saṅgha. Thus, I made an asseveration of truth (*adhitṭṭhāna*), *“If this tiger and I have ever committed kamma toward one another, may it eat me so that our kammic debt may end. But if we have never committed bad kamma toward one another, may this Bengal tiger not harm me.”* Thus the Pāli adage, “Dhammo have rakkhati dhammadārim,” one who safeguards Dhamma will be safeguarded by Dhamma and will not fall toward evil. If my bad kamma hadn’t reached its climax, I would not come to harm.



Once I figured this out, I felt a surge of courage. The bold fearlessness that filled my heart was strong and solid. I was confident and ready to face the notorious Bengal tiger. Come what may, I would sit in meditation (*samādhi*) right where I was, awaiting the tiger's arrival. There was only one path for the tiger to gain access to his customary haunt. If I sat facing the tiger's point of entry, I probably wouldn't be able to resist opening my eyes and looking at the tiger. If I sat facing the side, allowing the tiger to easily pass through, I was afraid of missing out on sneaking a peek at the tiger. Consequently, I decided to sit with my back facing the tiger's entrance. Once it climbed up and saw me, it would snatch me by the neck and eat me straight away. This could be the last time I would ever meditate in this life. Though I was still young and had been a monk for only two vassas, my life could very well end tonight. Whether or not my life would come to an end was for the Bengal tiger to decide. At that moment, I had resigned myself to death. I hadn't yet reached enlightenment (*nibbāna*) and my existing mental intoxications (*āsava*) dictated that I must be reborn again. I hoped to be reborn again as soon as possible so that I could ordain and practice until I profoundly realized and truly understood the universal truths (*sacca-dhamma*) laid forth in the Buddhist religion of this current Buddha. I willed myself not to be reborn in any of the heavenly realms (*sagga*).

Once I had set my resolution and resigned myself to death, I immediately sat down with my back to the tiger's path and began to meditate. Initially, I coupled the "Buddho" mantra (*parikamma*) with my breathing. Once the mind (*citta*) entered a more refined stage of meditation, I stopped reciting the mantra. I merely focused awareness on inhaling and exhaling until my breaths developed an utterly refined and delicate quality. My breaths disappeared and the *citta* was replete

and calm. I couldn't perceive or feel anything. The citta began to hit its meditative stride around 9 p.m. and withdrew from the meditative state around 2 a.m. Once I was back to normal consciousness, I deduced that the large Bengal tiger must not have come. I stood up, walked over to the bower, and practiced walking meditation until it grew light. To be sure the tiger didn't appear while I was meditating and couldn't see it, I strolled over to the tiger's sole point of entry. Oh, Buddho! The impressions left by the large Bengal tiger indicated that it had stood there watching me meditate! It had been a mere three meters away from me. Considering this, I felt even more confident that I certainly would not die by tiger in this lifetime. I was absolutely certain that the Dhamma indeed protects those who practice in accordance with the Dhamma. In the nights thereafter, I would no longer be anxious or wary of tigers.

On my way to my usual alms round, I spotted the same group of huntsmen. They expeditiously made their way to me with their weapons in hand. Upon seeing my face, they said, "Gee, we couldn't sleep at all last night. We were so worried about you, Kru Ba. We thought that the tiger had snatched you away for supper. We were just on our way up to check on you." And they told me, "Last night, that large Bengal tiger killed a buffalo from the village and made a meal of it." The tiger's feast had taken place only one kilometer away from where I had been. I told the huntsmen that I had seen traces of the tiger near me, but that it hadn't done anything. I continued on the alms round and the men returned to their homes.

During that period, a number of monks and novices (*sāmanera*) had taken ill with malaria. As a layperson, I had acquired some knowledge about both modern and traditional herbal medicine, so I instantly became a makeshift doctor. I traveled down to Si Chiang

Mai district to procure medicine. I trekked many kilometers to purchase medicinal sprays, tablets, and saline solution to heal the afflicted in our group. The monks and sāmañeras were set up very far from one another. Throughout the day and night, I had to take shortcuts into the forest in order to administer shots. We were lucky that no monks or sāmañeras lost their lives that year. I also came down with malaria and had to inject my muscles and veins all by myself. Before leaving that area, we had gone through two fertilizer bags worth of injections and saline solution. A single needle lasted a long time. If I injected the needle and it caused pain, I would take the needle tip and draw it against a stone before reinjecting it. We didn't have money to buy another needle. We had to conserve by sharpening and reusing the needle.

There were so many inconveniences during that season of dhutaṅga. I didn't have money to travel by car. Despite being faint and weak, I had to bear it and trek on. There were moments when I considered hailing a ride, but I didn't dare because I had no funds to pay for it. Nobody donated common pain medication. I went to one house where they invited me to their housewarming merit-making to take place three days later. "We invite you to attend. With the donation, you can afford some pain medication." Look at these boneheads—I had to accept the chanting gig before they would donate money for medication.



## A Vision of a Tall, Steep Cliff

During that period, a monk friend and I were on dhutanga together. We would stay one or two nights in each location. If a particular spot was conducive to mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*), we would stay longer. We journeyed on, stopping to sleep wherever we found ourselves when the skies darkened. In some places, there weren't any people's homes nearby. We would wake up very early and continue walking until we encountered people's homes, but by that time it was already too late. As we carried our alms bowls through the villages, we received a clump or two of sticky rice. It was barely enough to keep us alive. Nevertheless, I was content with the life of a forest tradition (*kammaṭṭhāna*) monk. I imagined that the monks who went on dhutanga during the Buddha's era were this way, too. To receive food that you like is rare. But even though this characterized my experience—some days I was full, some days I wasn't; some days I got to eat, some days I didn't—I didn't consider it a big deal. All I wanted was to make it through the day or night.

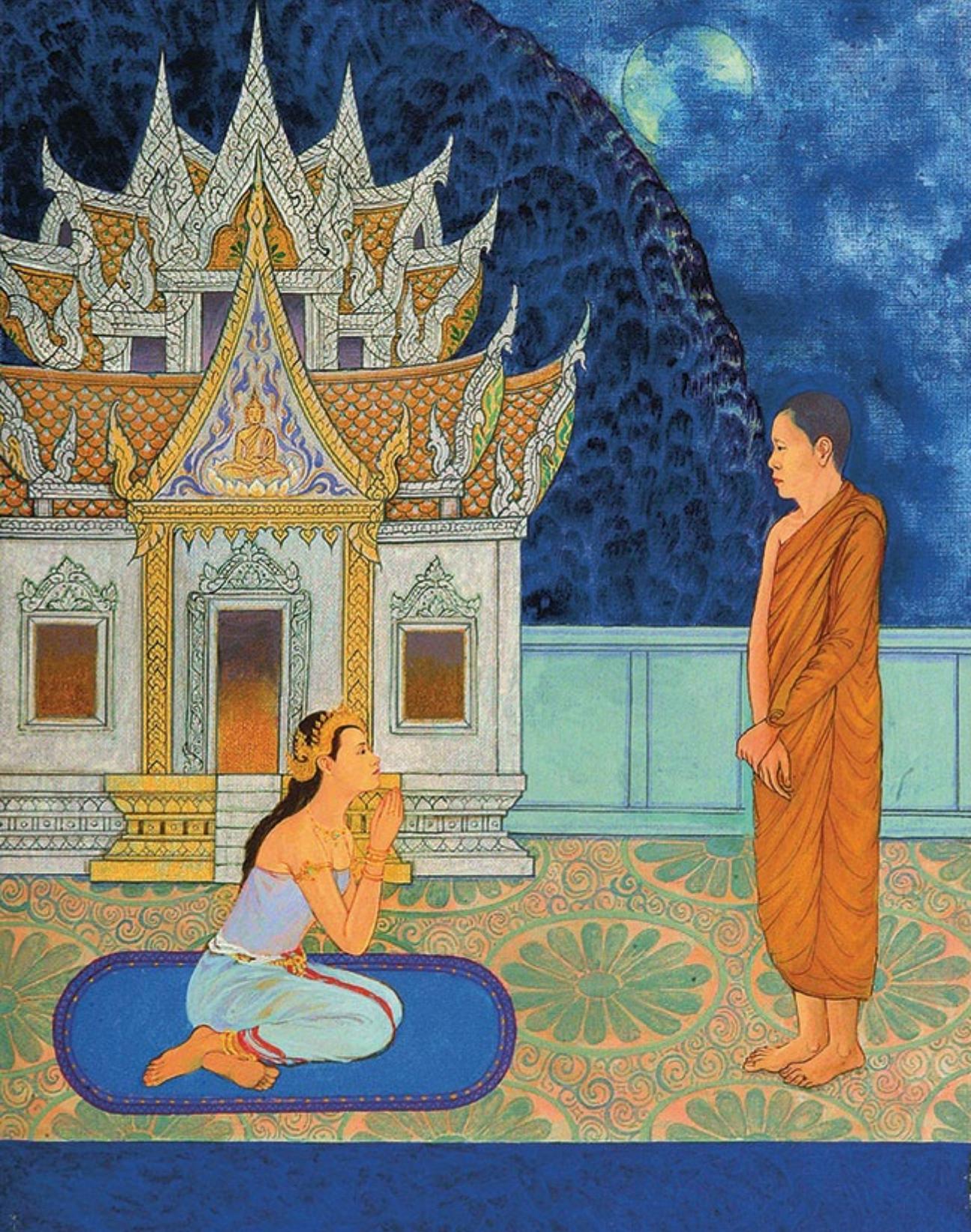
As my mind (*citta*) entered a serene state one night, I experienced a vision (*nimitta*). I saw a tall mountain that extended beyond my line of sight. The cliff face was as steep and high as the mountain ridge and appeared so flat and smooth that it shined. There were millions of people there. A voice announced, "Whoever wishes to be



free of suffering in this endless cycle of rebirth (*vatta-samsāra*) must scale this cliff. Once you reach the pinnacle, you will never be reborn in the human world again.” This announcement played on a continuous loop. There were three types of people there. One type paid no attention to the announcement. They sauntered back and forth without any aim or direction. The second type stood or sat listening to the announcement, but all they did was listen. They spoke to one another, listened to the announcement, but were not the least bit interested in climbing up the cliff. The third type were pleased and content to scale the cliff. They clustered together and attempted to leap and climb their way up the cliff, but it was too slippery to get a firm grip and they slid back down. After resting and recharging their energy, they bounded back up and tried again. I didn’t see a single person ascend to the top of the cliff.

At that moment, I was confident that I could definitely climb to the top of the cliff. I made my way through the crowd to the cliff, placed my palms together at my chest, and made an asseveration of truth (*adhitṭhāna*), “*If I am destined be freed from suffering in this lifetime, may I climb all the way to the top of this cliff.*” After making my resolution, I gathered my strength and leapt up six meters. My hands and feet stuck to the sheer face like glue. Then, drawing from all the energy I had in my body and mind, I ran as fast as lightning up the cliff face. I didn’t stop to rest at all.

I made it to the top of the cliff and turned to glance down at the sea of people. I waved to them and said, “I made it to the top!” Many people yelled, “Help! Help!” and many placed their palms together at their chests and said, “We rejoice (*anumodanā*) with you.” Then, the voice announced, “You must follow this path. This is the path to the ultimate end. Once you get there, you won’t have to come back



down to be reborn again." I followed the path. It was like walking up a progressively steeper incline. There was a field where I could have taken a break, but I didn't stop. I kept moving. It was like hiking a tall mountain. I wasn't tired or sore at all. I made it to the third level, which was extremely high and steep. I hiked up there effortlessly, without meeting any obstacles.

Upon reaching the third level, I encountered a beautiful single-story palace situated right by the path's edge. When I strode up to it, a female devotee walked out to welcome me. She was stunning and at the pinnacle of youthful beauty. She conducted herself in a friendly and courteous manner. She was humble, reverential, and gracious as she bowed and sat before me. With her palms together at her chest, she said, "Venerable sir, you have traveled a great distance and are weary. Please come inside to rest and refresh yourself with some water. I invite you to stay at this palace for a long time."

I told her, "My sole desire is to reach the fourth level—the highest possible point. I am neither tired nor thirsty. I am going to make my way to the fourth level now."

But the woman implored in a persuasive tone, "Venerable sir, from here to the fourth level isn't far. Just a tad further and you're there. Rest here, first. You'll make it whenever you decide to go."

I spoke with finality, "Thank you for your kind intentions, but I will not be resting here."

The woman said, "If you do not wish to rest, please proceed to the fourth level, venerable sir."

I continued to follow the path up the tall mountain. The fourth level was especially high and steep, but the path was smooth and flat.

I made it up there easily. Walking along this path, I did not feel drained or sore in any way. Upon reaching the fourth level, my surroundings completely transformed. Wherever I looked, there was nothing. It was entirely infinite and boundless. There were no trees. At the fourth level, there was nothing that I could describe for you to picture what it was like. There are no worldly conventions (*sammuti*) to define or compare it to that would do it justice. Because it was a place of nothingness, nothing can describe it.

At this point, the citta withdrew from the meditative state. At that moment, it felt like I had really been there. I used wisdom to contemplate, analyze, and interpret the meaning of the vision. I came to understand that it all represented my own practice. It was a good nimitta. It made me feel fully confident about my practice. Nimittas are not all the same in nature—some concern the past, some concern the present, some concern the future, some concern worldly issues, some concern Dhamma issues, some have to do with yourself, and some have to do with others. Nimittas come in various forms. Once someone experiences one, they must find a way to interpret it. If you ask others to translate your nimitta, their interpretation may be at odds with your own understanding. Nimitta denotes meaning. When we describe the nimitta or its significance, this interpretation of the nimitta is called *paṭibhāga*—and *paṭibhāga* refers to wisdom. You use this wisdom to isolate, explain, and expand on the meaning of the nimitta. In order to think in a fair and righteous manner, you must interpret the nimitta in terms of the Three Common Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*).



## Third Vassa, 1963

After trekking through various places on dhutanga, I decided to spend my third rains retreat (vassa) at Wat Pa Nong Saeng with Luang Pu Boowa Siripunño. Phra Ācariya Singtong was the elder monk (thera) in charge during that vassa. I will provide a bit of background on Luang Pu Boowa. He was a great elder monk (mahā-thera) and a pupil of Luang Pu Mun. Originally from Roi Et province, Luang Pu Boowa had never studied academically and could neither read nor write. He had expressed an affinity for Dhamma practice since his teens. He married according to custom, but his contemplations and Dhamma practice never faltered. He tended to emphasize meditation (samādhi) over wisdom; he would meditate first, then use wisdom to contemplate afterward. He earned his living by farming.

Luang Pu Boowa remained a layperson until he was fifty years old, when he became a white-clad eight-precept lay attendant (*anāgārika*). He accompanied the monks in their extensive travels. Luang Pu Boowa had a humble and gracious nature and ministered to his teachers with great reverence. His teachers deemed his character fit for ordination, so they had him practice reciting the formal monastic ordination request. He learned it all by ear—his teachers would recite the chanting and he would repeat it. It took him three long years to memorize the entire recitation and become a monk. He was very

determined in his practice and was serious and resolute about maintaining the unwavering continuity of his practice. Luang Pu Boowa listened to Luang Pu Mun's Dhamma teachings on a regular basis. After taking in a Dhamma lecture, Luang Pu Boowa would internalize the Dhamma topic and analyze it in a rational and logical manner. He didn't possess any scholarly knowledge (pariyatti). His basis for contemplations relied on rationality, logic, and personal capability.

Whenever Luang Pu Boowa contemplated any universal truth (sacca-dhamma), he didn't compare it to theory at all. Rather, he compared it to reality in a way that corresponded to impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and not-self (anattā). Consequently, the resultant understandings and realizations of the Three Common Characteristics (tilakkhaṇa) were entirely the product of his own wisdom. His practice progressed easily, and he didn't doubt or question whether his practice aligned with various theoretical topics or groupings. However the truth existed, that was precisely how he understood it. Thus, his practice was strikingly different from those with scholarly knowledge. His wisdom was exclusively developed and trained from his own mind, without any scholarly knowledge mixed in whatsoever. As a result, his understanding of sacca-dhamma stemmed from his own individual wisdom. Whenever he turned his wisdom to a topic, he would easily arrive at understandings and realizations. For instance, when he contemplated filth (asubha), he simply became weary of lust and cast it off. When he contemplated any sacca-dhamma, it was easy for him to be thorough and exhaustive. When the wisdom is your own, whatever you do or contemplate will be easy because you won't have any hesitations.



## **The Mindset of Listen a Little, Contemplate a Lot**

I am someone who doesn't like to listen to sermons too much. I prefer to listen a little and contemplate a lot. Personally, if I listen too much, the knowledge I distill from the sermon will funnel too much into my memory and I won't discern the reasonableness on my own. I listen to the sermons attentively and with deference, and only memorize a few of the teacher's Dhamma metaphors (*upāya*) if the Dhamma appears to fit with my mindset. It isn't necessary to follow the example word for word as the teacher has presented it. That is merely a matter of literary style. As for your own literary style, you must use mindful wisdom (*sati-paññā*) and your own capability. The quality of your wisdom's thoroughness and intelligence is what you have developed on your own. If you mimic other people's knowledge too much, your wisdom will all be memorized theory. As a consequence, the results of your practice will not be solid and sure.

When you build something with your own blood, sweat, and tears, you pay special attention to and take great care of it. When you obtain it or borrow it from someone else, the degree of care and attention lessens. The love and attention you heap on a child created from your own blood versus a child you've adopted is bound to differ as well. In that vein, the wisdom that you build up on your own,

whether modest or great in magnitude, is something in which you take pride. It's like counting money at a bank. Even if millions of dollars passed your hands in a day, you would feel indifferent about it. But if you were to count your own money, even if it wasn't a large sum, you'd feel pride. You can take that money and buy whatever you want. Similarly, if the wisdom is developed on your own, you can use it to solve problems. That's why they say that one is one's own refuge.

If you study and mimic what you read in the manuals too much, your wisdom will be an imitation. You won't have any wisdom of your own. You consult the manuals whenever you wish to know a Dhamma topic, but that knowledge will not solve your problems when they arise. It is just like Venerable Pothila, who carried the scriptures and studied the Tipiṭaka. He was fluent in all Dhamma topics and their denotations. He could give Dhamma sermons, but the Dhamma he spoke of was plagiarized. He didn't possess any of his own Dhamma. Perhaps he forgot that it wasn't his own Dhamma. It's reminiscent of the adage, "Drowning in knowledge but incapable of solving your own problems." Thus, he is called Pothila, meaning one who carries empty scriptures. I found that Venerable Pothila's story was an excellent cautionary tale for me.

Thus, when you listen to your teacher's sermons, if you possess a measure of wisdom and intelligence, you will be able to select a Dhamma topic to practice. If you don't possess any wisdom, you will be another Venerable Poṭhila. My objective in explaining this is to help you see that you shouldn't rely solely on theoretical knowledge (pariyatti) or deem it sufficient to know Dhamma only in name. Learning Dhamma in name is not enough. You must also select a Dhamma topic well suited to you to practice. It's what is called, "Dhammānudhamma-paṭipatti," practicing Dhamma in accordance

with Dhamma. Focus on practicing the Dhamma topic that you think will enable you to solve your problems. It is as if you know the characteristics of your own sickness. You must use medication expressly for that sickness in order to cure it. Once the medication corresponds to the sickness, the sickness will subside and eventually disappear. It won't do to know all the medications by name but be unable to discern which of them to take when you fall ill. Likewise, all the knowledge you have acquired is merely Dhamma in name. You don't see or know the true Dhamma yet. Because you lack mindfulness and wisdom, you are unable to select a Dhamma topic to use in solving your own problems. Consequently, you continue to question and doubt the scriptures. There is an ancient saying, "the blind oft speak of what they see, fools oft speak of what they know." This is a natural part of reality.

I especially liked Luang Pu Boowa's Dhamma metaphors (*upāya*). He would often present short examples so that the monks and novices (*sāmañeras*) could develop their own wisdom. The monks and *sāmañeras* learned to observe, to discern the links between cause and effect, and to have a thorough and constant grasp on reality. After bathing Luang Pu,<sup>29</sup> we headed up to Luang Pu Boowa's hut (*kutī*) to listen to the Dhamma. That day, he told us, "Dogs like to wander according to time and season, but this isn't considered too bad. Forest tradition (*kammaṭṭhāna*) monks are much worse than dogs because they wander without regard for time or season." This short Dhamma lesson was enough to strike a chord in *kammaṭṭhāna* monks. As we left to contemplate his words, we were unable to face one another. I

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<sup>29</sup> Typically, the elder monk stands in a robe covering half of his body and the junior monks use small buckets and soap to wash and scrub him. Bathing elder monks (or doing other tasks like massaging or washing bowls for senior monks) is an opportunity for junior monks to show respect and repay debts of gratitude to their teachers.

don't know which kammathāna monks were struck by this Dhamma metaphor, only that it struck me hard. From then on, I was conscious not to let my thoughts wander and was mindful of what I was doing at all times. If my mind was not composed, it would wander even more than dogs do—that would put me below dogs.

Every time Luang Pu spoke, wherever it was, there was always a Dhamma metaphor to contemplate. One day, two monks with differing views (diṭṭhi) were quarreling. After Luang Pu Boowa had bathed, we went up to his kuṭī for a Dhamma lesson. He said, "Last night, two dogs were baring their teeth at one another," but didn't explain further. We bowed and took our leave. As we descended from the kuṭī, we whispered amongst ourselves, trying to interpret the metaphor. After some investigation, we found that there really was an argument between two monks. Those two monks appeared to be quite ashamed. No other monks had any issues with each other. From then on, the monks and sāmañeras were constantly cautious with their words. After we had finished the Pātimokkha chanting, Luang Pu Boowa told us that, "The temple is a place for peace and quiet. No one is permitted to argue or fight here. In the event of a disagreement, those people will instantly be ejected from the temple grounds." We were right in the middle of the vassa, too, but we were lucky because there were no more fights between monks or sāmañeras. Everyone was determined to practice to the best of their ability.



## A Vision of Luang Pu Leading Me Over a Large River

One night, I experienced a vision (nimitta) of Luang Pu Boowa coming toward me. He said, “Phra Thoon, Phra Thoon, come down here. I’ll take you somewhere.” I left the hut (kutī) and followed him. Up ahead was a wide river, approximately eight meters wide by eight meters deep, bound by steep banks. There was a single bamboo pole of an arm’s thickness draped across the two opposite banks like a bridge. Once we reached the river, Luang Pu said, “I will bring you across the river to the other side,” and proceeded to walk across the bamboo pole. The pole simply lay there, unaffixed to anything and without a railing to prevent one from falling. But Luang Pu made it across without moving the pole in any way. He turned back to face me and beckoned me with his hand. “Phra Thoon, hurry up and follow me across the bridge now.” I thought to myself, *“If Luang Pu can make it across, why shouldn’t I be able to?”* I focused and walked across the bamboo pole. Though the pole simply lay there, it didn’t bend under my weight. While I made my way across, I could feel that the pole was heavy, sturdy, and didn’t move at all. I found it very easy to balance myself without leaning in any way. I easily followed Luang Pu and made my way across to safety.



Once I joined Luang Pu on the opposite river bank, he asked, “Do you see anything in the water?”

I replied, “I do.”

He said, “This is what the world is like.”

I observed the elderly, middle-aged, young, and infant males and females being dragged along the river as if they were a human raft. The people were terrified of dying. Some fought to survive. The strong latched onto the weak and used them as a boat. Those of comparable strength clung to one another, tossing and flailing in the water, hoping to mount the other and use them as a raft to ride out the river. Whoever clambered their way to the top was considered the victor. It was a chaotic tangle of men grabbing onto women and women grabbing onto men. Some called out to others for help. Many clawed their way up the banks, but ultimately failed to reach the top and slipped back down. Putrid corpses floated alongside the living. It was a sorrowful sight. Those dragged along the river would likely be swept out to the ocean (*mahā-samudda*), where they would circle for an eternity. They would surely die in the great ocean of worldly conventions (*mahā-sammuti*). I was unable to tell from where the river of humans started, as it extended far beyond the limits of my vision.

Once my mind (*citta*) withdrew from the meditative state, I reviewed what I had seen and used wisdom (*paññā*) to interpret the vision. The meaning of the metaphor became very clear to me, and I understood and realized the truth about humans. The tumultuous river represented desire (*tañhā*). The bamboo pole bridge represented the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-magga*). The massive human raft drifting along the river represented human desires. Once born into

this world, there are only a few humans who do not get pulled along by the tides of desire. The majority of people will be dragged under by sensual desires (*kāma-guṇa*). After death, only those who have cultivated ample merit (*puñña*) will enjoy a brief respite in a heavenly realm (*sagga*). Once they have exhausted their good merit, they will return to the human world for another rebirth and their minds will continue to follow the path of desire. The more the mind is slave to lust (*rāga*) and desires (*tañhā*), the deeper the worldly currents will drag you under. Who knows when you will be able to break free from them? So long as your mind is still pleased with the world, you will remain unaware of how much longer you will be dragged along by worldly currents. You will have no clue where they end. While the currents of desire and defilements still course through your mind, you will never escape the interminable worldly currents.

I used wisdom to teach my mind, “*Why is my mind so enraptured with sensual pleasures (*kāma-guṇa*)? Happiness cannot be found in this world. The notion that sensual pleasures provide happiness is a false one. Thus, ‘Piyato jāyate soko,’ affection begets sorrow. Suffering is the inevitable product of love, is it not? Suffering stems from love. Suffering stems from desire.*

“*Desire (*tañhā*) is the taproot of the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*). The Three Realms—the Sensual Realm, (*kāma-bhava*), the Fine-Material Realm (*rūpa-bhava*), and the Immaterial Realm (*arūpa-bhava*)—are all ruled by desire. Thus, ‘Natthi tañhāsamā nadī,’ there is no river like craving. Why can’t the mind see the suffering (*dukkha*), harmful consequences (*dosa*), and dangers (*bhaya*) that exist in this world? We cannot take worldly belongings and make them our own. Our clinging and attachments are the causes and conditions that produce suffering. True happiness cannot be found in this world.”*

This nimitta was a great Dhamma metaphor for my wisdom. It enabled me to understand how the world operates. Without wisdom, I never would have been able to interpret this vision. Consequently, the vision would have been worthless. Thus, you must cultivate your own wisdom so that you can use your nimittas to teach yourself. If you lack the wisdom required to train your mind to improve, your mind will essentially be meaningless. Thus far, you have allowed defilements (*kilesa*) and desires (*tanhā*) to drag your mind downward. Your thoughts and views heavily lean toward defilements and desires, and you have unknowingly become accustomed to thinking in a base and immoral manner. Are you going to continue to allow these wrong views to direct your life? Why don't you train your wisdom so that you can employ it in teaching yourself? If you point out the truth about reality to yourself often, your mind will gradually become more well-informed about the truth. The truth exists in all of the conditioned things (*sabbe-saṅkhāra*) in this world. You do not need to compel anything to be a certain way. This is how it is supposed to be.

“*Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*,” all conditioned things (*saṅkhāra*) are impermanent. All conditioned things constantly experience change and uncertainty. Whether they are internal *saṅkhāras* or external *saṅkhāras*, naturally arising *saṅkhāras* or *saṅkhāras* we have created, no *saṅkhāras* are constant; they are all *saṅkhāras* that change throughout their lifespans. If we have the wisdom to understand and realize according to these truths, the suffering within our minds will lessen. Once aware of the truth of all conditioned things, we say the mind understands and realizes according to the truth.

Thus, build up your own wisdom in order to employ it in fixing your mind's wrong views. If your wisdom lacks intelligence, you will be unable to know and see according to the truth of reality. Even if a

teacher explains the truth to you, apprehension and doubt will still arise within your mind. You will be too afraid to be decisive because you are unsure about whether something is wrong or right. Though reserved in speech, Luang Pu Boowa would suggest Dhamma models (*upāya*) and techniques for the monks and novices (*sāmañeras*) to work out on their own. Those with strong wisdom would be able to decipher the meaning, while those with weak wisdom would remain clueless.

“*Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā*,” all conditioned things (*saṅkhāra*) are suffering. If you cling to conditioned things, this can cause suffering. We desire for conditioned things to remain under our power. Because they are not under our power, suffering arises. This natural condition of suffering (*sabhāva-dukkha*) has been a part of us since birth. Once born, we are greeted by miscellaneous suffering (*pakiṇṇaka-dukkha*)—various transient suffering that comes and goes (*cāra-dukkha*)—that piles on until we are distressed and always scrambling to dodge and evade it. We constantly attempt to conceal or cover up the truth. As a result, our minds have become accustomed to the distress and endure it. We endure the suffering from the day we are born until the day we die. We don’t have a solution. If you recognize the suffering and recognize the cause of the suffering, that suffering won’t trouble you much. Only, you must be aware of the suffering and aware of the cause of suffering.

“*Sabbe dhamma anattā*,” all things—conditioned or unconditioned—are not-self. Anattā is the cessation of existence of the attā state. Absent the construct (*sammuti*) of self (*attā*), where would not-self (*anattā*) come from? Thus, in order to know not-self (*anattā*), you must know self (*attā*). This is because self is a solid identity or form (*rūpa*) that can be supposed (*sammuti*) to be an

animal or a person. There are two types of self (*attā*): 1. self in physical phenomena (*rūpa*), and 2. self in mental phenomena (*nāma*). Both types of self (*attā*) must be understood through wisdom-knowledge (*paññā-ñāṇa*), meaning seeing and then knowing (*dassana-ñāṇa*) and knowing and then seeing (*ñāṇa-dassana*). If you merely see but do not know or if you merely know but do not see, then you won't be able to nullify that state of self (*attā*) into a state of not-self (*anattā*). This is because you are lacking in *ñāṇa-dassana*. Self (*attā*) in physical phenomena denotes the four elements (*catu-dhātu*) of earth, water, wind, and fire that combine to form a physical identity (*rūpa*). Thus, you must use wisdom to break down physical form and clearly recognize and understand the role each of the four elements play in it. As for self (*attā*) in mental phenomena (*nāma*), this relates to feeling (*vedanā*), memory (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), which must also be understood and realized through wisdom.



## **Luang Pu Boowa Instructs Me to Triumph Over Suffering**

One day, Luang Pu Boowa asked me, “Thoon, have you ever meditated and triumphed over suffering?”

I responded, “With permission, sir. I have not.”

Luang Pu Boowa then said, “Then, tonight you shall triumph over suffering. Don’t let the woman put you to shame.”

I asked Luang Pu, “With permission, sir. Who is the woman who has triumphed over suffering?”

Luang Pu answered, “Mae Saibua. She has incredible fortitude.”

That day, I asked Mae Saibua how to triumph over suffering. She recounted her experience, scene by scene. “Kru Ba, triumphing over suffering is terribly difficult. You must be someone who possesses a high degree of fortitude and forbearance (khanti). The first time Luang Pu told me to triumph over suffering, I almost didn’t make it. Alas, I managed to make it out through tears. I thought my life would come to its end. I have given birth to six children and the suffering was intense each and every time. But even then, I shed no tears. But when I sat in mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*) in order to triumph over suffering that first time, the suffering was extreme. The pain of six

childbirths put together doesn't hold a candle to it. The suffering entailed in giving birth didn't bring me to tears, but triumphing over suffering brought on a flood of tears.

"I remained sitting from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. the following day, all without moving about. Whatever position you assume, remain in that position. You don't have to calm your mind or enter meditative absorptions (*jhāna*). Just sit there, fresh and raw. If you employ meditative tranquility or meditative absorptions, it doesn't count as triumphing over suffering. Those are merely tactics to hide from the suffering. Once you triumph over suffering the first time, you will get a boost of self-confidence and motivation. Subsequent attempts to triumph over suffering will be easier because you will already have confidence in yourself as a basis."

After hearing Mae Saibua relate her experience triumphing over suffering, I thought, "*She's a woman, yet she is this fearless and daring. I am a man and I am a forest tradition (kammaṭṭhāna) monk. There is no way I will let a woman best me. I must triumph over suffering tonight. Whatever happens, I will give it my all. I am a kammaṭṭhāna monk. To lose to a kammaṭṭhāna woman just won't do. Tonight, I will prove my worth.*"

That afternoon, I started walking meditation (*caṅkama*) early. When it came time, I climbed into my monk hut (*kutī*) in order to arrange my seat. Once I finished evening chanting, I made an asseveration of truth (*sacca-adhiṭṭhāna*), "*Tonight, I will sit in meditation in one single posture until the sun rises tomorrow. Whatever happens—even if I am to die tonight—I am ready to accept the outcome.*" Then I got into position. I focused on being mindful (*sati*). I could only practice steadfastly focused concentration, as there was no

tranquility or peace. It may have been due to my heightened determination that I was unable to calm my mind. Around 9 p.m., the pain in both of my legs steadily began to be more pronounced. At 10 p.m., the pain intensified and climaxed, but I could only grit my teeth and ride it out.

While experiencing pain, I established awareness (*sati*) of the pain by keeping my attention fixed on it. It seemed like the more I focused on the pain, the more it intensified. I nearly couldn't remain sitting any longer. But I recalled Luang Pu Boowa's teachings. *"Hadn't I made a promise to Luang Pu? If I give up now, I'll always give up. I'll never have a winner's heart. When Luang Pu asks me whether or not I've triumphed over suffering, how can I reply that I haven't? He'll think that I am a fake kammaṭṭhāna monk, a white-eyed, cowardly kammaṭṭhāna monk. How could I ever show my face around him? He'd call me a dumb kammaṭṭhāna monk, one who lacks fortitude, one who lacks decisiveness and bravery, one who lacks seriousness. I'd forfeit any faith Luang Pu had in me. He had believed that in the future, I would be a vehicle for disseminating the Dhamma. That's why he directed me to intensify my practice of mental cultivation and triumph over suffering. Once I triumph over suffering the first time, the subsequent times will be easier. I will be strong for Buddhism. I will be a refuge for the community. See here, Thoon. Luang Pu has put his faith in you. Do not let him down. He has probably foreseen that you will be one steadfast in the Dhamma and the monastic discipline (vinaya). Don't be worthless and incapable. Before you can become a good leader for this community, you must survive every form of practice."*

*"Luang Pu had spoken of his own Dhamma practice to us on many occasions. Each time, he nearly didn't make it out alive. That's why*

*he taught us the methods (upāya) he used. I have to be strong like Luang Pu. If I give up now, no matter where I am, I will always know that I am a loser of a kammaṭṭhāna monk. Am I going to allow defilements (kilesa) and desires (taṇhā) to put me to shame? I have already made an asseveration of truth (sacca-adhiṭṭhāna). If I give up now, how can I ever trust in myself? I'll be a lousy failure. I'll continue to cheat myself and mistrust myself until my final breath. There's no turning back now. Whatever is to happen will happen. If my leg hurts, then let it hurt. If my leg feels like it'll tear into pieces, then let it tear. My mind will simply be conscious and aware of it." Once I had deliberated with wisdom, my mind was injected with courage, and the pain began to gradually subside. The pain was replaced with numbness. I focused on continuing to sit in that state. Though the pain didn't disappear, it was tolerable. From 10 p.m. on, other symptoms arose, namely, burning in my legs.*

The fire that engulfed my legs continued to burn hotter and hotter. The longer I sat, the more intensely my legs burned. The heat in my legs was like I was sitting in a heap of red-hot coals. It felt like both of my legs were constantly enveloped in flames and being charred black. Once the scorching sensation reached its peak, I thought, "Am I going to be able to continue sitting like this?" Then, I recalled the pain that I had already suffered through. "I had overcome that pain. If the burning sensation returns, I'll just have to endure it and fight through it with everything I have. The asseveration of truth (sacca-adhiṭṭhāna) I have made must be a man's vow, a kammaṭṭhāna monk's vow. Whatever determination has been made, I must be steadfast and resolute in that determination. I must not cheat myself. Even if flames set my body ablaze and I am reduced to a pile of ashes, I will not get up from this

*seat, no matter what. If this burning is to kill me, then so be it.*" I had to constantly use wisdom to teach myself that, "*This burning is undoubtedly a plot by defilements and desires. Defilements has employed this tactic to combat me. It is using heat to disturb and annoy me. I must resist.*

*"All that has passed just now has been the work of defilements and desires using suffering and pain to impede my success, and I fought through it with forbearance. Now, it is using this burning method in order to get me to withdraw from my practice. I recognize the handiwork of defilements, standing in the way of my release from rebirth (vatṭa-saṃsāra) and solely compelling me to continue to float along the stream of the world. Defilements and desires have led me to be reborn in various places without end. Previously, my mind had lacked mindful wisdom (sati-paññā) and comprehensive intelligence, and that led me to becoming a slave to defilements and desires. But now, my mind has mindfulness and wisdom to teach it. My mind now sees and understands according to the truth of reality, that everything arises and decays according to natural causes. Defilements and desires are trying to use burning to trick me into renegeing on my vow, but I will no longer fall for their ploys, because my mind has already received clear communications from wisdom. I have a comprehensive understanding of causality, and a comprehensive understanding of the clever maneuvers employed by defilements and desires. From now on, I will be immune from their tricks. The Buddha and other holy individuals (ariya-puggala) have already attained release. They all possessed bravery and forbearance. As someone walking in their footsteps, I must also be one who possesses bravery and forbearance."*

It was around midnight then. The extreme burning sensation began to gradually diminish. Eventually, all the burning disappeared. It felt

like a return to normal. I didn't expect anything else to happen, but didn't take anything for granted. I continued to teach myself with wisdom.

Then, around 2 a.m. something did happen. A cold sensation began to overtake my entire body. The intensity of the coldness kept increasing until it peaked, and it was as if my entire body froze into a huge ice cube. The pain and agony caused by that coldness made me tremble and made it difficult to breathe. At that moment, I felt like I was nearing my last breath. I used wisdom to console myself that, *"The first time the pain in your leg was unbearable, but you made it through with forbearance. Then, you were hot all over, like you were sitting in the middle of a fire, and you made it through that with forbearance as well. And now that this cold sensation is taking over, you must also fight to make it through this with extreme forbearance."* I kept using wisdom to console myself, to prop up my bravery. *"When the pain and heat took over, I managed to survive them. Now that this coldness is taking over, why wouldn't I be able to survive it?"*

As I was sitting there trembling all over, I consoled myself, *"Look here, Thoon. You are in a freezing hell (naraka). Pain was a hell that you already survived. Burning was another hell that you also already survived. Right now, you are in the midst of a freezing hell. It is as cold as it can get. In this lifetime you have already gone through these hells. Once you die, you will get to go to a real hell, one that is hundreds of times more extreme than these hells. This mere coldness is nothing. It isn't even one one-hundredth of a real hell realm."*

*"So long as you take pleasure from sensual pleasures (kāma-guṇa), you will constantly encounter bodily suffering and mental suffering. So, how is it that you are scared of suffering? This suffering is all*

*a result of those sensual pleasures. Little do you know, sensual pleasures are like sugar-coated poison. Once the sugar melts away, the effects of the poison will kick in, and you will be displeased with those effects. This is the kammic retribution that you must accept. It all results from the belief in self (attā)—a firm attachment to this body being yours. Wherever you are, there will be suffering. But you must continue to tolerate it, because you have already been born.” Thus, I told myself, “Look here, Thoon. Just let this lifetime’s suffering be the final one. You must constantly use wisdom as a means to teach yourself to be afraid of rebirth (bhava-jāti) and to be sick of all the conditioned things (sabbe-saṅkhāra) that lead to rebirth into a lifetime of suffering. Do not allow defilements to lead you into being enamored with sensual pleasures anymore.”*

At that moment, as I was experiencing the freezing sensation, I constantly had to use wisdom to teach myself. Around 3 a.m., the coldness started to gradually subside. Eventually, it completely dissipated. Thus far, I had claimed victory over three phases. In that moment, I was overcome with a sense of bravery. Whatever else would happen, I was completely ready to fight through it. Even if it would take my life, I was ready to make that sacrifice. This is the Dhamma metaphor (upāya) that arose that night.

At that moment, the mind (citta) needed to take a meditative break. So, I focused the citta on the meditative phrase (parikamma), “Buddho” along with in-out breathing mindfulness (ānāpāna-sati). The citta gradually began to calm and I let go of the meditative phrase. I only remained mindful of in-out breathing and focused consciousness (poo roo). Once the in-out breathing mindfulness coupled with focus consciousness became refined, I let go of the in-out breathing to concentrate solely on focused consciousness. The citta was neither



in a state of happiness nor suffering. It merely existed in a state of emptiness, of independence. It was merely conscious of being conscious and did not waver at all. The citta remained in this stable state until sunrise the following morning.

At that moment, I experienced a vision (nimitta) of Luang Pu Khao standing behind my right side, holding a large umbrella over me. He told me, "My son, focus and be strong. Don't be discouraged. You must employ the utmost fortitude in your efforts. You must use mindful wisdom to contemplate so that you constantly know and see the truth. No one can help you. You are the only one who can help yourself. Hereafter, you will be able to depend on yourself forever and always." At that point, the citta withdrew from the meditative state. The sun had just risen. Upon the citta's release from meditation, my mind felt open and expansive. My mind felt extremely satiated. My mind was constantly in a state of unwavering focus, and it remained that way even apart from meditation.

When it was time to go on alms rounds (*piṇḍapāṭa*), partake in a meal, or do other duties, my mind was always in a state of unwavering focus. Later that evening, I went to bathe Luang Pu, as usual. When that was done, I went up to his *kuṭī* to listen to a sermon. Luang Pu gave us a short admonition, "All of you, focus on practicing mental cultivation (*bhāvanā-paṭipatti*). Don't concern yourselves with sleeping so much. Too much sleep, too much talking, and too much fooling around are all detrimental." Thereafter, the other monks and *sāmaneras* bowed in respect and left the *kuṭī*. I was still doing other tasks there. Once everyone else had cleared out, Luang Pu asked, "Thoon, have you triumphed over suffering yet?"

I told him, "With permission, sir. I have triumphed over suffering."

He asked, “When did you triumph over suffering?”

“With permission, sir. I triumphed over suffering last night,” I replied.

Luang Pu proceeded to ask me for details about my ordeal, and I recounted to him the pain, the burning sensation, and the freezing sensation. Upon hearing my report, he told me “From here on out, you must always triumph over suffering. One who is to triumph over suffering must be brave, strong, and must not fear death. You must always work hard and practice diligently. Don’t let the citta be fruitless, or apathetic like the fire grate at the bottom of a charcoal burner. Use wisdom to teach the mind often so that it is gradually able to know and see the truth.”

The following day, after sweeping the temple courtyard, we came together to partake in hot drinks, as was customary. Venerable Ācariya Singtong announced, “Tomorrow, after our meal, whoever wants to go to listen to Luang Pu Khao give a sermon at Wat Tham Klong Phen may go. But you’ll have to walk—the journey is around fifteen kilometers.” I was delighted to hear that I would get to listen to Luang Pu Khao give a sermon. I had thought to myself for many days now that I wanted to hear a sermon by Luang Pu Khao. I had never seen him before, in this lifetime. The next day, after finishing our meal, we set out.

Once we arrived, Venerable Ācariya Singtong brought our group to bow and pay respects to Luang Pu Khao. Luang Pu Khao benevolently (mettā) explained the Dhamma to us. The key points I remembered were, “If practitioners put death after them, their practice (paṭipatti) will be free of obstacles; their mental cultivation (bhāvanā) will only progress and flourish. If practitioners put death before them, their

mental cultivation will only shrink; you will lack the courage to persevere through suffering (dukkha-vedanā) when dying is considered a hindrance. You won't have the courage to strive with everything you have. When you experience slight physical discomfort from sitting meditation, you are afraid of dying. After doing walking meditation (caṅkama) for a few hours, you are afraid of dying—and so you stop. When you cut sleep hours or reduce food intake, you can't cope with a bit of hunger. You lack forbearance. If you are like this, you will be utterly unable to truly understand and truly realize the Dhamma.

"Thus, don't be afraid of death. If you are striving and are going to die, then die. Why would you be afraid? Practitioners who fear death are worthless. You must be strong and brave. You must promise yourself that, 'If I don't die, then let defilements (kilesa) die. If defilements don't die, then let me die.' This is a practitioner who is resolute, brave, and serious. If you practice in this way often, you will definitely understand and realize the ultimate truth (sacca-dhamma). Thus, don't cheat yourself. Practice being one who is earnest, and one day you will be able to understand and realize the truth."

Once Luang Pu was done with the sermon, we bowed in respect and took our leave. We returned to Wat Pa Nong Saeng. During this rains retreat, Venerable Ācariya Singtong took monks and sāmaneras to listen to Luang Pu Khao give sermons at Wat Tham Klong Phen on two occasions. Each time, I learned many Dhamma metaphors (upāya) from Luang Pu Khao. After the rains retreat ended and the Kathina<sup>30</sup> ceremonies concluded, I respectfully took my leave of Luang Pu Boowa and ventured out to various quiet and secluded locations in forests and caves.

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<sup>30</sup> The annual robe-presentation ceremony in the month following the end of the rains retreat.



## The Four Iddhipāda Make an Impression

From there, I travelled to a number of places. I stopped to practice mental cultivation (bhāvanā) at Hua Koh Yod Thon, Si Chiang Mai district, Nong Khai province. After cleaning up the pavilion one day, I headed back to my monk hut (kuṭī). I noticed a group of ants working together to create a hole to live in. They were transporting dirt from underground and placing it around the hole's mouth. I sat there thinking, *"These ants are so hardworking and diligent. Even tiny ants know how to create a home for themselves. Every ant works together cooperatively and industriously. There is no taking advantage of others. Every ant works hard to fulfill its duty and does not rest at all. Likewise, if I work hard and strive diligently like these ants, and train my mindfulness (sati) and wisdom (paññā) to frequently understand and realize according to the truth, my mind will have a firm refuge in the Dhamma that is a vihāra-dhamma,<sup>31</sup> or the mind's residence. With Dhamma as a refuge, Dhamma practice will continually make strides and prosper. The mind's foundation will become firm. From here on out, I must strive harder and work harder. The ants will serve as a model. However diligently the ants apply themselves, so must I apply myself to my practice."*

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<sup>31</sup> The vihāra-dhamma is where the mind frequently resides or dwells. The mind that is frequently angry or the mind that dwells in mental fabrications makes its home in a perilous and unreliable vihāra-dhamma. The mind that frequently contemplates the Dhamma or the fully enlightened mind that fully dwells in the Dhamma makes its home in the truth of reality; its vihāra-dhamma is a refuge.

As I was contemplating on the ants as a model for contemplation, knowledge clearly arose in my mind, “*Remain steadfastly focused in the Four Bases of Mental Power (iddhipāda).*” What comprised the Four Iddhipāda? How odd—I had learned it from manuals, was well-versed on it, and had taught others this concept before. Yet, now I could not recollect what it was or what its significance was.

In the pavilion, there were bookcases filled with navakovāda<sup>32</sup> books. So, I walked up to the main hall to consult them. But then the thought arose, “*What kind of forest tradition (kammaṭṭhāna) monk makes decisions based on books?*” Upon thinking this, I felt ashamed. Why was I rushing to read a manual? This knowledge should result from practice. So, I have to practice to gain knowledge of the Four Iddhipāda. I shouldn’t worry over not being able to remember it. There are other Dhamma topics I can contemplate in the meantime. However, the unsettling feeling persisted. I kept trying to recollect the Four Iddhipāda, but couldn’t manage to. Even while doing other tasks, like sweeping the temple courtyard, I still couldn’t find an answer.

Many days passed. One evening, I attempted to retrieve the Four Iddhipāda from memory during both sitting meditation and walking meditation (caṅkama), but that night’s efforts resulted in failure. I finally threw in the towel and decided that if I can’t find it, then forget trying to find it. I won’t even look it up in the manuals. Some day in the future, the knowledge will resurface on its own. Once I made the decision, I made myself forget about the Four Iddhipāda. After practicing mental cultivation (bhāvanā-paṭipatti) for seven days, as I was doing caṅkama, the knowledge arose that the Four Iddhipāda were: chanda, viriya, citta, and vimarśā. In that blink of an eye, their

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<sup>32</sup> A basic set of doctrines and disciplines to be learned by new monks.

names and meanings arose all together. The Four Iddhipāda is a means for serious practice.

If someone encounters a problem like this and can't remember something, they'd likely make a beeline to a book and read up on it or they'd ask a teacher to reveal the answer. This way, the teacher is at the helm of the journey to wrap up their questions on the Dhamma topic. Though the questions will have been eliminated in terms of theoretical knowledge (pariyatti), they will still remain in terms of actual practice (paṭipatti).



## Fun Playing with Kong Koi Ghosts

There were many kong koi ghosts where I was but I had never seen one for myself. I had only heard elders and old folks talking about how if you go into a forest where kong koi ghosts reside, you have to be extra careful. If you violate the forest by stealing wood or by casting enchantments, kong koi ghosts are sure to make a visit. When you fall asleep, they will spook you through sleep paralysis, and then dig in and gobble up all of your intestines. You will die that very night.

I wanted to see if kong koi ghosts would really be able to eat me. That night, I built a fire in order to provide relief from the cold. I did walking meditation (*cāṇkama*) and settled down to practice mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). At that time, I could hear the shrill calls of an approaching kong koi ghost. The closer it got, the more chilling the shrieks became, just like a strong enchantment. I thought, "*The kong koi ghost is really going to get me tonight!*" I focused my mind (*citta*) on meditation (*samādhi*), and once the citta was fully calm, I steered it to get a good look at the kong koi ghost. I could clearly see that it was as big as a monkey. Its eyes were red and alit with flames of anger as if from some past grievance. It ran many laps around my umbrella tent (*klot*) and stared at me. It extended its arm and tried to grab my leg. I focused the citta's power to shoot fire at the kong koi ghost's hand. It shrieked from the burn and leapt two meters



away from me. It tried to come in again, so I had to focus all my power on shooting a stream of fire at the kong koi ghost. Once the flames made contact, the ghost howled and ran away. It hung from a bamboo tree and swung itself toward me. The first and second swings, it didn't do anything. But its third swing came with great momentum as it let go of the bamboo tree. It had intended to bite my neck, but I had already focused the citta in preparation. When the kong koi ghost leapt at me, I focused the citta on repelling it. The kong koi ghost became scared, screamed eerily, and ran off. The citta withdrew from the meditative state at that moment. I grabbed my flashlight and got up to take a look. I didn't see anything. From then on, the kong koi ghost never came to scream in that area again.

One night, I heard the kong koi ghost shrieking from a distance and knew it was headed my way, so I went out to meet it. The screams neared where I was and then ceased. I shined my flashlight but didn't see anything. The hunters told me that kong koi ghosts look like monkeys, but can disappear. And no matter how you try to kill them, they won't die. One day, a hunter went to hunt wild oxen in the forest. Before heading back, he saw a large monkey. Seeing it as a meal, he shot at it and it fell to the ground. He tied its arms and legs together with rope and fastened it to a carrying stick propped on his shoulder. Before they cleared the large forest, the monkey unfastened its arms and used its hands to hit the hunter's butt, but the hunter paid it no mind. The hitting became more aggressive, which the hunter found odd. He glanced back at the monkey and found that it wasn't a monkey at all, but a kong koi ghost! The hunter cried out in horror and tossed the monkey away. The rope binding its arms and legs was utterly meaningless. The hunter saw the ghost's red eyes, bared fangs, and

attack stance, and ran for his life. He was terrified of the kong koi ghost.

The old folks said that if the kong koi ghost is going to eat a human, you will hear it call out, “kak!” Normally, you’ll hear it screech, “kong koi, kong koi” in a chilly voice. But if you hear “kak” at the end—like “kong koi, kong koi, kak!”—it’s surely going to eat someone. If you hear “kak” at the end, don’t you dare sleep. Just be sure to grab a cloth and jam it into your butt!



## Fourth Vassa, 1964

I had the opportunity to spend the rains retreat (vassa) at Wat Aranyabanphot with Luang Pu Rian Varalābho. During this vassa, my mental cultivation practice (*bhāvanā-patipatti*) advanced by leaps and bounds because I had a Dhamma method (*upāya*) upon which to base it. Namely, the Four Iddhipāda, or Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Chanda means contentment, zeal, or will to do. It's something you can readily observe in yourself. When you contemplate a particular Dhamma topic, how much contentment do you derive from it? If chanda, or degree of contentment, is low, then you must find a way to encourage yourself. This is because this contentment lays the foundation for diligent effort. It strengthens your mind and makes you take Dhamma practice more seriously. You will constantly strive to exert effort and will be determined to apply this effort continuously.

Chanda can still be a double-edged sword. If you know how to use it, then it will be beneficial. If you don't know how to use it, then it can be detrimental. For instance, if contentment (chanda) occurs in a fool (*bāla*), then they will use this contentment to act in a way that violates moral conduct (*sīla*) and righteousness (*dhamma*): to kill; steal; commit adultery; use dishonest, sarcastic, crude, vulgar,

or senseless speech; and partake in intoxicants. This is using contentment (chanda) in the wrong way. These are behaviors characteristic of fools. If the wise apply chanda, it will be in a beneficial manner—benefiting themselves and benefiting others. Thus, if one is to apply chanda, one must be equipped with strong mindfulness (sati), wisdom (paññā), and rationality; be able to discern what is proper and what is improper; be one who is ashamed of evil actions (pāpa) and unwholesome behavior (akusala); and be one who possesses views that are fair and consistent with good conduct (sucarita).

Contentment (chanda) must be aligned with right view (sammā-ditṭhi), in order to be right and just (dhamma) and lead to happiness and prosperity. Whether in a worldly or Dhamma sense, it is bound to lead down a positive path. Whenever chanda accompanies wrong view (micchā-ditṭhi), it will result in suffering (dukkha), harmful consequences (dosa), and future perils (bhaya) for yourself, as well as generate trouble for others. If chanda is added to desire, that desire isn't necessarily entirely good or entirely bad. Desires for good exist. Such as, the desire to chant, the desire to uphold the precepts (sīla), the desire to practice mental cultivation (bhāvanā-paṭipatti), or many other wholesome desires. These desires belong to those who have morality (sīla) and righteousness (dhamma) ingrained in their minds. Now, if the desires come from those of unwholesome morality (sīla) and unwholesome righteousness (dhamma), contentment (chanda) will follow an evil and unwholesome course. These desires that lead you lower are the evil desires that are characteristic of fools (bāla). Therefore, you must be one with thorough wisdom who knows what is proper and what is not proper. One with good wisdom will know how to discern this.

Viriya is effort, diligence, or exertion. The same principle applies—the efforts of the wise take one path, while the efforts of the fool take another. Effort being right or wrong hinges on view. With right views, effort will also be right. With wrong views, effort will also be wrong. Sammā-vāyāma is right effort—effort aligned with morality and righteousness, and effort in cultivating moral goodness (kusala) in a manner consistent with good conduct that the wise find praiseworthy. Effort resulting from wrong view (micchā-ditṭhi) is called wrong effort (micchā-vāyāma)—effort in action that is wrong, effort in speech that is wrong, and effort in thought that is wrong. It is effort that is characteristic of fools and the evil. It is effort that is selfish—aiming for your own desires to be personally satisfied without regard or concern for others. It is effort that is unjust to others.

Thus, effort (viriya) is connected to contentment (chanda). If there is contentment in a right way, then effort will also be right. If there is contentment in a wrong way, then effort will also be wrong. Therefore, wisdom must be trained to be thorough enough to know whether your efforts are in a wrong way or a right way. Wisdom must be comprehensive and thorough, and must choose only right effort. With effort, but lacking wisdom as the thorough discerning, efforts will unknowingly be wrong. When there is wisdom to support effort, it will lead to thriving and prosperity.

Citta is concentration, attention, or intentness to do what is right and in accordance with morality and righteousness. If there is concentration in a way counter to morality and counter to righteousness, evil and unwholesomeness will be cultivated. Thus, concentration can also be a double-edged sword. A practitioner must choose to apply concentration in the right way. If concentration is directed by

the yearnings of defilements (kilesa) and desires (tanhā), the mind may get dragged down. You must know your own mind. Use wisdom to contemplate rationally. If you are concentrating in a manner that is not wholesome, then quickly pull back. If you are concentrating in a manner that is wholesome, then be even more content (chanda) in that venture and carry on exerting effort in that wholesome venture continuously. You must know how to discern proper concentration. Don't merely think that it is pleasing, so it is sufficient. Being pleased can lead you to break with morality and break with righteousness. You must apply reason and causality in making decisions. Use wisdom to contemplate in order to understand and see how a certain kind of concentration is wrong or how a certain kind of concentration is right. In understanding what constitutes right or wrong concentration, you will be able to choose the right kind of concentration.

Vimamsā is constant reflection and contemplation of what is proper and what is not proper. For instance, contentment (chanda) requires wisdom in reflecting on whether that contentment is wrong or right. Through vimamsā, you will understand and realize whether effort (viriya) is being exerted in a course that is wrong or right, and how it is wrong or right. Through reflection, you will discern the course of concentration (citta), and understand and realize how that concentration is good or evil. As a result, you will be able to select the course of reflection (vimamsā) in accordance with morality and righteousness. If reflection (vimamsā) follows the course of mental fabrications (sañkhāra), mental fabrications according to worldly constructs (sammuti) will unwittingly arise.

Reflection is wisdom (paññā). Another concept is yonisomanasikāra, or contemplating causality until comprehensive clarity is reached and the truth is profoundly understood and truly

realized. There may be the question of how comprehensive clarity is determined. It is determined by the clearing of doubts about something. If those doubts have not cleared, then comprehensive clarity has not been reached in the mind. Therefore, reflection is examining wrong and right. How do wrong and right differ? Wisdom must be used to reflect on this frequently. In layman's terms, it is diligent thinking. If there is diligence in thinking and contemplating on something, the understanding of it will become clearer.

Reflection refers to the expanding or spreading out for the sake of developing a clearer understanding. This is because universal truths (*sacca-dhamma*) are stuck together in clumps, or in other words, *ghana*—meaning solid or compact—like a clump of physical phenomena (*rūpa-dhamma*) or a clump of mental phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*). How is each clump subject to *aniccam*, or change? How does the clump of *dukkham* exist in a manner that is difficult to bear? What is a clump of *anattā*—that which ceases to exist—like? If you pull them apart, you will understand and realize those things more clearly.

Thus, *vimamsā* is basically wisdom (*paññā*). It is purposefully thinking and reflecting on something in a constant manner. Every type of task, whether worldly or Dhamma-related, employs reflection as a basis for diagnosis, analysis, and deliberation in order to know the cause and contributing factors inherent in something. Without reflection, there will be unintended wrong action and wrong speech. Damage will result and unwanted problems will arise. So, reflecting before doing and reflecting before speaking will nearly eliminate damages.

I regarded that vassa as one in which I applied wisdom in contemplating the Four Bases of Mental Power (*iddhipāda*) in a way

that harmonized the concepts. The Four Iddhipāda are interrelated and connected, and are important guidelines that fit well with my character. The Four Iddhipāda are part of the Thirty-seven Factors for Enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiya-dhamma*), which are divided into the following seven groupings: the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), the Four Right Exertions (*sammāppadhbhāna*), the Four Bases of Mental Power (*iddhipāda*), the Five Spiritual Faculties (*indriya*), the Five Strengths (*bala*), the Seven Factors of Awakening (*bojjhaṅga*), and the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-magga*). Every element and every grouping are important Dhamma in and of themselves. They are Dhamma that support each other. If someone's character already corresponds to one of these Dhamma groupings, they will be able to tie in to all the others. As with links on the same chain, once any one link has been grasped, the other links all come along with it.

Of the thirty-seven elements under the seven Bodhipakkhiya-dhamma groupings, there is one chief element of Dhamma. That is, *sammā-diṭṭhi*, or right view. That is why wisdom (*paññā*) of this right view is of paramount importance. The Buddha stated, "Bhikkhus, just as the footprint of all legged animals is encompassed by the footprint of the elephant, all Dhamma that will lead one to the path and fruit of enlightenment (*magga-phala-nibbāna*) are encompassed by right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*)."<sup>1</sup> Thus, right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) is the basis and starting point for Dhamma practice. If you begin with *sammā-diṭṭhi*, wisdom of right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) will form the bedrock of your practice. In other words, right view will act as chief to all other Dhamma groupings.

Sammā-saṅkappa is right thought or contemplation corresponding to what is right and righteous. Those right thoughts must stem from

right view. Sammā-vācā, or right speech, stems from wisdom of right view. Sammā-kammanta, or right action, stems from wisdom of right view. Samma-ājīva, or right livelihood, stems from wisdom of right view. Sammā-vāyāma, or right effort, stems from wisdom of right view. Sammā-sati, or right mindfulness, stems from wisdom of right view. Sammā-samādhi, or right concentration, stems from wisdom of right view. They all stem from wisdom of right view. Hence, sammā-diṭṭhi, or wisdom of right view, is a very important foundation and starting point. Having already laid a foundation of right views that is straight-aligned, the practice of other groupings of Dhamma will also be straight-aligned.

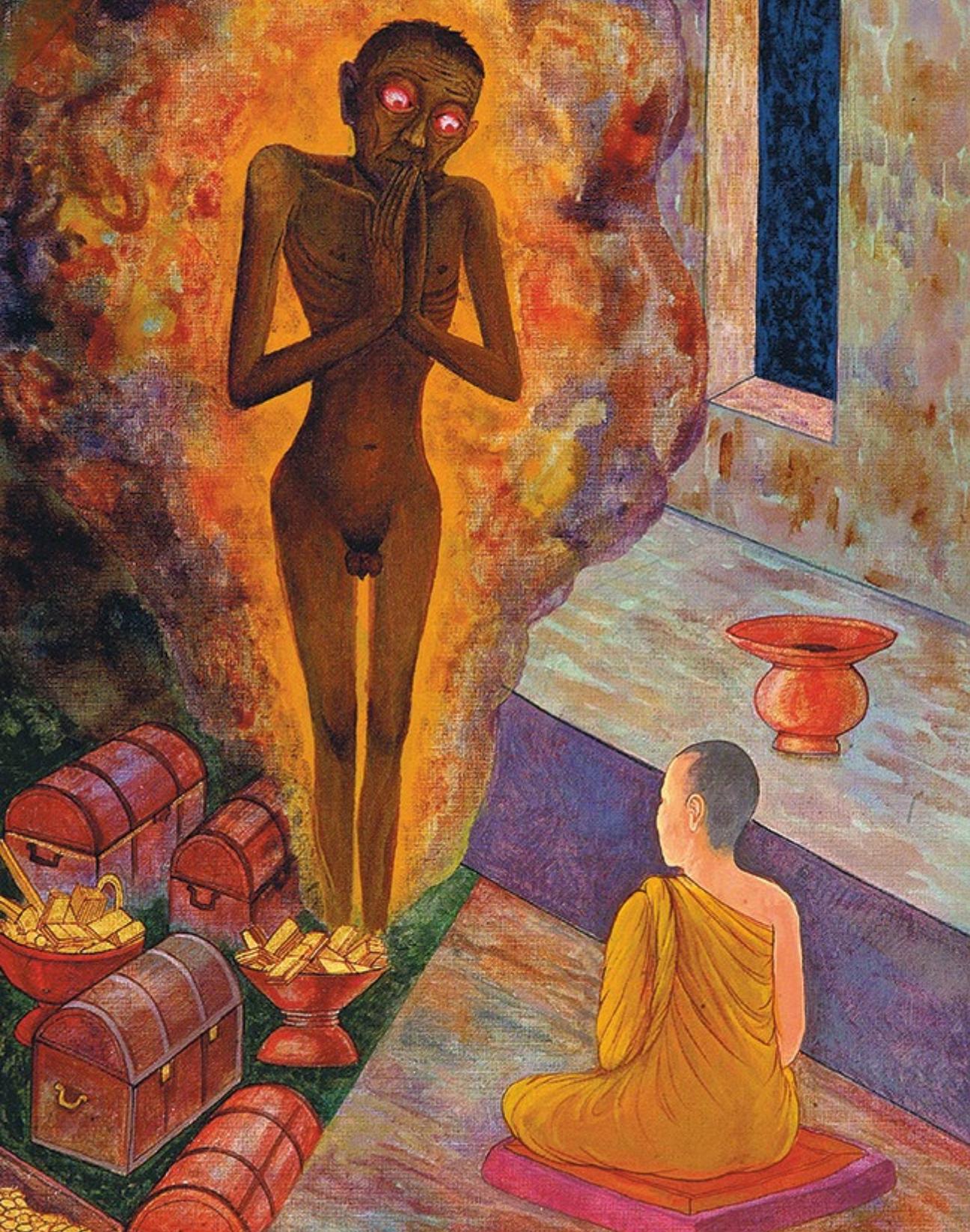
Accordingly, my practice made great leaps and bounds during that vassa. I acquired a lot of knowledge and food for thought from Luang Pu Rian, as he would often teach the Dhamma. He graced monks, novices, and laypeople alike with equal benevolence (mettā). You could say he was someone who possessed incredible mettā and spread that mettā all around. In spite of his advanced age, Luang Pu Rian would prop himself up and teach Dhamma on a regular basis. He was a great elder (mahā-thera) who notably disseminated the Buddhist religion during this era. As such, people throughout Thailand have deep respect for him. I take this opportunity to bow in respect to Luang Pu Rian.



## Leaving Luang Pu for Dhutaṅga

Once the rains retreat (vassa) ended and the Kathina wrapped up, I took my leave of Luang Pu Rian in order to embark on dhutaṅga to various locations. I was intent on practicing mental cultivation (bhāvanā-paṭipatti) at Kham Chanot, Wang Thong village, Ban Dung district. A novice monk (sāmañera) accompanied me on the journey. Wherever we reached at nightfall, that was where we slept. We left Si Chiang Mai district, traveled through Tha Bo district and Ban Nong Song Hong, and into Phen district. We slept in many different places along the way before we arrived at an abandoned temple in Phen district called Wat Pa Prana Hai. The temple was haunted by an evil ghost. Many forest tradition (kammaṭṭhāna) monks had spent the night there, and perhaps they released enchantments that rubbed the resident treasure-guarding hungry ghost (peta) the wrong way, because the peta would lie on top of the monks or yank on their legs. Unable to fall asleep, the monks had to grab their umbrella tents (klot) and alms bowls and dash out of there in the middle of the night. This was all because the abandoned temple's ordination hall (uposatha) contained many ancient treasures.

I entered that same ordination hall to sleep. From my pure heart, I disseminated loving-kindness (mettā) to all of the petas. The first and second nights passed without incident. On the third night, a peta



made an appearance. It appeared large, dark, and obscure, and stood there watching me. I transmitted loving kindness to it and communicated that I was residing there without any intention to search for any treasure. My purpose was to practice mental cultivation in accordance with the path and fruit of enlightenment (magga-phala-nibbāna). The peta then vanished. Within the following three days, the peta made another appearance. This time, it expressed respect by holding its palms together in the lotus position at its chest (vandana).

I asked the peta, “Why are you living here?”

The peta replied, “I am worried about the treasure buried under the base of the principal Buddha statue.”

I then asked, “Why haven’t you gone to be reborn?”

The peta replied, “I cannot go yet, as I am afraid humans will dig up the treasure and take it away.” It said, “If you want me to go be reborn, I will give you all of the treasure. Will you take it?”

I told the peta, “I don’t want any of this world’s treasures. It is a burden to care for them. My sole aim is to practice mental cultivation in order to attain the path and fruit of enlightenment (magga-phala-nibbāna).”

The peta then vanished. Once my mind (citta) withdrew from meditation (samādhi), I concluded that this peta was not my enemy. I had the sāmanera and three laypeople clean up that ordination hall. There was an ancient alms bowl sitting in front of the principal Buddha statue. When I went to peer into it, I discovered it halfway filled with coins. I had the laypeople count the money. There were over five hundred baht. I told them to use the money to buy medicine and milk. The laypeople didn’t dare take the money, as they were afraid they’d

die from it. I was stern with them and told them, "Just take it. This money was offered to me. I will take responsibility for all of the money." I wrote them a shopping list, and they bought all the items. The laypeople told their fellow villagers of what happened, and they unanimously concluded that Phra Ācariya Thoon would certainly have to die, because that peta was very evil. Little did they know that that peta had respect for me. Once they found out, the head of the sub-district and many laypeople invited me to stay on at that temple. They all wanted to place the temple in my hands. But I didn't accept, because my intention was to continue on dhutaṅga. I didn't want the burden or responsibility of building a temple at all.



## A Vision of an Expansive Mahā-Samudda

One night, as my mind settled into meditation (samādhi), I experienced a vision (nimitta) of an ocean (mahā-samudda), so expansive it stretched as far as the eye could see. The massive earth-retaining wall holding it back extended four kilometers or so. There were many, many people, numbering in the millions, crammed along the shore of the ocean. Gigantic waves pummeled the shore, filling the air with thunderous crashes. A voice announced, “Whoever wishes to cross this mahā-samudda to get to the other side—if you can make it across, you will no longer have to be reborn in the human world.” This announcement repeated continuously.

There was a group of people who wanted to cross the mahā-samudda. They jumped into the water and tried to float across, but the ocean’s colossal waves slammed them back onto shore. Again, they tried. And, again, they were thrust back onto shore. At that time, I didn’t see a single person manage to float out past the waves. Some looked weary and exhausted from the brutal beatings they suffered from the ocean’s waves. Some laid along the shore, utterly exhausted, their limp limbs listlessly outstretched. Some sat hugging their knees, despondently staring out at the ocean. The many people who were pummeled by the monstrous waves appeared defeated and discouraged from crossing the mahā-samudda. They could only sit, lie down, or



pace—as if internally reflecting that, “*I’ll probably be unable to cross over to the other side of the ocean within this lifetime.*”

The majority of people were uninterested in going against the currents to reach the other side. They spent all of their time on fun strolls, taking in the mountains, and jumping into the water. Uninterested in the resounding announcement, they simply stood around watching the others. There were people from every background—all genders, all ages, ordained individuals clad in ochre or white, as well as commoners. Everyone was crammed together along the ocean’s shore, hoping to make it across to the other side.

I sat watching the mass of people and listening to the announcement, “If you can make it across, you will no longer have to be reborn in the human world.” Those words gave me courage. “*The ocean’s waves are nothing—I definitely have enough strength to float across to the other side.*” And at that moment, I got up and walked over there. I was confident that I would surely make it across. I cleaved a path through the herd of people and stood on the edge of the shore. I placed my hands in the lotus position at my chest and made a resolute determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*), “*Now, I will traverse the ocean’s currents to get to the other side. May the perfections of character (pāramī) that I have cultivated in past lives and in this present life serve as the power and strength I need to swim across this ocean and make it to the other side.*”

Once I had finished the resolution, I leapt out with full force and it felt like I flew a distance of forty meters or so. In the moment my chest was about to hit the water, some kind of animal—I had no idea what it was, whether it was a fish or an ox—appeared and propped up my chest on its back. The instant we made contact, there was an airtight suction between my chest and its back. The animal flew

through the parted waves of the great ocean at lightning speed. I swam along with hand strokes and kicked my feet with all my might.

A huge wave came at us with tremendous force. I used my strength along with the animal fused at my chest to slam directly into it. The power thrust forth cleaved the huge wave and sent broken waves pulsing in every direction. It was as if a large ship collided with a great wave and continued on its way. After making it past the first wave, a second, third, fourth, and fifth wave—all of equally great magnitude—came rolling in toward me with immense force. I used my strength to cleave the waves and then came face to face with the sixth one. This sixth wave was unlike the others; it was more like a colossal wave that thrashed about and broke onto itself, and covered a broad expanse. I used my strength to cleave the monstrous wave and made it past without feeling the least bit weary or sore. I felt encouraged that I would make it across to the other side as I had planned.

When I reached the middle of the vast ocean, my eyes swept every direction for shore but found none. There was only emptiness and the perpetual intersection of sky and water. I continued to swim. I spotted an island in the middle of the ocean around eight kilometers away. A voice said, “Don’t go near that island. If you do, the swirling undercurrents will suck you into the island. Once on the island, you will be unable to make it across to the other side. You will only return to the same course.” After hearing that, I was careful to avoid getting pulled into the swirling undercurrents encircling the island. I swam toward the left in order to avert the island, but the currents still grabbed hold of my right leg. I used my strength to forcefully flick my leg out of its grasp and managed to free myself from the swirling undercurrent. The island’s undercurrent flowed counter-clockwise

and spanned a large radius. The currents were strong and spiraled. If someone slipped into them, they would quickly get sucked into the island. They would be utterly unable to make their way out of there and would be forever stuck on that island.



## The Shore Within My Sights

Once I successfully averted the island, I was determined to keep swimming without relaxing my efforts. I felt that if I continued to swim without stopping or holding back, one day I would surely reach the shore of no more rebirths. Then, I peered ahead and could barely make out the shore. It was very far away, but it was clearly visible. Heartened at the sight of shore, I hurriedly swam toward it. Once I got there, the animal that transported me across the ocean vanished, and I walked up to the shore on my own. There was nothing but sand in the vicinity. Gazing forward, I observed an elevated, steep embankment before me.

A bit later, I walked around searching for a way up the embankment. I spotted a narrow pathway formed from a vertical gap sandwiched by walls tall enough to conceal a standing human. The path was tiny—just enough for someone to fit. There were the footprints, both old and new, of those who had gone before. I thought to myself, *“Who made this journey before me? In any case, I will surely get to meet them.”* Once I hiked up the steep embankment, there was a small pathway leading out from it. I took that path and noticed the footprints of those who had gone before appeared more pronounced and more numerous.

After walking for not too long, the landscape appeared vast and empty as far as I could see. I saw a large single-story palace before



me. I thought to myself, “*Those who had made this journey before me must have rested in this palace.*” I walked straight toward the palace. To the side of the palace, there were numerous ochre-colored robes hanging out to dry. Once I was forty meters from the palace, I noticed an elderly monk, standing with his arm leaning against a column, watching me. As I got closer, he walked out to meet me. I walked directly up to him. He grabbed my arm and said, “Venerable Thoon made it across the ocean! Venerable Thoon made it across the ocean!” and expressed his congratulations. He appeared bright and cheery. He led me into the castle.

The monk who came out to welcome me into the palace was Luang Pu Khao Anālayo of Wat Tham Klong Phen. He asked me, “How was it? Was it difficult swimming across the ocean?”

I replied, “With permission, Luang Pu. Floating across the currents of the ocean was not difficult at all.”

He asked, “How many of you came?”

I answered, “I came alone, sir.”

He then asked, “They didn’t want to cross over?”

I replied, “With permission, sir. They had a great desire to cross over, but they were not strong enough to go against the currents of the ocean. Each time they jumped into the water, the ocean’s waves would sweep them back onto shore. They were intent and very determined, but I don’t know when they will make it across the ocean.”

Luang Pu said, “Take your wet robe and hang it out to dry. Then, come back inside the palace to rest with us.”

While I was speaking with Luang Pu Khao, Luang Pu Boowa Siripuṇño of Wat Pa Ban Nong Saeng was sitting atop another bed.

He asked me, “How was it? Were the ocean waves big? How did you swim to cut through the waves and ocean currents to get here?”

I replied, “With permission, sir. I was very confident in myself. When I leapt out from shore, my body flew very far. Once my chest was about to hit the water, some kind of animal propped me on its back, and we swam by cutting through the currents of the waves.”

He then asked, “Did you see the island in the middle of the ocean?”

I told him, “Yes, I saw it.”

He said, “One who will make it across the ocean is considered one who is replete and primed in all aspects.” Then he asked, “Did anyone swim after you?”

“With permission, sir. I didn’t look behind me at all. But there were a great number of people preparing themselves to follow. However, I don’t know if they will be able to make it because the ocean’s waves are very powerful.” As I was speaking with Luang Pu Khao and Luang Pu Boowa, there were other senior monks (*ācariya*) listening to our conversation. Then, my mind (*citta*) disengaged from meditation (*samādhi*). I don’t know for how long the vision (*nimitta*) transpired.

Once the *citta* disengaged from meditation, I applied wisdom (*paññā*) to analyze the events in the *nimitta* and their significance. I used wisdom to line up each and every stage of the *nimitta* and make sense of them. The mass of people represented those who believe in Buddhism and are cultivating virtues and perfections of character (*pāramī*). They possess varying levels of *pāramī* and share the common goal of eliminating all mental intoxications (*āsava*), defilements

(kilesa), and desires (tanhā) from their minds. Whether one will be able to accomplish this goal, and how quickly or slowly, depends on one's own mindfulness (sati), wisdom (paññā), faith (saddhā), and effort.

Those who had already jumped into the water and were thrust back onto shore by the ocean's waves signified those determined and striving to make it across the ocean. Their insufficient pāramī necessitated that they return to cultivate more pāramī and use mindful wisdom to contemplate in order to better understand and realize universal truths (sacca-dhamma) in accordance with reality. On its own, a desire to break free is insufficient; without mindfulness, wisdom, and thorough intelligence, one will be utterly unable to traverse the ocean.

The five large waves represent the five sense pleasures (kāmaguṇa) of form, sound, scent, taste, and touch. It is difficult for one to overcome them. However, with mindfulness and wisdom it is not a problem. The other kind of wave that thrashed about and broke onto itself represented mind-objects (dhammārammaṇa). Dhammārammaṇa is the convergence point for all preoccupations (ārammaṇa) that come from form, sound, scent, taste, and touch. This gives rise to itṭhārammaṇa, or pleasing preoccupations, and anitṭhārammaṇa, or displeasing preoccupations. In other words, vedanā, or the preoccupations that our minds savor every day. This is how the mind bows to the influence of defilements and desire and gives rise to love, lust, pleasure, and displeasure.

The animal that used its back to prop up my chest represented the vow (sacca) that I had already determinedly set. I was earnest and serious about myself. Once I had made the determination, I had to follow through with that vow (sacca) and not excuse or fool myself.

Being conveyed on a swimming path that sliced the ocean's currents represented the power of truthfulness (*sacca*). It was a major strength, and it enabled the strength of other *pāramī* to fuse together at full potential. The perfection of wisdom (*paññā-pāramī*) was the force that compelled me to the correct destination. It was also the bright light that enabled Dhamma practice to be correct and aligned with the path and fruit of enlightenment (*magga-phala-nibbāna*).

The emptiness in the middle of the ocean signified the mind being neutral or disinterested—neither pleased nor displeased with anything, not being affected by any preoccupation (*ārammaṇa*) of sensual pleasures (*kāma-guṇa*). The mind is unaffected by worldly preoccupations (*ārammaṇa*). It is constantly disinterested—unaffected by sensual pleasures (*kāma-guṇa*), and neither pleased nor displeased by defilements (*kilesa*) and desires (*taṇhā*) in any way.

The large island in the middle of the ocean represented the Brahma realm (*brahma-loka*), where hermits (*tāpasa*) and ascetics (*isi*) who cultivate meditative absorptions (*jhāna*) end up being stuck after death. They are unable to continue onto the path and fruit of enlightenment in any way. Even in our current era, once death befalls those meditators whose minds are able to attain serenity in *jhāna*, they will similarly be reborn as these Brahmans. The counterclockwise current swirling around the island represents a mind that is stuck in tranquility, stuck in *jhāna*. The pleasure and contentment of that blissful tranquility has made a deep imprint. Such a mind utterly lacks the wisdom to contemplate in order to understand and see the truth about all conditioned things (*sabbe-saṅkhāra*) in this world. In other words, it is the rest stop for stupid minds (*citta*) that do not possess a shred of intelligence or comprehensive mindfulness and wisdom. My right leg that was pulled

by the current swirling around the island and my managing to break free symbolized my having already attained immaterial meditative absorptions (*arūpa-jhāna*). If you flip back to my second vassa, you'll see what techniques I employed to break free from *arūpa-jhāna*. It may be an example (*upāya*) you can apply to teach yourself.

The animal's disappearance upon making it to the other side of the ocean represented the perfections of character (*pāramī*) that I had cultivated in past lives and in the present life that served as the force that propelled me to the shore. The merit (*puñña*) and moral goodness (*kusala*), both large and small, had finished serving their functions and obligations. They're unable to tag along into the path and fruit of enlightenment. The path onto shore that was narrow and only accommodated a single person signified "eko maggo," that there is only one path, and it is the ultimate path that the Buddha has already demarcated.

The term "mahā-samudda" represents "mahā-sammuti." All of the humans and animals in this world cling to delusions of mahā-sammuti. Mahā means a lot, or great. Sammuti refers to being deluded by the Three Realms: the Sensual Realm (*kāma-bhava*), the Fine-Material Realm (*rūpa-bhava*), and the Immaterial Realm (*arūpa-bhava*); deluded by desire; deluded that the four elements (*catu-dhātu*) and five aggregates (*pañca-khandha*) are self; deluded that material elements (*vatthu-dhātu*) belonging to the world in fact belong to us. We suppose that whatever we have, it belongs to us, thus birthing delusion, wrong understanding, and wrong view. This leads to the strong attachment to things truly being who we are and truly being ours. This causes *micchā-diṭṭhi*, or wrong views, to blossom and thrive in the mind.

All it takes is this *micchā-ditṭhi*, or wrong view, to give rise to the delusion of the *mahā-sammuti* being an appealing place to inhabit. Only the idiotic mind (*citta*) is attached to this delusion. The *citta* that possesses good mindfulness (*sati*) and wisdom (*paññā*) is not. Put another way, the flood of sensuality (*kāma-ogha*), or the sensual pleasures (*kāma-guṇa*) for which the world's sentient beings strive, is difficult to cross. The flood of view (*ditṭhi-ogha*), or wrong views held in the mind, is difficult to fix. The flood of ignorance (*avijjā-ogha*), or not knowing according to the truth of the world's constructs (*sammuti*), is difficult to understand. The flood of becoming (*bhava-ogha*), or the delusion of and attachment to becoming (*bhava*) and birth (*jāti*), is difficult to fix.

Thus, a practitioner must study these Four Floods of Worldly Turbulence (*ogha*), discern whether one is submerged in a particular flood or all four, and figure out how to fix oneself. Those with good mindfulness and wisdom won't find this challenging. But those with poor mindfulness and wisdom certainly will. The Four Floods (*ogha*) that are difficult for people to cross are a chronic and long-standing problem. It is a challenge to traverse and overcome them. This is due to a lack of understanding of insatiable desires (*taṇhā*). There are three types of desires: 1. desire for sensuality (*kāma-taṇhā*), 2. desire for existence (*bhava-taṇhā*), and 3. desire for non-existence (*vibhava-taṇhā*). These are *samudaya*—the cause of each and every problem, the cause of never-ending problems—that completely shroud the mind (*citta*) in delusion and attachment.



## Fifth Vassa, 1965

I spent my fifth rains retreat (vassa) at Wat Pa Si Wichai in Ban Si Wichai, Wanon Niwat district, Sakon Nakhon province. My old teacher Luang Por Boonma was the abbot there. Luang Por Boonma was the one who gave me the Dhamma topic of “arise, cease” back when I hadn’t yet ordained. That was the first time I had ever heard Dhamma from a forest tradition (kammaṭṭhāna) monk. As a result, the topic of “arise, cease” had made a deep impression on me since then. Before entering this year’s vassa, a group of devotees, along with every monk and novice (sāmañera) in the temple, had felt, “We are fortunate to have Phra Ācariya Thoon with us for the vassa. We will get to fully listen to the Dhamma during the entire vassa.” Once I heard the devotees, monks, and sāmañeras whispering this, I set about formulating a plan to not teach the Dhamma during the vassa. I devised a plan. The only possible way was to observe the dhutaṅga practice of mūgavatta, or to refrain from speaking to anyone, during the vassa. There would be four exceptions: 1. If Luang Por Boonma asked me something, I would have to speak, but I would not speak with other monks, 2. Upon becoming ill, if monks, sāmañeras, or doctors asked about my symptoms, I could speak, 3. I could confess offenses (āpatti), chant in homage to the Buddha, and do Pāṭimokkha chanting, 4. When a settlement of issues (adhikaraṇa) arose within the Saṅgha, I could help resolve it by speaking according

to the code of monastic discipline (*vinaya*). Other than these four exceptions, I would not speak to anyone.

Once I had thoroughly established my plan, I kept it a secret. I would inform the monks and *sāmañeras* on the day we entered the vassa. Then came the day we performed the ceremonies of entering the vassa. After finishing the chanting, we thrice pronounced the formal dedication, “*Imasmim āvāse imam̄ temāsaṁ vassam̄ upemi*.” It means, “I will remain in this monastery for this three-month rains.” Thereafter, I announced to the group of monks and *sāmañeras*, “From now on, I will observe the *dhutaṅga* practice of *mūgavatta* and will not speak to anyone during the entire three months,” and instantly clamped my mouth shut. Upon hearing those words, the monks and *sāmañeras* implored me to retract my vow (*sacca*), but their entreaties were futile. Once one gives one’s word (*sacca*), one must abide by it. Thus, the monks, *sāmañeras*, and devotees were filled with disappointment, complaining that, “Ācariya Thoon shouldn’t have done that.” Whenever someone came to talk to me, I would merely smile at them.

During this vassa, my practice progressed immensely because I didn’t talk to anyone. Because I wasn’t talking, I didn’t have to discern what words to use in speaking. Nor did there exist in my mind the preoccupations (*ārammaṇa*) that resulted from discerning those words. Talking necessitates thinking and considering things to talk about. But since I wasn’t speaking, why would I even think about those topics? After two months, the results of not speaking were clearly noticeable. Whenever I meditated for serenity, the mind (*citta*) became calm very quickly. Normally, I was already quick to attain that calm state. But now that there weren’t any preoccupations (*ārammaṇa*) related to speaking, it was attained even quicker. When



I concentrated on a meditative word (parikamma) or meditated on in-out breathing, within a few minutes the citta would quickly and soundly settle into a calm state of concentration (samādhi). Once the citta withdrew from that meditative state, I would direct the mind toward continuous wisdom (paññā) contemplations of the ultimate truth (sacca-dhamma) that corresponded to the truth of reality. I came to understand and see according to the truth much more clearly. The joint use of meditation (samādhi) and mindful wisdom (sati-paññā) allowed for constant continuity. Each night, each day, and each hour never went to waste. Though there were many monks and sāmañeras there, it was as if I was by myself because I didn't think about interacting with anyone. The mind was constantly in a state of oneness.

One night, once I had meditated to a serene state, I experienced a vision (nimitta) of a man dressed in distinguished formal attire like someone in the royal palace. He was leading a saddled white horse toward me. The horse was huge and incredibly beautiful. The man said, "This is your horse. In not too long a time, you will definitely get to ride this horse." Then, my citta withdrew from meditation. I thought about how the horse must ride especially well and differed from the white horse I rode in my first vassa. This horse had sleek white hairs that sparkled and shone like diamonds. The horse I had previously ridden had white hairs akin to cotton. This horse's hairs gleamed and glistened throughout his entire body. I was confident that one day in the future, I would surely get to ride this horse.

When the vassa and Kathina were over, I wished to dhutāṅga in the South. Eventually, that wish came true. That journey to the South was filled with every convenience. I'd like to compliment the people of the South for their memorable hospitality. Whenever the

bus reached a stop, after the driver and passengers—with whom I was not previously acquainted—had completed their personal errands, they would always buy me soda, coffee, or other beverages. When they made the offerings, they were respectful. They were friendly, generous, and attentive. It was as if we had been relatives before, or as if I were a teacher (ācariya) they already respected. They even asked me, “Do you need anything?” Seeing all of this, I felt incredibly proud.

I reached Takua Pa district right at lunch time. Everyone disembarked to get something to eat. A sāmañera and I sat at a table and the passengers purchased a lot of food to offer to us. They went about as if I were a monk related to them or a teacher they already revered. Their physical and verbal deportment was deferential and markedly humble. That was back then. I imagine it's still the same now, as southerners are a gracious and hospitable bunch. To this day, the goodwill of the southerners continues to make a profound impression on me.

When the bus reached Khok Kloi sub-district, I asked a middle-aged man, “Where is Wat Rat Yothi? Which way do I go?” He replied in the Southern dialect, and we couldn’t understand one another. I asked that he speak in the Central dialect, but he was unable to. I didn’t know what to do. There was a man standing there, observing the hopeless conversation between monk and layman. He walked up to me and asked, “Venerable ācariya, where are you going?” He spoke in the Central dialect. What a relief!

I told him, “I am headed to Wat Rat Yothi. Where is that temple located?”

He replied, "It is over in that direction, but still many kilometers away." Then he said, "I will arrange a car to transport you there," and he hired a minibus to deliver me to my destination. The man I struggled to understand also gathered his things and accompanied me to the temple. Once we arrived, he helped remove my things from the minibus. I was amazed at the selfless, kind consideration the southerners displayed. They even paid my bus fare! Would all southerners possess such kindness?

Not long thereafter, Luang Por Khampong Tisso led me on dhutaṅga to various places in the South. With the exception of Surat Thani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces, my tour of the South was complete. I am someone who easily adapts to others, easily knows people's personalities, and can read people. The Southern language is an easy language and is easy to understand. After one month in the South, I could speak the Southern dialect. Many southerners commented, "Other monks stay in the South for ten years, but cannot speak the Southern language." The ability to speak the language and the ease in adapting to people was a double-edged sword. Without strong wisdom, it will make life considerably difficult for the ordained. That Southern dhutanga trip is a long story that isn't fitting to write about here, as this book would become too thick. At the end of the vassa, I returned to Wat Rat Yothi.



## Sixth Vassa, 1966

I spent this rains retreat (vassa) with Luang Por Khampong Tisso at Wat Rat Yothi, Khok Kloi sub-district, Takua Thung district, Phang Nga province. During this vassa, my practice progressed unhindered. I gained quite a lot of knowledge from Luang Por Khampong during the vassa. He was skilled at teaching the Dhamma, and his teachings were rational. He had a resolute, decisive nature, and was direct and straightforward. The witticisms that dotted his sermons kept listeners attentive and inwardly chuckling at various points. I don't know how he did it. I'll hand it to him—Luang Por Khampong was a great preacher of our time.

During the start of the vassa, I received word that my father had passed away. Following the end of the vassa and Kathina, I invited Luang Por Khampong to travel north with me to make merit for my father. He was kind enough to attend the funeral. For this funeral blessing, all forms of entertainment were disallowed, as were the killing of all animals and alcohol. All relatives, children, and grandchildren were to abide by the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*) for the duration of the ceremonies. Everyone was to be pure in their making of merit (*puñña*) so that the merit dedication would be pure. This would enable my father to fully receive the dedication of merit.

The dedication of merit to my father was completed successfully. No evil demerit (*pāpa*) or unwholesomeness (*akusala*) was permitted to contaminate this event. I really wanted to know why this kind of pure dedication of merit wasn't more commonly implemented. People tended to slaughter animals and get drunk at this type of event. This event, though, was truly pure. The monks who presided were pure in moral conduct (*sīla*) and were pure in righteousness (*dhamma*). All of the items donated to the monks had been acquired honestly and righteously. The faithful (*saddhā*) who made the offerings and merit dedications were of bright and pure minds (*citta*). Both parties were complete and irreproachable. The giver (*dāyaka*) was pure and the receiver (*patiggāhaka*) was pure. With purity on both sides, I yearned to know if my father received the merit.

After the ceremonies concluded, I went to stay at Wat Pa Santikawat, Ban Nong Tum, Chai Wan sub-district, Chai Wan district, Udon Thani province. Luang Pu Boonchan Kamalo was the abbot. I had resolved (*adhiṭṭhāna*) to discover whether my father had actually received the dedication of merit from his family. After setting this resolution, I directed the mind (*citta*) into meditation. After two days, I still hadn't a clue. I thought about why this could be and realized that it was due to my desire that it was unknowable.



## Visiting and Blessing My Father

On the third night, I eliminated all desire from my mind. That night, I experienced a vision (nimitta) of a smooth pathway in front of me. I walked along the path. On that path, there were many outgoing footprints, but not a single one incoming. After following that path for some time, I saw a large steel door in front of me. There were four able-bodied men standing guard, each gripping either a spear or sword in his hands. Their expressions were serious and grim. I walked up to them to ask, "What is this place? Where does this path lead?"

All four of the men acted deferentially, placing their hands in the lotus position at their chest (vandana). They were deeply respectful. They told me, "This is the door to the underworld (yama-loka). Everyone who dies from the human world with demerit (pāpa) hanging over them must come here for questioning." They inquired of me, "Venerable sir, what purpose do you have in coming here?"

To which I replied, "I wish to know whether or not my deceased father is here."

"Your venerableness is presently following up on your father?" they asked.

I told them, "That's right. I am following up on my father."

"In that case," they said, "please come in and ask our boss." Then, the four of them opened the large steel doors and I walked in. I encountered the supervisor sitting in a chair. He was responsible for checking the accounts of all of those who died—first and last name, age, address, village, sub-district, district, province—just like for a census, house registration, or government identification in the human world.

Once I entered, the supervisor who was doing the accounting appeared slightly surprised because he did not know beforehand that a still-living monk would be entering that place, but he was quite respectful. He placed his hands in the lotus position at his chest (*vandana*) and said, "Venerable sir, what is your purpose?"

I told the boss, "I have something I would like to ask you. My father died many months ago. I would like to know whether or not he has come here."

He asked, "What is the name of your father, venerable sir?"

"Uddha Nonruecha," I replied. Then, he went and picked up a book with the names of the dead. That book was about one meter thick. His finger sliced through the book, and he read, "Uddha Nonruecha from Ban Nong Waeng (Gam Hom), Chai Wan sub-district, Chai Wan district, Udon Thani province, correct?"

"That's right," I answered.

"He's still here, sir."

"I'd like to go see my father. Would that be possible?" I inquired.

The supervisor responded, "That won't be necessary. I have some servants who can go retrieve your father, venerable sir, so he

can meet you here,” and he told his servant to bring my father to meet me. “Go fetch Uddha Nonruecha to meet his monk son named Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño, this instant.” The servant hurried off.

A while later they had retrieved my father. He appeared ashamed as he walked toward me because his right cheek was slightly darkened. However, his left cheek appeared normal. As he approached, he turned so his left cheek faced forward. He was wearing the same clothes that he had worn when he died. Only after he had received the merit dedicated to him by his family would his clothing change. Once near, he sat down and prostrated in a normal manner. Then I asked my father, “Do you remember me?”

He said, “I do.”

I asked, “Since you’ve been here, have they hit you?”

He replied, “Before, they used to hit me, but now they don’t anymore.”

I asked, “While you’re here, do you still do chanting and mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*)?”

He replied, “I do chanting and mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*) every night, without fail.”

I asked, “Your children and grandchildren made merit and dedicated it to you within the past three days. Did you receive it?”

He replied, “I received three parts. The other part, I didn’t.”

I asked, “Why didn’t you receive all of it? What was the reason?”

He replied, “Because the monks who received the offerings had tarnished morality (*sīla*).”



I asked, “The kamma that you must pay for now, is there much of it?”

He replied, “There isn’t much. The smaller kammic debts have already been repaid. All that remains is the group kamma from killing an ox.”

Then, I went to consult the Lord of Death (yama). “The majority of my father’s kamma has already been paid. There’s only the kamma related to a single ox. Seeing as how there’s only small kamma remaining, I’d like to make an alms request (*piṇḍapāta*) that my father be cleared of this kamma. Is that possible?”

The Lord of Death picked up a book to consult whether or not my father’s remaining kamma was substantial. Then he said, “Actually, your father’s kamma is set to expire within the day, venerable sir. I will permit your father’s kamma to expire this moment.” He wrote in another book, which was the book for those who had settled their kammic debts. In it, the day, month, year, and time that the kamma had been paid off was recorded for evidence.

The Lord of Death said, “May I extend my deep respect for you, venerable sir, for coming all the way here to follow up on your father and to bless him.”

I turned to my father and asked, “Do you want to ordain?”

He replied, “I want to ordain.” Then, I grabbed a white robe from my bag and extended it to my father. He put it on. The instant he finished dressing, his skin changed. His face appeared fuller and his skin took on a healthy glow. He prostrated before me three times and said, “My kammic debts have been paid off today. My son, may you tell the family that my evil kamma has been paid. Tell those who are

still living that they should cultivate lots of merit (*puñña*), moral goodness (*kusala*), and virtue, so that when they die, they will not have to suffer." He added, "I am headed to a higher place now," and prostrated before me three times.

After finishing his speech, my father soared up into the sky. I watched as he floated beyond the line of my vision. I knew that my father was destined for the Fine-Material Realm (*rūpa-brahma*) because before he died, my father had attained meditative absorptions of the fine-material level (*rūpa-jhāna*) on many occasions. However, before he died, his evil kamma had shrouded this. That's why he had to contend with the evil kamma first. Once the evil kamma was paid off, the good kamma—the merit and wholesomeness—appeared in his mind. The fine-material meditative attainments (*rūpa-jhāna*) also resurfaced. So, he went to the Fine-Material Realm (*rūpa-brahma*).



## The Hell-Guardians Usher in Wrongdoers

Let me get back to explaining about the dead. I think it will leave you, the reader, with either meager or ample food for thought. While I was talking to the Lord of Death (yama) and my father, there were hell-guardians (niraya-pāla) ushering in a great number of people who had committed evil kamma. Some were hauled in by the ropes fastened around their necks, some were dragged in by the chains binding their arms and legs, some were being driven in by the thwacking of a birch cane. Each body was covered in blood. Their pain was evident in the lamenting shrieks and howls that filled the air. Some wore torn clothing while others weren't wearing any clothes at all. The hell-guardians forced and threatened the wrongdoers in various ways. Each group of those who killed, stole, committed adultery, spoke untruthfully, or partook in intoxicants was punished differently.

The group of adulterers who had violated the third precept of refraining from sexual misconduct (kāmesu-micchācārā) were tied together at the neck with rope in male-female pairs. They were not clothed at all. The hell-guardians used rattan canes to beat them until their bodies were cloaked in blood. Many of the dead were punished by the hell-guardians in this way. There were many groups of hell-guardians. One was charged with herding the wrongdoers through

the steel doorway while another took over after that. The hell-guardians all used much violence—walloping them with birch canes, kicking them, and pulling and dragging them. Wrongdoers were punished according to whatever heavy kamma they had committed in the human realm.

I glanced to the other side, where a large pavilion stood. I asked the Lord of Death, “What is that pavilion?”

The Lord of Death answered, “That is the pavilion of a thousand rooms. It is used to investigate and make judgements on various cases. In the pavilion of a thousand rooms, each room operates differently. One section is for those from the heavenly realms (*sagga*) who have exhausted their merit (*puñña*). They must pay for the evil kamma they had committed while in the human realm. Once that kamma has been paid for in hell (*naraka*) but there is still outstanding residual kamma, they will be reborn as hungry ghosts (*peta*) or animals (*tiracchāna*).

“Those who committed evil (*pāpa*) verbal offenses and were vicious while they were human—such as slandering or lying—are destined for rebirth in the four lower levels of existence (*apāya-bhūmi*): hell (*naraka*), hungry ghost (*peta*), angry demon (*asura*), or animal (*tiracchāna*). And if residual kamma remains and they are reborn as human, that residual kamma will cause them to have a foul-smelling mouth. No one will believe what they say; consequently, they will be failed leaders.

“Each of the rooms in the pavilion are used to judge cases. For example, the case of someone who went to heaven but ran out of merit and had to return to hell to pay off that kamma. Those who

have paid off their kamma in hell are sometimes reborn in heaven, as hungry ghosts, or as animals."

A Lord of Death works in a righteous manner, unlike the judging of cases in the human world. Cases in the human world can be altered and distorted in many ways, though this isn't the place to delve into that. When a Lord of Death decides cases, there are no lawyers, no appellate courts, and no superior courts. There are no weak or strong arguments. All there is is you—both you as defendant and you as plaintiff. For instance, when you've forgotten the good kamma you've committed or forgotten the evil kamma you've committed, forgetting the good or bad kamma doesn't void or erase it in any way. It is like when information gets inputted into a computer. Even if you've forgotten it, the information in the computer doesn't get erased. Likewise, the good kamma and the evil kamma we have committed is stored in the deep recesses of our minds. Once we die, we will enter the kamma judgment room. In that room, there is no Lord of Death to interrogate us. It is like a lie detector room. The good kamma and evil kamma we have committed automatically appears on a screen. If someone has committed considerable good kamma, if they've committed scant evil kamma, if they've committed considerable evil kamma, or if they've committed scant good kamma—all the results of those actions appear on their own. Thus, "kammunā vattatī loko," the world's sentient beings are determined by kamma.

So, once we have died, kamma will do the deciding. However kamma decides, that is the fate that we must accept. Once we have died, there is no one more influential than kamma; there is no one more powerful than kamma. It's impossible to lie to kamma or bribe kamma in any way. I studied the way judgements were made in the

pavilion of a thousand rooms. Every step was fixed in my memory. Then, my mind (citta) withdrew from meditation.

I sat and analyzed the events that occurred in the meditative vision (nimitta). It's something that is difficult to explain to others. It's something that is impossible for people in today's day and age to understand. If someone holds some measure of belief in the effects of kamma, they may understand some of it. When we are in the human world and cultivating evil kamma, it isn't scary. But once you die and the effects of that evil kamma catch up to you, it's terrifying. The time when the hell-guardians were shepherding the wrongdoers toward their judgements was the precise moment their kammic creditors had been awaiting. Whichever manner the evil had been committed, that evil would now exact its revenge. If someone had killed oxen or cows, the form of oxen or cows would appear to chase them down and gore them. If someone had killed ducks or chickens, the form of ducks and chickens would appear to peck at them and hit them. After the owner of the kamma fell dead, they would rise once more.

The location where evildoers were confined was a great distance from the pavilion of a thousand rooms. This left a vast empty space for evildoers to traverse. Within that space, there were numerous kammic creditors waiting to get their revenge. A Lord of Death is unable to prevent this kamma in any way. The pain and torment that occurred in the kammic creditor revenge stage was tremendously frightful. The ducks and chickens that pursued and pecked at people were not the chickens we would see back at home—they were steel-beaked chickens tearing bodies to shreds until the fields were saturated and flooded with blood. When people went on trial and were judged destined to hell, that was also terrifying. Explaining these events to those who habitually commit evil will only make them

laugh. But once they experience the results of their kamma for themselves, they will know what it is like.

At that time, my mother was still alive. I went to ask my mother about my father's involvement in killing the ox in the past. I wondered how he killed it, because I had never seen my father kill an ox. My mother told me that back then, my father was the village head. There were people in the village who stole an ox from another village. They brought the ox back and killed it. Once they had killed it, the parts that they could not eat were buried and crops planted over it. The owner of the ox came by but did not see any trace of the killing. Actually, my father didn't kill it, but because he had supported the killing of the ox and protected the wrongdoers, he had assisted in the wrongdoing. Consequently, he had to pay for that kamma.

The judgments made in a Lord of Death's court are extremely fair and righteous because good kamma and evil kamma do the deciding. It is straightforward. There is no corruption. There is no bias or favoritism. There is no money used as a factor in deciding cases, as it is in the human world. When we say, "kammunā vattatī-loko," the world's sentient beings are determined by kamma, it is very clear. People often ask if those who work as hell-guardians (*niraya-pāla*) or a Lord of Death (*yama*) are the same group of people who work that profession in the human world. They could be working the job because they are accustomed to this field of work. It is likely the same bunch. However, I forgot to ask the Lord of Death and the hell-guardians what their field of work was in the human realm. Alright, if I have an opportunity to visit there again, I will ask them whether or not they worked this type of job as humans. It is a question worth pondering. We should think about whether or not the theory fits. If they were of a corrupt bunch that took bribes, it is unlikely.

Those people are taken to correct their behavior and pay for their kamma, just like all the others. If that kind of person was employed as a Lord of Death in the underworld, the laws of kamma would surely be destined for catastrophe.



## **Seventh Vassa, 1967**

My seventh rains retreat (vassa) was spent at Wat Pa Santikawat, Ban Nong Tum, Chai Wan sub-district, Chai Wan district, Udon Thani province. Luang Pu Boonchan Kamalo was the abbot. During that vassa, my mental cultivation (bhāvanā) and practice (paṭipatti) went smoothly, without any obstacles. Luang Pu Boonchan was reserved with words by nature. When he spoke about Dhamma, though he said very little, it was full of meaning and significance. Each of his sentences had profound meaning and were full of rational reason. If one used wisdom to analyze his words, one would realize how extraordinarily meaningful they were. Only those who are thick eared and cannot see would fail to grasp his Dhamma teachings.

During this vassa, as my mind (citta) was established in meditative calm, Luang Pu Mun came to me and said, "Thoon, once the vassa ends, go and stay with Venerable Ācariya Khao of Wat Tham Klong Phen. Your aspiration will become reality in not too long a time." Thereafter, the citta withdrew from meditation. I used wisdom (paññā) to contemplate how Luang Pu Mun's order made it seem like he already knew that in a short time my goal would be attained. Throughout that night, I felt full and content. I was determined to go stay with Luang Pu Khao after the vassa was over. I was also proud because in this lifetime, I had never seen Luang Pu

Mun, but he still graced me with the reminder. I was confident that if I went to stay with Luang Pu Khao, I would certainly come to understand and realize the ultimate truth (sacca-dhamma). This was merely my determination. What would actually transpire is for you to discover.

In 1955, I was ordained as a monk in the Mahā Nikāya tradition at Wat Chainat Wararam. One day, on my alms round (*piṇḍapāta*), I saw walking toward me Dhammayut monks from Ban Chai Wan led by Luang Pu Boonchan. I instantly remembered that when I was a novice (*sāmañera*) in 1949, I had gone with Phra Ācariya Som to pay respects to Luang Pu Boonchan at Ban Champa, and I was filled with deep admiration and respect for him. Now, Luang Pu Boonchan had established a temple in Ban Nong Tum, Chai Wan sub-district, Chai Wan district.

Previously, I had wanted to ordain in the Dhammayut order but I didn't know where the Dhammayut temples were. My father had me enter myself as a candidate for monkhood (*nāga*) at a Mahā Nikāya temple, so I ended up ordaining as a Mahā Nikāya monk. After ordaining, I discovered that a Dhammayut monk had established a temple there. Again, I thought about wanting to ordain as a Dhammayut monk. But it was not possible at that time because Mahā Nikāya monks and Dhammayut monks did not get along at all back then. I felt very uncomfortable because I wanted to leave in order to become a Dhammayut monk, but I couldn't. One day, I had a good opportunity. I went to cut bamboo to make a broom to use in sweeping the temple. I stopped by to take a look at the Dhammayut monks' temple, to see their way of life. Once I entered the temple, I could see a small hut that functioned as a meal hall. I observed how the Dhammayut monks lived and how they took their meals. I could see that the temple was

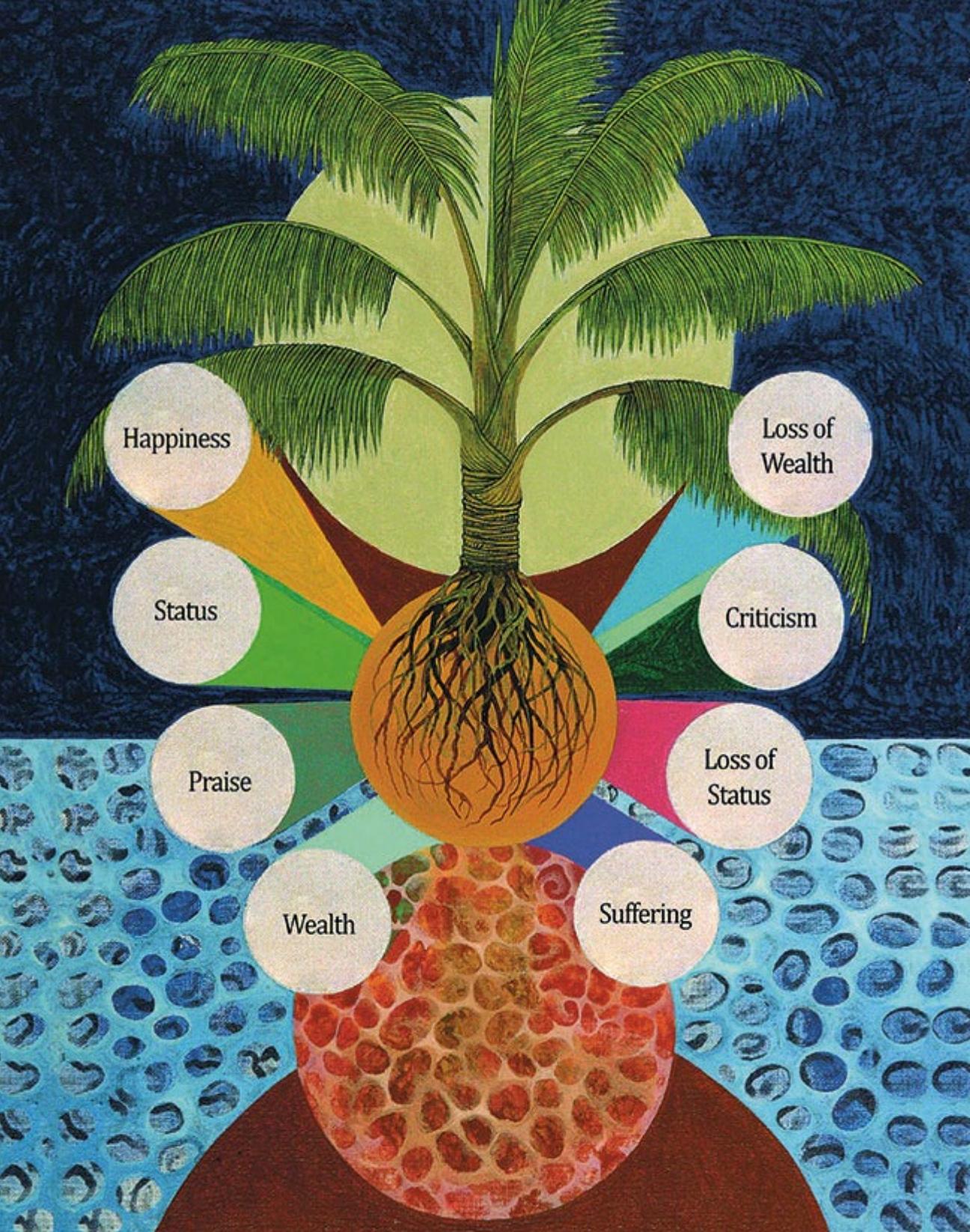
very clean and well shaded. I so wanted to become a Dhammayut monk. I walked over to the area for washing bowls and the trash heap and noticed a toothpick in there. I picked it up and saw that it resembled Phra Ācariya Som's toothpick that I had seen back when I was a sāmañera.

Thereafter, I wondered if there were some way for me to ordain as a Dhammayut monk. I certainly couldn't do so right then. The only way was to disrobe from the Mahā Nikāya order and then take ordination as a Dhammayut monk. I decided to disrobe the following day, thinking I would re-ordain as a Dhammayut monk. And I did ordain in the Dhammayut order, just as I had been determined to.

During the vassa at Wat Pa Santikawat, I gained a Dhamma metaphor (*upāya*) that made a deep, unforgettable impression. Namely, that of a coconut tree. One evening, it was time to sweep the temple courtyard. I saw a coconut tree in the middle of the temple courtyard. It was a dwarf-sized tree and many years old. It was only about one foot tall, but it had the customary fresh green leaves. I asked Luang Por Khamsing, "How long ago was this coconut tree planted?"

Luang Por Khamsing replied, "Well, this coconut tree was planted the very year the temple was established. In fact, I was the one who planted it here. It doesn't grow bigger, but it doesn't die, and it doesn't fruit. It was planted in 1950, and it's 1967 now. It is seventeen years old."

Hearing that, I internalized (*opanayiko*) and drew a Dhamma parallel in that instant. I used that coconut tree to teach myself that this coconut tree is old and has survived to this day. If it were planted where other trees didn't shroud it, it would've already fruited and its fruit would've already been eaten. But because other trees shroud it,



Happiness

Status

Praise

Wealth

Loss of  
Wealth

Criticism

Loss of  
Status

Suffering

it is unable to grow or thrive. Although its leaves are healthy, the tree will never bear fruit. I drew a parallel between the coconut tree and myself. If my life were frequently covered by defilements (kilesa) and desires (taṇhā), I would not thrive in Dhamma. Even if I were still a monk, I would never attain the path and fruit of enlightenment (magga-phala-nibbāna). Even if I remained a monk until the day I died, it would have been for naught. The path and fruit of enlightenment would never be attained.

I constantly used this metaphor to teach myself not to be like this coconut tree. *“Don’t let preoccupations (ārammaṇa) with love or preoccupations with sensual pleasures (kāma-guṇa) shroud your mind. Don’t let the Eight Worldly Conditions (loka-dhamma) shroud your mind. Don’t allow your mind to be deluded by the wealth, status, praise, or happiness of this world. Whenever you are pleased by wealth, status, praise, or happiness, disappointment will surely follow. Because these things are all impermanent, the deterioration of wealth, the deterioration of status, criticism, and suffering are bound to occur. You must constantly train your mind to be clean at all times. Don’t allow preoccupations of love, preoccupations of hatred, or preoccupations of contentment or discontentment to take root in your mind. You must constantly train your mindful wisdom (sati-paññā) in order to look after your mind at all times.”*

During my stay at that temple, I would constantly sit and contemplate on the coconut tree. Each day, I did this no less than three times. Each day, I had a topic to think about. I gained many Dhamma metaphors from this coconut tree. It was a great reminder. The coconut tree lives on. Although the trunk grew a bit taller, I can guarantee that it will not fruit. When this coconut tree dies, it will die without having fruited. Practicing mental development (bhāvanā-

paṭipatti) is the same way. The coconut tree is barren of fruit just like the hardened, apathetic mind is barren of the opportunity to attain the path and fruit of enlightenment in this lifetime. An apathetic mind (citta) is a barren mind (citta). There's the old adage about the old fire grate—that despite the iron having been of good quality, if it has been at the bottom of a charcoal burner for too long, that quality will have deteriorated. You can't take that iron and make it into a knife, an ax, or a spade. It cannot be put to use. The same goes for the citta. If you train the citta to be hard and apathetic, then it will be barren just like the old fire grate at the bottom of the charcoal burner. Even if you possess the perfections of character (pāramī) that could enable you to attain the path and fruit of enlightenment in this lifetime, you will be immediately disqualified. There will be no knowing or awakening of Dhamma in any way, shape, or form.

Thus, in practicing mental development, one must train the citta to be constantly awake and alert. This means training the citta to have true understanding and training the citta to have true realization of the truth of reality at all times. If the citta is frequently trained to be asleep in meditative tranquility, the citta will develop symptoms of apathy; the citta will be barren. If the citta is constantly asleep, it will not have a comprehensive understanding of the ultimate truth (sacca-dhamma). Without realizing it, the citta will become attached to happiness and attached to the bliss found in the state of calm. The citta must be trained to be steadfastly focused in wisdom (paññā) at all times. Don't train the citta in delusion (moha) or ignorance (avijjā), because normally, both delusion and ignorance already reside in the mind. Wisdom must be used to train the mind to awaken from this delusion. Constantly come up with Dhamma metaphors to teach the mind, so that the citta will be smart and comprehensive in understanding

reality as it truly exists at all times. Thus, problems will be able to be solved.



## **Eighth Vassa, 1968**

When the rains retreat (vassa) and Kathina at Wat Santikawat were over, I took my leave of Luang Pu Boonchan and went on dhutaṅga, as usual. I returned to spend the vassa at Wat Tham Klong Phen, Non Than sub-district, Nong Wua So district, Udon Thani province. There were many monks and novices (sāmañera) spending the vassa at this temple. Going to this temple compelled me to behave like a Neanderthal so that no one would be able to discern my personality. Whatever foolishness I possessed would be put on full display. That year, Venerable Ācariya Juan Kulajetṭho also spent the vassa at the temple. After arriving at the temple, I went in to pledge myself a devoted student of Luang Pu Khao. He was friendly and bright by nature and was especially benevolent and kind toward me. He asked me, "Where are you coming from?"

I answered, "I am coming from Wat Pa Santikawat of Luang Pu Boonchan, Chai Wan sub-district."

Luang Pu then asked, "Where did you ordain?"

I replied, "I ordained at Wat Photisomporn in Udon Thani. Luang Pu Chao Khun Dhammadchedi was my preceptor (upajjhāya), sir."

Luang Pu smiled and said, "Mm. You ordained under the same preceptor as I did." He asked where my home was, and I told him



everything. Then he questioned me about various aspects and methods of my practice. I related to him the main parts. After he heard it all, he said, "Good. That's correct." Then he said, "Use wisdom (paññā) to contemplate a lot. Whatever you see, contemplate it in terms of the Three Common Characteristics (tilakkhaṇa). Only wisdom can engender profound understanding and clear realization of the ultimate truth (sacca-dhamma) because wisdom serves as the bright light for the mind. When the mind is shrouded in darkness and cannot see, you will not know or see the truth of reality in any way. If wisdom is used to teach the mind frequently, the mind will become smart and comprehensive in its understanding of reality. It will know and see that everything merely arises, persists momentarily, and decays—that's all. Use wisdom to contemplate often.

"With each day that passes, with each night that passes, our lives pass as well. Do you know and see yet what you will have gained from this life? Do not be reckless with your life. You may die any day or any month. Consider yourself fortunate to be alive right now. If you were unfortunate, you might have died a long time ago. Right now, life is merely breathing in and breathing out. If you breathe in but don't breathe out, or if you breathe out but don't breathe in, gone are the rights to this life, and gone are the opportunities to cultivate any more virtue. Thus, don't be one who is reckless in life." Thereafter, I prostrated, took my leave of Luang Pu, and headed to the monk hut (kuṭī). I used the Dhamma teachings (upāya) that Luang Pu taught me as models in my subsequent practice.

There were many elder monks (thera) spending the rains retreat at the temple. Each monk was prominent and had a great number of company (parisā) and followers that visited. A wealth of cane sugar juice, palm juice, Pepsi, Cola, and other beverages filled the kuṭis. I

also came to rely on the monks' bounty for nourishment. As the elder monks taught people how to contemplate (*bhāvanā*) and practice (*paṭipatti*), I could see that each elder had his own unique strengths. Each elder's Dhamma teachings showcased his particular style and techniques. The knowledge I gained from the elder monks was a fortunate byproduct. The Dhamma models that lacked reason, I would let pass. The Dhamma that contained enough reason to be believed, I would apply in my practice thereafter. I wasn't opposed to anyone and didn't argue with anyone about Dhamma. My only charge was to listen. If anyone wanted to say that Venerable Thoon was a fool, I didn't care. I just didn't want to have problems with anybody. My strategy was to always be humble and respectful.



## A Vision of the Three Assassins

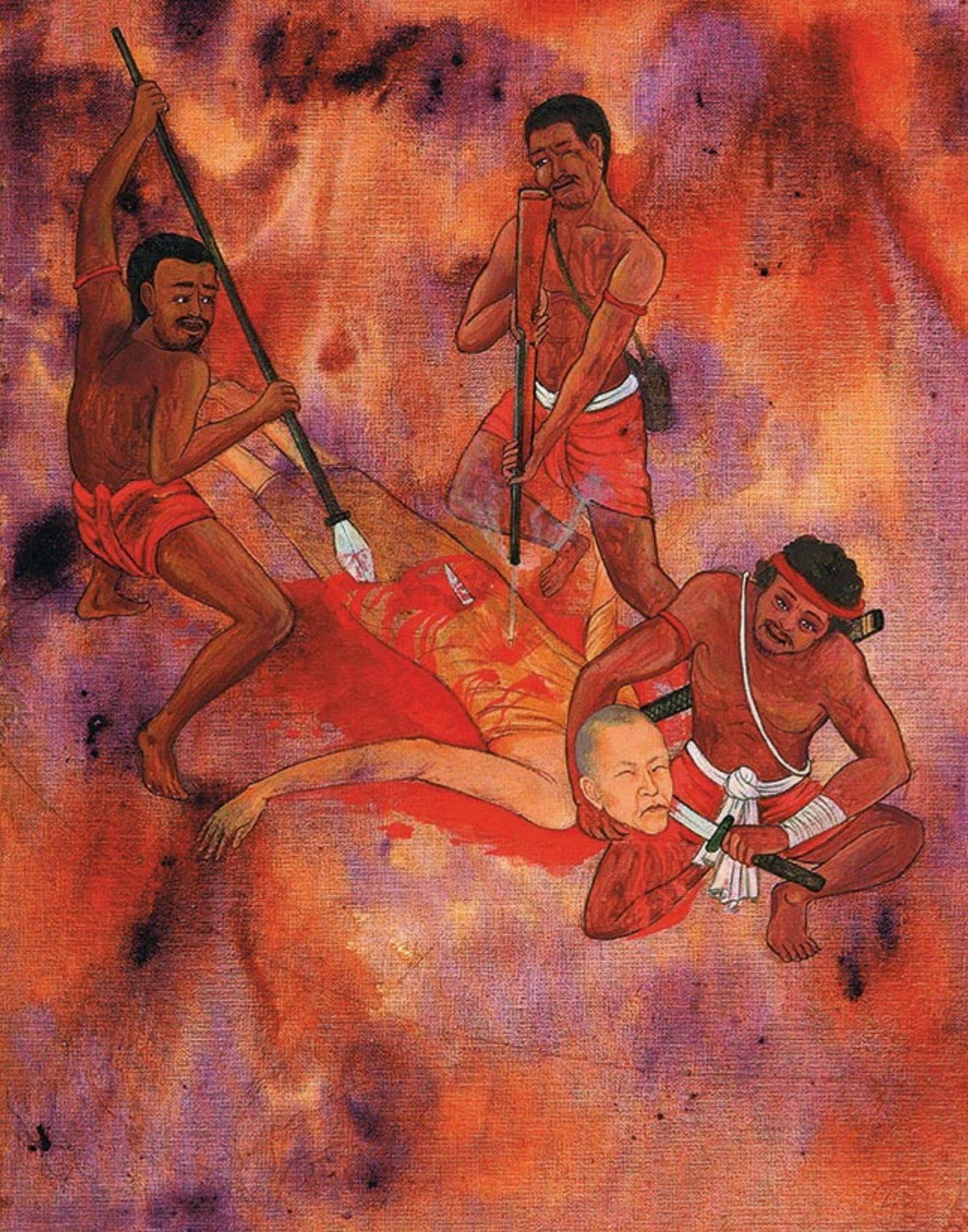
One night, as my mind (citta) settled into a calm meditative state, I experienced a vision (nimitta). While I was sitting in the monk hut (kuti), I heard the voices of three people in conversation. I could clearly hear, “Venerable Thoon is staying in a kuṭi around here. Or is he in this kuṭi?” One of them said, “He must definitely be in this kuṭi because there is no other kuṭi nearby.” That moment, I peered out of the kuṭi and saw three burly, muscular men. They were armed with a gun, a spear, and a sword. I heard them saying, “One person, go up to the kuṭi. Two people, wait down below. Once he leaps down, make sure he’s cut to pieces.” I thought to myself, *“Who are these three men? Why would they want to kill me? I have never done anything to anyone before.”* Then, I thought of Venerable Mahā Moggallāna. When the bandits were hunting him down to kill him, he had flown away, but ultimately he could not escape. In the end, the bandits killed him. And he was already fully enlightened (arahant) at that time. I wasn’t even an arahant yet. If they killed me now, my chances of becoming an arahant in this lifetime would have been extinguished. I should fly away first. I shall not let the three men kill me.

I gathered my strength and steeled myself. If they came in to kill me now, I would not let them capture me. I would immediately fly out the window. Finally, one of them came up to the kuṭi holding

a weapon. He opened the door and saw me sitting in the kuṭī. He shouted, “He really is here in the kuṭī! Get ready. If he jumps out the window, hurry and stab him dead right away.” That instant, they lunged in to capture me. Things weren’t looking good, so I flew out the window. They said to each other, “He escaped by flying away. Let us hunt him down. Chase after him. Don’t let him out of your sight. When he runs out of strength, he’ll fall back down.”

As I was flying, I could see the three men on the ground running after me. They were running really fast. However fast I flew, they ran just as fast. They told one another, “Don’t let your guard down. If he gets away, it will be difficult to hunt him down and kill him.” I kept flying onward. I reached a vast, empty field. There was not a single tree standing there that I could rely on. That moment, I realized that I was exhausted. I didn’t have the strength to fly anymore. I tried to jerk my body upward, but couldn’t because my energy was diminishing. Each time, the three men exclaimed, “He’s running out of energy to keep flying. He’s about to drop to the ground.” They told each other, “Don’t let him hit the ground.” One wrapped his arms around my legs, another wrapped his arms around my waist, while the other wrapped his arms around my neck. They asked each other, “Where should we kill him?” One said, “Take him to the middle of the field and kill him.” While they were carrying me off, I was injected with hope from thinking, *“These three men who are to kill me will only be able to kill my body, they cannot kill my mind.”* That moment, the three men jeered, “You bastard. You thought you could escape us, and now you aren’t going anywhere. You are going to die at our hands.” At that moment, I wasn’t the least bit afraid.

The trio hauled me off to the middle of the vast, empty field. They laid my body face down and used their gun to shoot me in the



middle of the back. Bullets penetrated the ground with a *pop, pop* sound. I don't know how many bullets they shot off. The sound was thunderous. Another man impaled me with his spear; it went straight through my leg and stuck into the ground. The other man said, "I'm afraid he isn't completely dead," and unsheathed his arms-length sword. With one hand, he lifted my side. With the other hand, he inserted the sword into the hollow of my neck and out through my rear end. Then he grabbed the sword and rocked it back and forth many times. Blood saturated the ground.

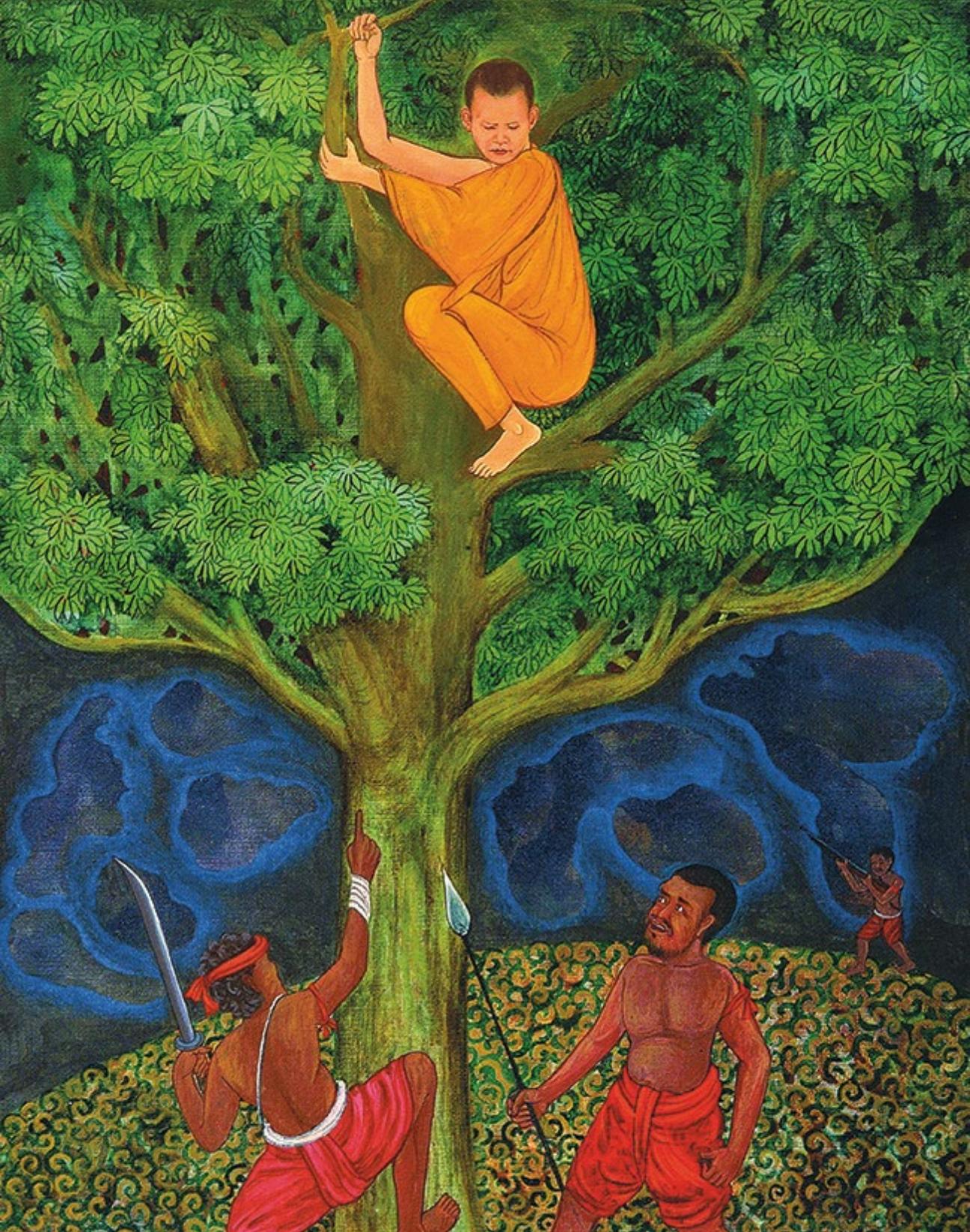
I still had enough strength to constantly think, "*The three of you may have killed me, but you only killed my body. You cannot kill my mind at all.*" I realized that if I kept showing them my strength, they would keep at it. Why do that? It is better to play dead so they think I've already died. So I acted dead. I bulged my eyes, held my breath, and kept my breathing to a minimum. Once they saw me in this state, one of them said, "He's dead already. He won't come back to life. Leave his corpse here." Then, they removed the sword from the hollow of my neck and the spear from the upper part of my leg, and went on their way. I peered sideways at them as they walked away.

Once they entered the forest, I made an asseveration of truth (*adhiṭṭhāna*), "*If I am to contemplate and practice (*bhāvanā-paṭipatti*) until I am free of suffering in this lifetime, then may all the wounds on my body disappear and revert back to normal.*" Instantly, all the wounds vanished. My body returned to being strong, as usual. Then, I stood up and ran the opposite direction into the woods, thinking that I would not let the three men catch sight of me again.

As I entered the forest, I encountered my mother sitting there, waiting. My mother said, "Take good care of yourself, son. Don't fall for their tricks again. Endeavor to evade those three men."

As my mother instructed me, the three men ran up yelling, "We thought you had died, and here you've come back to life. Let's catch him and kill him again!" and they ran to capture me. I leapt and flew up to the top of a tall tree. They ordered me to come down, but I didn't. One of them was climbing the tree. I flew away again. This time, I hid in the tips of a rubber tree. In the middle of the forest, there were tall and large trees. The three men managed to catch up to me. One of them climbed up after me, and I flew away once more. This time, I soared very high, so high that I ended up above the clouds. I assumed that the three men would lose their way and be unable to track me, so I flew back down to take refuge in a huge rosewood tree. I thought the trio would surely be unable to catch up, but they drew near again. One of them climbed up after me, and I flew away again. This time, I landed in the middle of an enormous field, so vast and expansive that it extended as far as my eyes could see. This last flight had sapped all of my energy. I wouldn't be doing any more flying. In the expansive field, there was an ebony tree that stood around five meters tall, and had grown out of a termite hill in the middle of the field. There was only one of these trees, and it was just enough to take refuge and recharge my strength.

I was exhausted at that point. I was no longer able to fly. That's why I flew down to take refuge in the ebony tree. I thought to myself, "*If those three men catch up to me, do I have some plan to prevent them from killing me again? Because this is the final place.*" At that moment, the gang approached while running, but this time, there were only two of them. I don't know where the other one disappeared to. They threatened, "If you don't come down from that ebony tree, we will climb up there and stab you dead with the sword this very instant." They seemed to mean it, too.



I devised a plan. I had to act submissively and make them promise to be my friends so that they would not kill me. I told them, “If I climb down from the ebony tree, will the two of you agree to be my friends?” Once they had agreed and promised that they would not kill me again, I descended the ebony tree. I put on a performance, going in to hug them and treating them like friends. I walked on a bit. But I had a scheme within a scheme. I employed the tactic of telling my friends, “My friends, there are two of you, and you are even armed with a sword. If my friends were to kill me, I would certainly die. For the sake of assurance, would it be alright if I carry my friend’s sword?” They acquiesced and handed the sword over to me.

Once my fingers wrapped around the sword hilt, I devised a plan to kill my friends with that very same sword. This way, my enemies would finally be eliminated. I told my two friends, “You guys, go ahead,” plotting, *“Now that the sword is in my hand, I am going to stab my two friends dead at this very moment.”* Once I had formulated my plan, I had them lead the way. Once they walked on, I firmly gripped the sword with both hands, raised it up with every ounce of strength I had, and struck down with all my might. The instant I cut my friend, the mind (*citta*) disengaged from the meditative state. At that moment, it all felt so real.

I applied wisdom to review and analyze the nimitta in order to determine how it all related to me. I deduced that the three men represented the defilements (*kilesa*), desires (*taṇhā*), and delusions (*avijjā*) with which I have long been enamored. They are hunting me down to kill me because I am trying to find a way to distance myself from them. The spear, sword, and gun represent greed, anger, and delusion in the reckless, heedless mind that is carried away with the world’s currents and is born and dies without end. Thus, the Pāli

adage, “*Lobho dhammānam paripantho*,” greed is a danger to Dhamma; “*Lābho sakkāro kāpurisam hanti*,” wealth and status will kill unsuspecting fools. Thus, greed, anger, and delusion are major problems within the mind. One must train one’s wisdom to fix these problems in order to eliminate them from the mind. Otherwise, the mind will continue to experience suffering in the world for an eternity.

My mother symbolized *hiri*, or shame in one’s evil thoughts, evil words, or evil actions, and *ottappa*, or fear of the ramifications of one’s immoral deeds. It is said, “*Dhammo have rakkhati dhammadcārim*,” one who safeguards Dhamma will be safeguarded by Dhamma and will not decline but will always prosper. The large tree that I used was a representation of the merit and wholesomeness (*puñña-kusala*) that I have already cultivated. It is a momentary refuge, because once the merit and wholesomeness have been used up, demerit (*pāpa*) catches right up. Flying above the clouds represents heaven (*sagga*) where one goes to for a short respite, and then soon after is reborn in the human realm once again. The ebony tree symbolized the five aggregates (*pañca-khandha*) upon which the mind relies. The two men signified *tañhā*, or desires that are endless, immeasurable, boundless, limitless, and insatiable; and *avijjā*, or being in the dark, blind, and shrouded from the truth, which engenders wrong understanding and delusion. Both not knowing according to the truth and having lost your way from the truth leads to wrong understanding. This is called *micchā-ditṭhi*—having wrong views and wrong understandings. It’s thinking that something bad is something good, thinking that something wrong is something right, seeing suffering as happiness. In other words, “seeing the wheel as a lotus flower” or seeing evil as good.



## The Sword Is Saṅkhāra, My Enemy's Weapon

A distinction must be made between my enemy and the sword. My enemy represented mental intoxications (*āsava*) and defilements (*kilesas*) and the various desires (*taṇhā*) that cause the mind to suffer in myriad ways. The sword symbolized my enemy's thinking, or in other words, *saṅkhāra*—mental formations or volitional thought. This *saṅkhāra* is employed for the direct purpose of satisfying defilements and desires. Call it the advertiser—it communicates on behalf of all defilements and desires. It would not be wrong to call it a world-class public relations department. When the mind strays in the wrong direction and *micchā-diṭṭhi*—wrong views and wrong understandings—arise, it is because of these volitional thoughts (*saṅkhāra*). When the mind lacks mindful wisdom (*sati-paññā*), when the mind isn't smart and comprehensive in its knowledge, delusion arises. This *saṅkhāra* is what creates the advertising image that invites the mind to see things accordingly. *Saṅkhāra* holds incredible influence. It is an agency that is very effective in satisfying defilements and desires. It is the news reporter that takes various information from defilements and desires and creates storylines to deceive the mind. The stories that *saṅkhāra* composes have two main themes:

1. *iṭṭhārammaṇa*, or pleasing preoccupations (*ārammaṇa*), and
2. *aniṭṭhārammaṇa*, or displeasing preoccupations (*ārammaṇa*).

For the most part, saṅkhāra uses pleasing preoccupations to create advertisements. It sources beautiful things to set the stage and describes the properties with exquisiteness, fragrance, and sweetness, so that the mind will become enchanted and swept away without even realizing it. If it were a master of illusion, it would be a world class professional master of illusion. The mind that lacks wisdom (paññā) and comprehensive understanding of saṅkhāra's illusions will find itself spellbound and in the dark. The tool saṅkhāra employs in fooling the mind to see according to its illusions is constructs (sammuti). Volitional thoughts without constructs are non-functioning volitional thoughts. Constructs without volitional thoughts are worthless constructs. It's like having a sword but not knowing how to use it, or knowing how to use a sword but not having one—it's fruitless. Similarly, if you have volitional thoughts but don't have constructs to use in the thinking, or if you have constructs to use in the thinking but don't have volitional thoughts, nothing will happen. If you have a pen but don't have paper on which to write, or if you have paper on which to write but don't have a pen, nothing will get written. Thus, if you have saṅkhāra but don't have sammuti for saṅkhāra to use, or you have sammuti but don't have saṅkhāra to use the sammuti, nothing happens. Thus, volitional thoughts (saṅkhāra) and constructs (sammuti) are a pair; they are interrelated.

Thus, the sword can be beneficial or detrimental. It is up to the person who uses it. Whatever side the sword falls into, that side will win. If the sword falls into the hands of the police, the criminal will lose. If the sword falls into the hands of the criminal, the police will lose. Likewise, if thoughts are on the side of defilements and desires, wisdom will lose. If thoughts are on the side of mindful wisdom, defilements and desires will lose. Thus, who will lose or who will win

is contingent on the sword. And right now, the sword is with the enemy. What method will you employ to dupe the enemy into relinquishing the sword? If you are smart and have a good plan, you will trick the thoughts that have supported volitional thinking (*saṅkhāra*) to come back to contemplating with mindful wisdom (*sati-paññā*). It isn't difficult at all. One should understand that if volitional thoughts (*saṅkhāra*) don't have thoughts to support them, *saṅkhāra* won't be able to produce anything. Wisdom (*paññā*) is the same way. Without thoughts, using wisdom to contemplate something will be equally fruitless.

Therefore, thoughts are an important variable. If the mind frequently directs thoughts to follow the path of defilements and desires, the mind will conform to defilements and desires. Similarly, if the mind frequently thinks in terms of Dhamma, the mind will gradually conform to the path of Dhamma. When thoughts are led to the territory of defilements and desires, they will definitely generate wrong views (*micchā-ditṭhi*) within the mind. We must come up with a new policy on thinking. When contemplating on something, it must always correspond to the principles of reality. Train the mind to become accustomed to the universal truth (*sacca-dhamma*). Since the distant past, the mind has been steeped in wrong views according to volitional thoughts (*saṅkhāra*) based in defilements and desires. You must change your attitude, change your way of thinking. When contemplating on something, it must always correspond to the Three Common Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*) of impermanence (*aniccam*), suffering (*dukkham*), and not-self (*anattā*). The mind must know and see according to the truth frequently, and it will gradually change from wrong views (*micchā-ditṭhi*) back to right views (*sammā-ditṭhi*). Because the mind has lost its way from the truth for quite some time

now, it's necessary to train the mind and teach the mind to know and see the truth more often and to find a way to know and see the suffering (dukkha), harmful consequences (dosa), and future perils (bhaya) inherent in volitional thoughts (saṅkhāra) of conventional reality (sammuti). The mind must know and see each construct clearly and train thoughts in wisdom (paññā) to be superior to thoughts in volitional thinking (saṅkhāra). The mind will decide for itself what is an illusion and what is true.

The norm thus far has been for thoughts on the saṅkhāra side to cover up the truth. That which is pleasing or beautiful is used to mask that which is filthy. That which is fragrant is used to mask that which smells foul. That which is sensually pleasing (kāma-guṇa) is used to mask suffering. That which is impermanent or uncertain masquerades as that which is certain in the mind. That which is a solid (ghana) self (attā) is used to mask that which is not-self (anattā). That which is not ours proclaims itself to be that which is ours in the mind. That which is not meaningful masquerades as meaningful in the mind. Because the mind has been fooled by saṅkhāra's masking of the truth for so long, it has subscribed to saṅkhāra's wrong views (micchā-diṭṭhi) the entire time.

Now, mindful wisdom (sati-paññā) has received accurate information from the Buddha's teachings and will use it to prove the truth. Wherever saṅkhāra's thoughts obscure the truth, there paññā's thoughts will reveal the truth. Saṅkhāra's thoughts attempt to conceal constructs (sammuti), but paññā's thoughts will find a way to reveal the truth of sammuti. We'll see whether saṅkhāra's thoughts or paññā's thoughts will have superior strength. If there are few paññā thoughts and many saṅkhāra thoughts, we will be the loser once more. If there are many paññā thoughts, sammuti can be exposed so that the mind

knows and sees all sammuti clearly. This is called *ñāṇa-dassana*, knowing the truth and seeing the truth of a particular sammuti; or *dassana-ñāṇa*, seeing the truth and knowing the truth about various sammuti. Once the mind knows and sees the truth about sammuti, the mind will let go of sammuti on its own. The term *moha*, or delusion, is the mind that is deluded by sammuti. *Avijjā*, or ignorance, is ignorance of these sammuti.

The sword is *saṅkhāra* thoughts. With a good method (*upāya*) on hand, whenever these thoughts can be tricked into returning to *paññā*'s side, *saṅkhāra* will be without a weapon with which to combat *paññā*. This is *paññāvudha*. The weapon (*āvudha*), which is wisdom (*paññā*), is the same way. When the mind has strong wisdom, it is said that wisdom is the mind's eye or wisdom is the mind's bright light. Whenever the mind is illuminated by wisdom, it's called, "natthi *paññā samā ābhā*," there is no light like wisdom. Within these Three Realms, there are no constructs (sammuti) that are secret or that can elude or hide from wisdom. Thus, "natthi loke raho nāma," there are no secrets in the world. Wisdom will surveille, search out, and know and see according to the entire truth of reality—that all constructs (sammuti) are subject to the Three Common Characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*).

Ghana is something solid or a clump of something. Wisdom will destroy *ghana*, scattering it into smaller pieces. There is no self (*attā*) or sense of self in any way. Since there is no self, there is no us, and there is no them. The term "self-belongings" is meaningless. Everything is merely a construct (sammuti) to be relied on temporarily. In the coming days, months, or years, it will disintegrate according to its natural properties. This is wisdom that is comprehensive and aligned with the universal truth (*sacca-dhamma*).

In order to correctly interpret a vision (nimitta), it must be your own nimitta. All nimittas—regardless of dream (supina-nimitta) or visualized image (uggaha-nimitta)—that occur to someone will be worthless if that individual doesn't have strong wisdom and comprehensive discernment. Once the nimitta happens, it will merely become a story to tell, or it may be interpreted in a different way that lends no Dhamma benefit. For example, a nimitta of lying in a ditch or a well, or immersed in something filthy, is interpreted as being down on one's luck or having bad fortune, which then necessitates getting a soothsayer to perform a ceremony to change one's bad luck and improve one's destiny. A nimitta about being chased by a tiger or constricted by a snake is taken as a bad sign or as the possibility of impending danger. Consequently, one suffers anxiety and is constantly wary. A nimitta where one sees a beautiful palace and suspects oneself of living there is interpreted as one's having ample merit and wholesomeness (puñña-kusala). Consequently, one feels happy and is constantly beaming and smiling.

Thus, nimittas can be interpreted many ways. They can be interpreted according to worldly themes or they can be interpreted according to Dhamma themes. If a nimitta occurs to a practitioner of mental cultivation who possesses strong wisdom, that person will be capable of interpreting the nimitta in correct Dhamma themes. That nimitta will be beneficial and an effective method of solving problems. “Nimitta” is translated as mark, sign, or symbol—it is a sign that something will be a certain way. Practitioners must only interpret the nimitta in terms of Dhamma, just like I did in the aforementioned example. If you were to follow my example, that would be good.

I was greatly energized in my practice during the vassa I spent at Wat Tham Klong Phen. One day, I went and consulted Luang Pu Khao about the characteristics of a proper place to practice. What kind of place would be conducive to mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*)? Luang Pu described various places that were favorable to mental cultivation and practice. Each location was one in which he had personally practiced in the past. He told me, “Each of those places were good. But for this era, the best place to practice mental cultivation is the North. This is because in the North, there aren’t as many people to visit you or bother you like in the Northeast. They put rice and food into your alms bowl and that’s it. They don’t come and pester you to give them lottery numbers like back home. Each day and each night, your practice will have continuity. It won’t be broken up or disjointed. Wherever you are walking, sitting, or lying down, you aren’t preoccupied with people coming to visit.

“As for our region, there are so many people who play the government lottery and underground lottery. Wherever you go to practice, there will be people asking for lotto numbers. It’s chaotic. They ask for two numbers or three numbers.<sup>33</sup> They ask to hear your nimittas or dreams. You tell them you didn’t dream, and they still force you to have dreamt something. Sometimes, they come and observe your movements. You use your hand to scratch your head or use your hand to grab something, and they decode all of it as lotto numbers. Or if you are speaking on a Dhamma theme, instructing them how to observe the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*) or Eight Precepts (*attha-sīla*), they interpret it as lotto numbers. Sometimes, it’s a match with the actual lottery numbers, so rumors spread that this teacher (*ācariya*) is accurate at giving hints for the lottery. And then throngs

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<sup>33</sup> The Thai lottery has prizes for matching two digits, three digits, and six digits.

of people swarm you, bringing with them plenty of sweet and savory foods, beverages, and confections. If an ācariya ever led people to winning money, his temple is packed during the middle or end of the month.<sup>34</sup> Some people observe his words and others his movements despite the ācariya himself having no intention of portending any lotto numbers. Some count his footsteps and play that number. Others count the number of bites of food he takes and play that number.

“So, the best thing to do is to go to the North to practice. You’ll have time to accelerate your mental cultivation and practice to its fullest.”

I asked him, “Luang Pu, in what province do you think it would be best for me to practice?”

Luang Pu said, “Go practice mental cultivation in the Chiang Rai region. Stick to the rural areas, far from noise and disruptions. Your mind (citta) will readily attain steadfastly focused concentration (samādhi). Your wisdom contemplations will be continuous. There will be solitude for the body and solitude for the citta. You will know and see the universal truth (sacca-dhamma) according to the truth of reality in a clear and illuminating manner.”

After hearing what Luang Pu Khao had to say, I wanted to head out within the next day or two. I had initially expected Luang Pu Khao to tell me to practice in Chiang Mai province, as he had awakened to the ultimate Dhamma in Phrao district, Chiang Mai province. But I believed Luang Pu’s words. He directed me to Chiang Rai province. It was like he had already contemplated it. I would certainly come to know and see the ultimate truth (sacca-dhamma) in the Chiang Rai region within the near future.

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<sup>34</sup> Lottery numbers are drawn on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of the month.

This was another kind of desire (*taṇhā*), but it was a desire toward good. It was a desire to break free. This kind of desire, once used beneficially, is a great source of motivation to practice. Thus, “*taṇhāya tarati ogham*,” one crosses the stream of the world by desire. There are two types of desire—worldly desire and Dhamma desire. Worldly desire is desire that follows the stream of the world. Though one feels happy, it is happiness streaked with tears of suffering. There is no pure happiness to be found. But people still greatly delight in and strongly crave for this kind of desire.

As for the other type of desire, it is a desire for good. Examples of this kind of desire include a desire to pay tribute to the Buddha and do chanting, a desire to make merit and give charity, a desire to observe the precepts, a desire to practice mental cultivation (*bhāvanā-paṭipatti*), a desire to eliminate all mental intoxications (*āsava*) from the mind, or a desire to break free and enter the path and fruit of enlightenment (*magga-phala-nibbāna*). These kinds of desires are the desires of the wise and should be encouraged to grow and thrive within each of us. This is because these desires are that which the wise condone and need. In a community of practitioners of mental cultivation, these types of desires are vital and sought after.

Thus, practitioners must be able to distinguish between the different kinds of desire. Otherwise, wrong understanding may arise. This is due to hearing many teachers of mental cultivation teach, “Eliminate all desire (*taṇhā*). No desires are to remain within the mind. Nothing is to be acted upon if desire is its cause.” This is not understanding desire (*taṇhā*). Saying, “Doing good is not desired, doing bad is not desired,” steers one away from realistic attainment of the goal. Normally, the wise laud the cultivation of good and virtue and teach abstinence from evil. Even the enlightened (arahant) don’t

have that protocol. This is because desire (*taṇhā*) doesn't exist within their minds at all, so even if the arahants do good by whatever means, it is merely an outward action (*kiriyā*)—they aren't expecting a specific result from that good action.

This is what happens when commoners (*puthujjana*) try to impersonate the enlightened (arahant). It is absolutely wrong. This is because in the beginning stages when one is cultivating virtues and perfections of character (*pāramī*), there must be desire (*taṇhā*) leading the way. Only, it must be the kind of desire (*taṇhā*) that is for good. For example, before our Buddha became enlightened and became the Buddha, he had desire (*taṇhā*). That is, the desire to become a Buddha. He cultivated *pāramī* and mentally told himself that he wanted to be a Buddha for nine incalculable aeons (*asaṅkheyya*). He verbally expressed his desire to be a Buddha for seven *asaṅkheyya*. Then, he received the prophecy (*vyākaraṇa*) from Dīparakṣa Buddha that he would become a Buddha one day in the future. From that moment until now was four *asaṅkheyya*. In total, the Buddha cultivated *pāramī* for as long as twenty *asaṅkheyya*. The cultivation of his *pāramī* hinged on desire (*taṇhā*).

So, if you teach people to shed desire (*taṇhā*), where would they get the motivation to do good in the beginning stages? It is normal for commoners (*puthujjana*) who are still searching to have desires, such as the desire for a good teacher, the desire to listen to the teacher's Dhamma, or the desire to practice Dhamma until actual results are achieved. Thus, desire is the foundation for continuing to cultivate virtue. It's not that there shouldn't be any desires whatsoever. Rather, there must be a wise method of protecting against evil desires. Be comprehensively wise in the methods of encouraging the desires for good to sprout within the mind so that there is encouragement to

cultivate the merit and wholesomeness (puñña-kusala) which will support the journey to the path and fruit of enlightenment (magga-phala-nibbāna).

The same applies to faith or conviction (saddhā). Many people don't understand it. This is because normally, people innately possess beliefs. In which direction those beliefs are applied is contingent on each person's views. If someone possesses strong wisdom and reason, they will not decide to believe in that which is irrational or senseless. They would take what they heard and analyze its rationality before deciding to believe it. Or if they read a book or manual, they would have to use wisdom to discern whether or not that manual's Dhamma is of sound reason and whether or not it can be trusted. Reason must be used as the deciding factor. If there is reason to support it, then believe it. If that information is contrary to reason, then don't believe it. This is called saddhā-ñāṇa-sampayutta, which means contemplating with wisdom and finding it reasonable before believing. Only then can it be called the faith of the wise.

As for the beliefs of those lacking wisdom, they will believe in things that lack reason. They believe whatever they hear or they believe the entirety of whatever book they've read. They don't contemplate or consider the reason at all. This is called saddhā-ñāṇa-vippayutta, which means those who believe senselessly. If someone says it's right, they also say it's right. If someone says it's wrong, they also say it's wrong. If someone is like this, they will not have a foundation for themselves to rely upon and will not be able to be a leader to others in any way.

The Buddha taught us to have strong conviction chiefly in our own rationality, and to have principles and beliefs of our own that

are grounded in reason. Then, we will firmly be our own refuge. We must train ourselves to be steadfast, to not be easily swayed by rumors. We must not be like a stick in the sand or a stick in the mud, leaning whichever way the wind blows. Otherwise, we will unwittingly become someone who believes whatever they hear, just like the Kālāmas.<sup>35</sup> The Kālāmas believed without reason, and without knowing what was right or wrong. Their faith was based on individuals.

For instance, if you believe too much in your teacher without considering what is right, regardless of whether your teacher teaches right or wrong, you believe it. The Buddha does not commend this kind of faith. If your teacher happens to be a bona fide holy individual (ariya-puggala), then it'll benefit you well. But if your teacher isn't a bona fide ariya-puggala, then it'll be quite risky. It could be wrong, it could be right. If your teacher is a commoner (puthujjana) but understands the correct methods of practice, then yours will correspondingly contain some correct elements. But if your teacher's methods (*upāya*) of practice are incorrect, then yours will correspondingly be incorrect.

How can you know if your teacher teaches correctly or incorrectly? The answer is that you should study and understand the Buddha's history. What does the Buddha say is wrong? What does the Buddha say is right? You will instantly know and understand. Thus, you must use the Buddha's history and the ariya-puggalas' histories as a basis. There are volumes of discourses (*sutta*) on the historical accounts of the ariya-puggalas. Once you have a clear understanding of the ariya-puggalas' histories, you will immediately be able to compare

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<sup>35</sup> The Kālāmas were a clan that the Buddha instructed in the Kālāma Sutta. In the discourse, the Buddha discourages fanaticism, bigotry, dogmatism, and intolerance, and encourages using wisdom and reason to analyze and form correct understandings.

and contrast those accounts with the present-day teachings of your teacher. You will know which teacher in this era teaches incorrectly or correctly. Otherwise, you will have a tendency to set your beliefs on the wind, completely lacking any stability. You will be unable to be held accountable for your beliefs, as you have trained yourself to be credulous, to vacillate, and to be senseless and irrational. You will never be able to rely on yourself, even up until the day you die. What's worse, these traits will remain with you in your future rebirths.



## **Luang Pu Khao's Personality**

Anyone who has been to pay respects to Luang Pu Khao in person will know his character well. Luang Pu Khao was immensely kind and benevolent (mettā). Those who meet him or pay respects to him never want to leave his side. Many people share the sentiment that they feel at peace when in his presence. Whenever someone has a problem, they will always come and ask Luang Pu for help. He was truly benevolent. His benevolence manifested physically in actions and demeanor that were always bright and friendly. He was magnanimous with everyone, regardless of wealthy status or impoverished status. He was equally kind to all. His benevolence manifested verbally in a tone of voice that was soft and gentle. His tone of voice didn't strike out at anyone, inflict pain, or leave bruises. Each Dhamma phrase contained immense value. The same Dhamma phrase when read from a manual or heard from another teacher made no impact. But when it came from Luang Pu Khao's mouth, it made a deep impact. The listener embraced the Dhamma and proceeded to apply those themes in their practice.

For instance, Luang Pu would say, "Do chanting every night before you sleep," and people would really do as he instructed. He would tell them to do sitting meditation (samādhi) while focusing on the parikamma phrase, "Buddho," and they would really go and

do that. Or he'd tell them to observe the Five Precepts with a pure mind and they would really do it. Whatever Dhamma he taught them, they'd embrace it and practice it according to their respective abilities. Luang Pu Khao's benevolence in actions and speech were a true reflection of the benevolence within his own pure heart. This benevolence was embedded in his movements in various postures (*iriyāpatha*). His gaze and facial expressions were amiable, cheerful, and always welcoming of his guests. Not once did some latent evil flare up in his physical or verbal actions (*kiriyā*). This peaceful coolness reaches into the depths of the hearts of those who have met him.

Every monk, novice (*sāmañera*), and layperson who listened to Luang Pu explain the Dhamma did so in attentive silence. They each grasped one or two of Luang Pu's Dhamma models (*upāya*). That Dhamma was of great value to that individual. Even if they had previously heard that same Dhamma from a different source, once they heard it from Luang Pu Khao, they felt a deeper appreciation for it. This was because the Dhamma had been filtered through Luang Pu's great benevolence. The Dhamma came from a teacher that they respected and believed in. That Dhamma carried great value. If you listen to Dhamma from a teacher that you do not respect, you will feel nonchalant about it. It practically doesn't have any significance. Luang Pu Khao was respected by the community. Although the Dhamma that Luang Pu explained was basic, common Dhamma, the listener considered it significant and deeply meaningful.

It's similar to when you receive something from royalty, from His Royal Highness the King or Her Royal Highness the Queen. Though that object may be ubiquitous, if you received it as a royal gift, that object is considered to be of immense value. You see it as auspicious and take very special care of it because it was given to you by someone

you respect. Likewise, those who had received the Dhamma or any object from Luang Pu Khao considered it to be highly auspicious. It is impossible to paint a picture that fully conveys Luang Pu Khao's grace and benevolence, so this is where I'll leave it.

The rains retreat (vassa) ended, and I told Luang Pu about my plans to practice mental cultivation in Chiang Rai province. Luang Pu gave a sermon on various themes and methods for practicing mental cultivation of which I was greatly appreciative. Then, I took my leave of Luang Pu and headed out to Ban Kut Tao to meet up with Phra Ācariya Khan and prepare requisites (parikkhāra) for our trip to Chiang Rai province. There were ten monks and sāmañeras traveling to Chiang Rai together: Phra Ācariya Khan, me, Phra Ācariya Wan, Phra Ācariya Charat, Phra Ācariya Rian, and five sāmaneras.

After we had prepared our requisites, we were ready to start trekking. Once we reached Chiang Rai, we rested in Ban Lao, Thung Ko sub-district, Wiang Chai district, Chiang Rai province. Phra Ācariya Khan stayed in Ban Lao, while the rest of us fanned out along the nearby villages in search of places to practice. I stayed in Ban Dong Wai. The villagers constructed a bamboo stretcher for me in February of 1969.

One night, there were strong gusts of wind and rain. The wind tore trees apart and sent their broken branches flying. The umbrella tent (klot) I slept in could not withstand the wind, so I didn't set up my klot that night. I gathered my necessary requisites, secured them in my alms bowl, and wrapped the klot around my body and the requisites. However, the rain still drenched everything. I had to sit there on the bamboo stretcher out in the rain, in the cold, the entire night. I was nesting under a large horse mango tree. The wind



pummeled the branches of the large mango tree and the tree lurched back and forth. I thought to myself, “*If the branches of this mango tree break, that is when my life will end,*” because there was nowhere else that I could go that night. It was pitch dark in that dense forest. I couldn’t see anything around me, and my flashlight was dim and nearly dead.

That night, I made a determination (adhitṭhāna), “*If I am to preserve the Buddhist religion for posterity, then may my life not come to an end at this time.*” That very moment, a large branch that had been swaying in the wind broke off and fell next to my bamboo stretcher. It was only one meter away from me. As I heard the sounds of the branch breaking, I focused my mind and thought, “*These are the final moments of my life, now.*” However, my life’s virtue dictated that it was not yet time to die, so I survived. After the wind and rain stopped, a colony of centipedes started swarming all over. They emerged to find food and crawled all over each other in every direction. Many came up to my stretcher. Many tucked themselves into my seat and tried to enter my upper robe. Many crept along my body, but I didn’t react. That entire night, I had to sit and practice mental cultivation in the bitter cold.

I thought back to the Buddha’s time. The monks who had journeyed on dhutaṅga to various places must have encountered what I did. They braved those obstacles, survived, and attained enlightenment and became arahants. I will also brave and fight through these obstacles. I was determined to relinquish my life for Buddhism. I would fight on until my life came to its end.

One night, as my mind (citta) entered a calm meditative state, I experienced a nimitta of rows and rows of coconut trees. Each row



contained four half-meter-tall trees. The first tree had large fruit overflowing and piled on the ground. The second tree was also a half meter tall, but it had about half the fruit of the first tree. The third tree was a half meter tall and contained only three fruits. The fourth tree was the same height but did not have any fruit, only leaves. The second row of coconut trees were one meter tall. The first tree was filled with fruit. The second tree was the same height but contained half the fruit of the first tree. The third tree was the same height but had only three fruits. The fourth tree was the same height but did not have any fruit, only leaves. The third row's trees were two meters tall. The fourth row's trees were four meters tall. The fifth row's trees were five meters tall. The coconut trees got progressively taller in levels. Each level and each row similarly contained four coconut trees with different amounts of fruit as previously described. The last row of coconut trees was forty meters tall and contained four trees just like the others. But these trees didn't have any leaves, just a stubby tree top jutting out to the sky. The first tree was filled with fruit. The second tree had half the fruit of the first tree. The third tree had three fruits. The fourth tree did not have any fruit at all.

In that same vision, there was a coconut tree that was filled with fruit. This tree stood eight feet tall. The trunk and the leaves appeared healthy and thriving. The knowledge arose that, "*This is my coconut tree.*" That very instant, it was as if I leapt up and hugged all of the coconuts. Then, my mind withdrew from the meditative state.

I used wisdom to analyze the nimitta and concluded that it pertained to practitioners and how the fruits of practice were not the same. I determined that it was like practitioners who started out at the same time, in the same era. The trees were the same height—one meter tall. But the amount of fruit on each coconut tree



differed. This indicated that the cultivated virtues and perfections of character (*pāramī*) of each of the four individuals was not the same. Though they began practicing at the same time, the degree of attention to and effort in each individual's practice differed. Consequently, the fruits of their practice in this lifetime were not equal.

The tree filled with coconut fruit represented one who had attained enlightenment and become an arahant. The second tree that contained half the fruit of the first tree represented one who had attained enlightenment and become a non-returner (*anāgāmī*). The third tree which contained sparse fruit represented one who had attained enlightenment and become a once-returner (*sakadāgāmī*) or a stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*). The fourth tree that did not contain any fruit represented perfections of character that were not yet mature at this time. If one was diligent and applied greater effort, one could see the fruit of practice in this lifetime like the others.

The coconut trees that got progressively taller by row represented how the same amount of time could go into practice but produce unequal amounts of fruit, just like with the first row of coconut trees. Each row of coconut trees that gradually got taller demonstrated this same concept. The coconut trees in the last row that were forty meters tall represented the age of a practitioner that was in its final (*pacchimavaya*) stages. The lack of branches signified not having any more years to live. The stubby tree top sticking out symbolized a life and body that had aged to its ultimate peak.

The trees having different amounts of fruit signified one person having attained enlightenment as an arahant, one person having attained enlightenment as an *anāgāmī*, one person having attained enlightenment as a *sakadāgāmī* or *sotāpanna*, and another not

having attained enlightenment at all in this lifetime. But if in a future life they get to be reborn into the era of the Metteyya Buddha,<sup>36</sup> they will be a part of attaining enlightenment and becoming a holy individual (ariya-puggala) of some level for sure.

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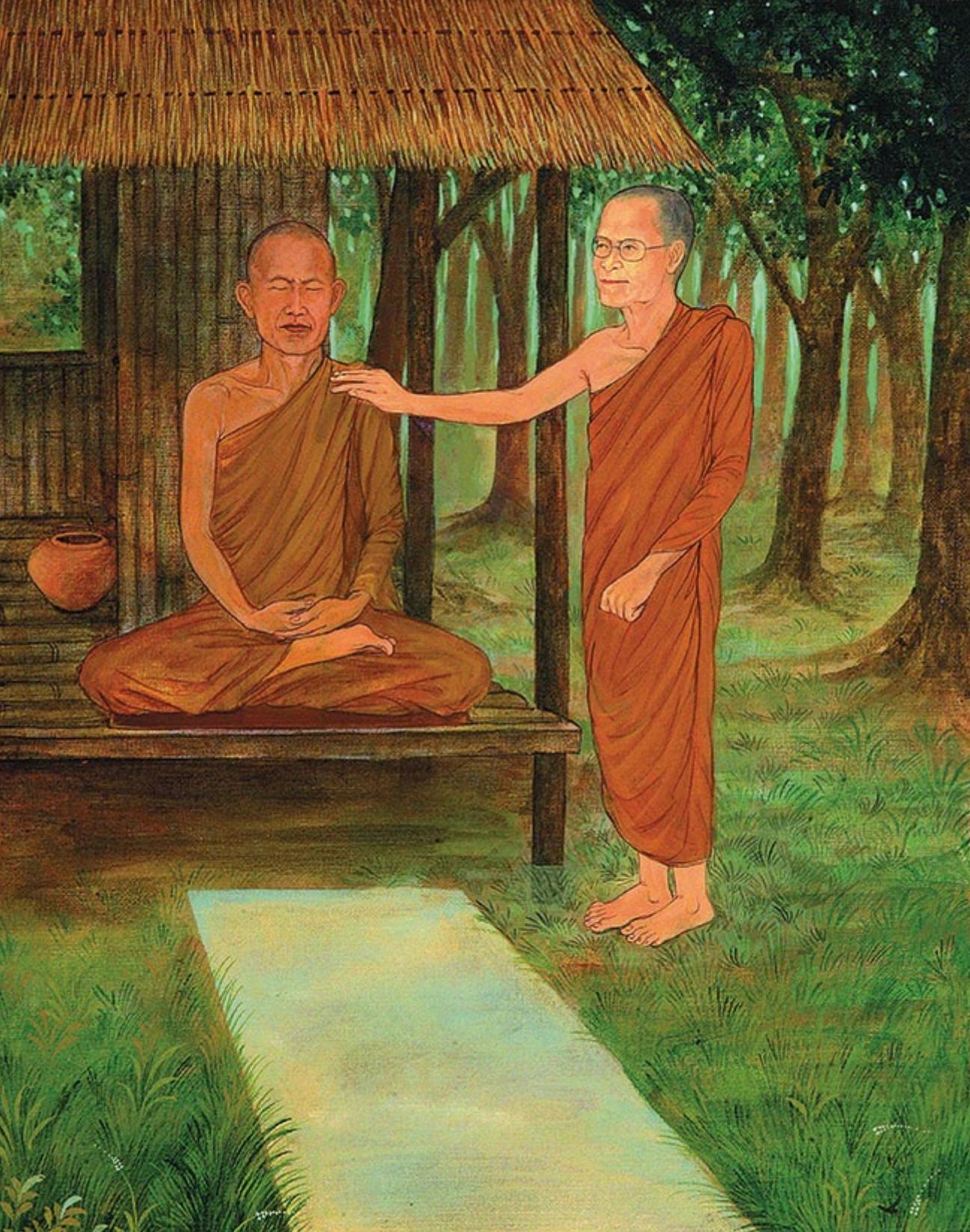
<sup>36</sup> Buddha Metteyya will be the fifth Buddha of this Buddha era. He will be born in the far future, during an era in which the human lifespan is 80,000 years.



## **Spending My Ninth Vassa at Pa Lun, 1969**

A few days later, the villagers of Pa Lun received news that I was residing and practicing in Ban Dong Wai. They came to see me and invited me to Pa Lun, and so I traveled to Ban Pa Lun, Pong Noi sub-district, Doi Luang district, Chiang Rai province. The location was an uncultivated forest densely populated by large trees of various species. The villagers came out and constructed a place for me to stay. They built a small hut with bamboo strip floors, bamboo poles, and a cogon grass thatch roof. One night, I had a vision (nimitta) of a visit from Luang Pu Khao. He placed his hand on my shoulder and said, "Not too long from now, that which you have set your mind to will come to fruition in this very place." That moment, there appeared a large, smooth path that directly led up to where I was sitting. Luang Pu Khao said, "You must walk along this path. Soon, you will reach the end of suffering."

Then, my mind (citta) withdrew from meditation. I thought about Luang Pu's words and how it could be possible, because at that moment, I didn't even have a Dhamma model (upāya) to give me confidence that I would finish. Each day that passed, my practice of mental cultivation progressed as usual. There was still no path out of suffering. The path I saw in the nimitta was just a nimitta. It couldn't be used to guarantee I would be free of suffering. But I was determined



to practice to my fullest ability in this lifetime. Whether or not I would be able to be successful, my breaths would decide. If my breath entered but didn't exit, or if my breath exited but didn't enter, that would be the determinant in the end. Whether I make it or not, this is all the time that I have.

While I am still breathing, my body is strong, my mindfulness and wisdom are sharp, and I am sufficiently able, I will focus on practicing mental cultivation to the fullest. My mindful wisdom constantly reminds me to not be reckless in life. Each day and night passes, and our lives also pass with time, with every minute. As of now, I haven't reached the end of suffering. I must hasten and accelerate my practice to full throttle. Pay no mind to that nimitta. Don't wait for the merit (*puñña*), karmic imprint (*vāsanā*), and virtues (*pāramī*) from past lives to catch up and lend support. I don't know how much *pāramī* I cultivated in past lives. Pay no mind to that *pāramī*. Right now, just practice mental cultivation to the fullest.

Every day, every night, and every moment is significant. Don't allow time to be wasted. I must find a way to use that time advantageously. I have been born in an era of Buddhism. I have already experienced the burdens of life. Now, I have come to know the path out of suffering that the Buddha has laid forth. This life is an opportunity, so I shouldn't conduct myself in a way that floats along the world's currents as in the past. The time we have in this life is limited. A few years in the future, we will pass away from this world, and we don't know if we are going to be born into Buddhism like in this lifetime. We have been born and died, been born and died, and cycled through many rebirths in this world for some time now, and we will continue to be born and die in future rebirths without knowing when it will ever end. As long as we still have the fuel of defilements

and desires leading us to be reborn, there will be no end to arising (jāti) and becoming (bhava). In this life, I am physically ready and mentally ready. I will pour everything I have into practicing with full effort. I will wager my life on it.

There were two monks residing together that rains retreat (vassa): me, Phra Ācariya Wan Pandito, and the novice (sāmanera) Sawai. The villagers said that that area was haunted by a lot of spooky ghosts. The natives didn't dare enter that zone to forage for food because ghosts had already caused many people to die. After practicing mental cultivation there for seven nights, one night as my citta reached full meditative calm, I heard a loud sound—like a mountain crumbling—coming from the bottom of the waterfall. It was around one hundred meters from where I was. I directed my mind (citta) to see what was going on. It turned out to be two large wild boars seething with rage. Both of them were looking at me with eyes red like burning flames and they expressed their great resentment of me.

Then, the two wild boars showed off their power in various ways, acting menacingly in order to incite fear. They hurtled toward me with great speed, as if to kill me that very instant. Their eyes burned like fire. They growled threateningly and continuously. They circled my hut three times, then stood side by side about three meters in front of me. The two boars crouched down and rocked back and forth two times, as if to gather up momentum. When they rocked the third time, they leapt at me with great force, in order to bite me. I had summoned my strength to repel the attack, so when the two boars lunged forward, I directed my charged mental strength to deflect them with full force. As our powers clashed, there was a loud crack, then the two boars were flung back onto the ground.



For a moment, the two boars just lay there. When they came to, they appeared in human form. Their bodies were burly and muscular. They crawled in toward me, and with docile humility they raised their palms together in the lotus position at their chests (*vandana*) and said, “The two of us have ruled over this land for a long time. We have caused many people to die. This time, we intended to cause you to die as well, ācariya, but we were unable to do so. We admit defeat to you, venerable ācariya. May you grace us with your benevolence (*mettā*) and forgive us both for our transgression. We both pledge ourselves as your followers in order to serve you, ācariya, from this moment forth. If you have any need for which we may be of assistance, please call us at any time. We are both willing and ready to serve you; it would be our pleasure. And we will also ensure the safety of the monk and sāmañera that are residing with you. May you bless us with your benevolence, venerable ācariya.”

My citta withdrew from meditation and I contemplated what happened and discerned that the two of them were serpent demigods (*nāga*) living in the waterfall there. They were highly deferential toward me and provided me with assistance and protection. A few days later, I was disturbed by the racket made by a chittering civet.<sup>37</sup> Each night, it chittered by my hut (*kuṭī*) for many hours on end. It was absolutely not conducive to practice. Then I thought of telling the two *nāgas* to chase the civet far away. Once I thought of it, I told them. That night, the civet chittered. Around 10 p.m., it was still chittering. Once I entered into meditation, I could hear people in conversation, “Venerable ācariya is disturbed by this civet’s chittering. Let us chase it away from here, chase it far away, and not let it come back to make any noise around here again.” The two came near the

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<sup>37</sup> Civets are small nocturnal mammals that make high-pitched screeching noises.

kuṭī with a hammer and bludgeon in hand and walked directly to the civet. The civet scurried away as fast as it could, and the two of them struck out with their hammers and bludgeons as they chased it two kilometers away. They yelled after the civet, “From now on, don’t come making any noise around here again! If you do, we will kill you right away!”

I sat there watching as they chased the civet far away, stopped, and allowed the civet to escape. From then on, there were no more chittering civets. Another time, some mice had chewed up some things in my kuṭī and chased each other until it became irritating. So, I told the nāgas to chase the mice away, and they came as before and chased all the mice into the forest. Thereafter, there were no more civets or mice to disturb me anymore. My practice and mental cultivation had continuity because there weren’t any noises to disturb me.

Now that I’ve told you about ghosts, I’m going to tell you a bit about heavenly beings (devatā) so that you have information with which to compare and contrast them. Everyone has been talking about ghosts and heavenly beings for a long time now, causing white-eyed, cowardly practitioners to always dread them. When they are going to practice mental cultivation anywhere, they are all terrified of ghosts as if all ghosts are mean spirited. In actuality, the norm in Buddhism isn’t even to call them ghosts. They are described with admiration and praise and called heavenly beings (devatā).

The term “ghost” is one that villagers use. The label has been used for so long that it is deeply entrenched in our minds. The day we start understanding the language of our parents and relatives, the word “ghost” starts taking root in our minds. A ghost has such and such characteristics, its body looks like this, its eyes look like

that, or however they choose to describe it. They do it to incite fear in the child. It's a means of preventing the child from going out at night. And even after growing up, that fear of ghosts still lingers. The first thing cowards think of is ghosts. They think that the ghost is going to come to spook them like this or spook them like that, and so they become afraid. In reality, it is their own thoughts spooking them and they don't even realize it. Wherever they go, all they think about is ghosts. This makes them constantly startle in fear.

The issue is that when you talk to practitioners of mental cultivation about any Dhamma theme, they know everything. But the instant you hit on the topic of ghosts, their eyes bulge in fear and their ears are on alert. This is one who is going to clearly know and see the truth of the Dhamma? One who can't even conquer the first stage—ghosts—is going to lead oneself to the path and fruit of enlightenment?

What we call ghosts and heavenly beings (*devatā*) both reside within the same being. Each day we are both ghosts and *devatās* in the same person. For instance, you have some displeasing preoccupation (*ārammaṇa*), so you immediately act out in a ghostly manner. This is the real ghost. Why aren't you afraid of this one? Whenever your mind is bright and happy, you want to make merit and observe the precepts, your mind is benevolent toward all beings, your mind is ashamed of all evil acts, or your mind fears evil kamma—in those times your mind has become a *devatā*. Those who want to see ghosts or *devatās* should look no further than within themselves. They will very clearly recognize a ghost and *devatā* in there. This is called the ghost within and the *devatā* within. We are ghosts with a body controlled by the four elements (*catu-dhātu*) and five aggregates (*pañca-khandha*). The ghost without and the *devatā*

without is the same way. The only difference is that the ghost without does not have the four elements. For example, a single life force (*viññāṇa*) can inhabit either state because its mind is full of greed, anger, and delusion. It can employ devious ruses in ceremonies or cause someone to die. In this case, you'd call it a ghost. But if the *viññāṇa* finds humanly actions such as dedicating merit to it or dedicating the fruits of mental cultivation to it pleasing, then it will have love for you and will help you be happy and prosper. In this case, you'd call it a devatā.

Thus, ghost, devatā, and human all exist within the same life force (*viññāṇa*). The only difference is a ghost and devatā only possess *viññāṇa*; they do not possess a physical body, or four elements, like humans do. They similarly possess personality, demeanor, and needs. Humans may be more skilled at fooling fellow humans than ghosts are at fooling humans. If a *viññāṇa* embodies virtue, it is called a high level devatā. They don't bother with humans because they have their own merit on which to rely. They have moral shame (*hiri-dhamma*) within their minds and moral dread (*ottappa-dhamma*) within their *viññāṇa*. As for *viññāṇas* of lower virtue, they will interact with humans all the time. For example, when there are meritorious ceremonies, they will be invited to rejoice (*anumodanā*) in the merit with the humans.

There are some *viññāṇa* who feed on the sacrifices that they have tricked humans into making. But their deceit is on a different level from the manussa-peto, who purport to be human but have the heart of a hungry ghost (*peta*) and trick their fellow humans. This can be seen everywhere. Manussa-peto are human ghosts who are more deceitful and cunning than actual ghosts themselves. That's why humans are classified into many groups. For instance, manussa-

devo have a human body but a heavenly being (devatā) mind. Manussa-manusso have a human body and human mind; they strive to cultivate virtue. Manussa-peto have a human body but a hungry ghost (peta) mind. Manussa-tiracchāno have a human body but an animal (tiracchāna) mind. Another group is that of the human body but demon (asura) mind. These manussa-asurakāya are especially proficient at trickery. Whatever personal gains can be acquired through deceit, they'll seize it all. Their minds don't contain a crumb of virtue. They are demons controlling human bodies. Actual demons don't have a body. They deceive humans into feeding them sacrificial offerings. Wherever foolish humans have built a shrine of a household god to offer pig's head, chicken, food, or sweets, these demons will tend to show themselves. They will impersonate protective spirits or sacred beings and immediately take possession of that shrine. Foolish humans will bring them high quality offerings on a regular basis. What's worse, they venerate and ask these demons for help.

Before the start of the vassa, I was constantly aware of myself. My practice was solid, my mind was unusually steadfast, and my mind was resolute. The strength of my mindfulness (sati), the strength of my wisdom (paññā), and the strength of my decisiveness were at exceptionally high levels. It was like I was teeming with resolute decisiveness, braveness, and fierce single-mindedness. These attributes were the results of my past practice. It was my first time knowing what I was capable of. I shouldn't describe what it was like in order for someone else to feel and understand it because it is like when you have finished eating and are full. Describing the feeling of being full so that someone who is hungry will understand is impossible. Even if I explain it, someone who has never experienced the Dhamma will be unable to know and see what I am talking about. Likewise,

whatever Dhamma that results from one's practice (*paṭipatti*) will be one's private treasure. The random speculations by analysts and scholars of theoretical knowledge (*pariyatti*) will never get it right.

Thus, though theoretical knowledge (*pariyatti*) and applied practice (*paṭipatti*) share the same path, *pariyatti* is merely the formula for *pariyatti*. It will never result in the *paṭipatti* result. I have done significant studies of theoretical knowledge (*pariyatti*) and applied those principles in actual practice (*paṭipatti*) until I received actual results. That is how I know that the results of applied practice greatly differ from theoretical knowledge. It is like one person has learned the names of food but has never tasted the food and therefore doesn't know what the flavors are like. Another person has learned about food and has tasted the food and therefore knows the different flavors of different kinds of food. What this person who knows from actual experience feels is completely different from what the person who knows from manuals feels. Similarly, the results gained from learned knowledge and the results gained from applied practice are completely different.

Thus, I dare to tell people that one day in the future, if you are interested in Dhamma practice, you will certainly know the flavor of Dhamma on your own. Once that time arrives, you will also dare to tell others about the flavor of Dhamma. It is like a person holding fruit in their hand but they haven't eaten it yet. They are unable to know what the flavor of that fruit is like. But once they get a taste of that fruit for themselves, they will immediately know that the flavor is like such and such. Likewise, studying theoretical knowledge and passing judgment on those who are practicing—that they are doing mental cultivation incorrectly like this, or practicing incorrectly like that, or doing mental cultivation correctly like this, or practicing

correctly like that—are merely conjectures of the foolish know-it-all. They have no clue what the actual results of practice are like. If you do not yet truly know and truly see the results of your own practice, then you should not brag that you know it all, nor should you guarantee the attainment of others as wrong or right. It'll fit the characterizations of the blind leading the wise, the pretentious fool, the blind losing their way, and the blind leading the blind.

These are merely some points for you to mull over. Even as I explain the results of practice to you at this moment, I am not borrowing someone else's results of practice to write about. I do not have the intent to brag or claim that I practice well in order to gain your respect. I am only writing about what actually happened, my actual results from my actual practice. What anyone thinks or says is their problem. May I, in this lifetime, leave this truth with the world for those are born after I am gone to know so that they may realize that during Buddhism's decline, there existed those who were fruitful in practice and deserving of the term "arahanta asuññaloko." As long as there are those who practice correctly according to the Dhamma and monastic code (vinaya), then arahants will still exist in this world.

From the very start of practicing mental cultivation at this place, there was something unusual about myself. For example when using wisdom to contemplate various angles of Dhamma themes, there was such clarity and transparency. When contemplating on any universal truth (sacca-dhamma), a comprehensive clarity would effortlessly arise and any doubts in my mind would instantly be extinguished. Using wisdom to contemplate in a way that engenders comprehensive clarity is where all sacca-dhamma wisdom congregates. This is because this comprehensive clarity is the device that directly destroys wrong view and attachment within the mind. If you contemplate a particular

problem, once comprehensive clarity arises, attachment within the mind instantly dissolves.

Previously, the mind was enchanted by the Three Realms because *avijjā*, or that which is not true, covered things up for so long. Wisdom was never used to train and teach the mind in any way. Even the truth that exists within us and in external things was never known or seen. As a consequence, the mind became delusional and was always misunderstanding things. Once wisdom was used so the mind could know and see clearly, the truth emerged in the mind. It became known that defilements and *saṅkhāra* had been selling falsehoods, causing the mind to be in a perpetual state of delusion until the mind grew accustomed to it. It has been deluded with this world for a long time. Now, the mind has wisdom as its trainer, to teach it to know and see things according to reality at all times. The mind has comprehensive knowledge, the mind has discernment, the mind has the ability to know and see very clearly what is real and what is fake. Once the mind possesses this comprehensive knowledge and reason, it will firmly have self-confidence that after using wisdom to teach the mind often, the mind will gradually awaken from its wrong views. This is using wisdom to train the mind to know and see according to reality that every single thing in this world is subject to impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*). There is nothing in this world other than these Three Common Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*).

In the past, I had used wisdom to contemplate universal truths (*sacca-dhamma*) in certain rudimentary objects; comprehensive clarity had arisen, and attachments and doubts had been severed. It hadn't necessitated a second round of contemplation at all. This is what happens when the mind has clearly accepted true knowledge

and true realization through wisdom. Doubts and misgivings were destroyed automatically. Feelings of love or hatred and feelings of pleasure or displeasure in whatever object had been extinguished from the mind in that very instant. At that time, it was as if the Three Realms—the Sensual Realm (*kāma-bhava*), the Fine-Material Realm (*rūpa-bhava*), and the Immaterial Realm (*arūpa-bhava*)—had converged in that one place. I knew and saw how the *vatṭa-cakka*, or the cycling through the Three Realms, worked. I knew and saw what the cause and factors of delusion were that compelled us to be born and die in these Three Realms for such a long time. I knew and saw the entirety of the path of cycling through rebirth (*vatṭa-cakka*), and I knew and saw with great clarity the method to prevent my mind from cycling through the *vatṭa-cakka*. I knew and saw very clearly that cycling through rounds of rebirth (*samsāra*) would only bring about constant suffering (*dukkha*), harmful consequences (*dosa*), and future perils (*bhaya*). So, I applied my wisdom in contemplating in a more refined manner issues stemming from the past into the present, and extrapolated the future that would take shape in future rebirths. With sharp wisdom, I knew and saw all of this very clearly. Within the Three Realms, there was nothing that could hide from this wisdom. Everything would be known and seen, and pierced and penetrated.



## Vipassanā Arises

One day, after I had practiced mental cultivation (*bhāvanā-paṭipatti*) and had gotten decent rest, it was around 3p.m. It was the time I customarily came out to do walking meditation (*caṅkama*). I was seated, resting on the hut (*kuṭī*) porch. My eyes landed on a skunk vine growing beside the caṅkama path. Within the past few days, I had on two occasions told the novice (*sāmañera*) to remove it, but the skunk vine kept growing back in the same spot.

During that period, wisdom had already been used to contemplate the ultimate truth (*sacca-dhamma*) of reality, and I had known and seen the causes and conditions that have led to perpetual existence in the Three Realms. Upon seeing the skunk vine, I immediately internalized it as a Dhamma metaphor (*upāya*). The skunk vine was just like my mind. It arises from causes and conditions (*paccaya*) that organically exist within itself. Whenever the bulb of the skunk vine is buried in the dirt, the contributing conditions kick in in an intercausal chain reaction. The skunk vine bulb will extract from the dirt the nourishment it needs to feed its vines. Even if it is chopped down, that is merely addressing the end result. After the vine is chopped down, the fuel that generates life still remains in the bulb, so it will regenerate. Even if it is cut down one hundred times or one thousand times, the skunk vine will keep regenerating without end.



If the bulbs were dug up from the ground and were set out to dry under the sun's rays or were burned to ashes with fire, the skunk vine bulb would never regenerate. That is, the cause and conditions of the skunk vine would have been completely obliterated.

Likewise, the mind that is regenerated in different rebirths does so because the mind is led there by the fuel of defilements and desires. Once defilements and desires have been obliterated from the mind, different rebirths (*bhava-jāti*) will have no way of arising again. In that moment, it was as if the mind were utterly empty, like the world and dhamma had detached from one another and were completely separate entities. The mind had no attachments to anything.

At that time, my mindfulness and wisdom were extremely courageous and confident. When something was contemplated on, there was comprehensive clarity in all aspects. The models (*upāya*) upon which wisdom was applied were the same principles that had already been contemplated. The difference, though, was that the mind completely accepted the truth from wisdom. Whatever was contemplated on, the mind would know and see according to the principles of reality in an exhaustive manner. Both comprehensive clarity and dissolution of doubt occurred simultaneously. The crux was that desire (*taṇhā*) was what led the mind to rebirth in existences (*bhava*), small and large. Desire leads to suffering. There are many causes and many conditions working together. The desire for happiness is the chief cause. It is a very refined, latent desire and it effortlessly leads the mind to delusion without the mind even realizing it. That is, the desire for sensual pleasures with which humans that populate this world are so obsessed. This is because they are considered pleasurable preferences. Whatever one derives pleasure from, whatever one loves, or whatever one has attained to

one's satisfaction are considered happiness. Little do people know that happiness is the cause of suffering. Take for example, the five sensual pleasures (*kāma-guṇa*) of form, sound, scent, taste, and touch. These five sensual pleasures are things that exist in the world, and they have been consumed to the point of becoming habits. While they are being consumed, it is considered pleasurable happiness, but what follows is suffering. So, people struggle and intensify their efforts at procuring more sensual pleasures, and more suffering follows. That is how happiness from sensual pleasures causes suffering to result. Once there is great obsession with sensual pleasures, one will consequently always be trailed by the shadow of great suffering.

That moment, I was replete with incredibly refined wisdom. I knew and saw the taproot of desire very clearly. There was another type of desire that caused the frequent cycling through rebirths in this world. It is a source of great pleasure. Everyone in this world yearns for it. Namely, desire for merit and wholesomeness (*puñña-kusala*). I apologize to everyone here, as this is not something that should be written here, but it must be written. Just consider it my own personal matter. You, the reader, should hold off on following in my footsteps. Once that day arrives, you will know and see for yourself what the refined desire that causes delusion is like, why we humans have been reborn in this world until we are unable to find our way out, and why—even worse—we keep cycling through the Three Realms.

Sense-desire existence (*kāma-bhava*) is an existence (*bhava*) where there is delusion of sensual pleasures (*kāma-guṇa*). There are two types of *kāma*, or sense-desires: *vatthu-kāma* and *kilesa-kāma*. *Vatthu-kāma* refers to all material possessions that we have—money, gold, food, and every type of object to which we hold ownership rights

or accountability. It can be something that is alive, like an animal that belongs to us by convention (sammuti). Both of these are called vatthu-kāma. They are procured, utilized, and consumed only in this human world. These possessions are not owned by anyone outright. They are merely possessions we rely on temporarily, while we all are still alive. If the mind is fooled into believing that these things belong to us, so much so that it is swept away by attachment and clinging, it will suffer. This is because these material possessions are subject to impermanence (anicca). There is bound to be change according to causes and conditions. The assumption that these things eternally belong to you is not true. You should only consider them temporarily yours. In a few days or years, you and your various possessions will most definitely part ways. Sometimes, you are still alive and your possessions meet their doom before you do. Other times, the possessions are still there, but you have died and left them behind; this is also possible. Those various possessions then fall to your children and grandchildren to use and rely on. But even your children and grandchildren cannot truly be the owner of those possessions. Everything is merely acquired for temporary use.

Even royal emperors who possess immense merit (puñña) and perfections of character (pāramī) and assume worldly treasures as their own cannot truly take these worldly possessions for themselves. They are only to be owned and relied upon while you are alive. Soon, you will part ways. If the mind clings to these worldly possessions, once death arrives, the mind that is attached to and worried over the possessions will return to be born in order to continue to care for them. Instead of going to rest in heaven (sagga), it can't go. Or, sometimes it is reborn as a hungry ghost (peta) to guard over the treasures; this is also possible. Thus, don't be obsessed with worldly

treasures. They may bring you mental happiness, but it isn't that great. Mostly what they bring, or nearly all that they bring, is mental suffering. It is the responsibility of the practitioner to constantly think about this in order to lessen the attachment within the mind.

Kilesa-kāma refers to love and lust in the realm of passion (rāga). The agents that raise passion within the mind are form, sound, scent, taste, and touch. They can be applied in constructs (sammuti) that arouse the mind. Despite defilements (kilesa) and passion having taken root within the mind, if form, sound, scent, taste, and touch are not used to construct (sammuti) notions that gratify the defilements of passion, it is like red coals that are still burning. If fuel isn't applied to the coals, the flames will not rise. Whenever fuel is poured onto the hot coals, the flames will rise with great intensity. Likewise, though there is passion in the mind, if form, sound, scent, taste, and touch are not used to construct (sammuti) or fabricate something that amplifies notions of love and lust, the mind will not be aroused or have preoccupations (ārammaṇa). The world's sentient beings are deluded by sense-desire existences (kāma-bhava). Partaking in attachment, pleasure, love, and lust has become a habit. The mind has become intoxicated by them. It is hooked on sense desires (kāma), so hooked that it is addicted. Humans regard all of this as ordinary; they consider it normal. Isn't that kind of understanding self-serving? Whatever gratifies your defilements is considered normal, right? So, this is what it is like, being deluded by things that are normal. That's why we have been reborn in sense-desire existences (kāma-bhava) for many eternities up to the present time and will continue to be deluded by "normal" like this for perpetual future rebirths.

Within sense-desire existences (kāma-bhava), there is another type of existence we humans strongly desire—heavenly existence.

The sense-desire existence (*kāma-bhava*) in heaven is referred to as divine (*dibba*). There is enjoyment and enchantment with divine things. Heavenly beings partake in sensuality (*kāma*) through the mind. The infatuation with sensuality there surpasses even that of the human world. Heaven (*sagga*) is a place of merriment. Anyone who lives there upgrades their delusion. Little do they know that heaven is still subject to impermanence (*anicca*). All heavenly beings do not want to fall back down to a human rebirth, but they cannot remain there because the merit and virtues they have cultivated are finite. Once it is time, they must be reborn as a human again. No one will be able to remain in heaven for perpetuity. Therefore, in *kāma-bhava*, an existence in which beings are obsessed with sensual pleasures (*kāma-guṇa*), it is difficult for them to realize that they are deluded. That is, deluded by their own merit. Little do they know that merit (*puñña*) and demerit (*pāpa*) are a pair and cannot be separated. They are rings that are linked together. If the merit ring is strong, the mind will have some happiness. If the demerit ring is strong, suffering arises in the mind. Thus, a single mind experiences both merit and demerit in this sense-desire existence (*kāma-bhava*).

Another type of merit results from meditating to a point where the mind (*citta*) is calm in fine-material meditative absorptions (*rūpa-jhāna*). After dying, these meditators are reborn in the Fine-Material Realm of existence (*rūpa-brahma*). Another type of merit results from meditating to a point where the citta is calm in immaterial meditative absorptions (*arūpa-jhāna*). This is merit of a refined level. This merit is unable to cancel out demerit. It merely overpowers demerit and prevents it from rising up. This merit is born from desire. There are two types of desire: desire for demerit, and desire for merit and wholesomeness (*puñña-kusala*). Merit and wholesomeness will only

orbit within these Three Realms. Demerit similarly orbits within these Three Realms. Once you know and see, through wisdom, how desire engenders merit and demerit, and you know how desire leads the mind to cycle within the Three Realms, you must find a method (*upāya*) to destroy desire. When desire has been completely obliterated from the mind, the path of cycling (*vatṭa-cakka*) within the Three Realms will have essentially been severed.

Once wisdom knows and sees according to reality in this way, there are no existences (*bhava*) that can be inhabited and relied upon. The mind is not attached to anything, which is why the mind is considered to be vacant or empty. The mind does not hold anything as significant (*nimitta*). That is why there is a vast emptiness within the Three Realms. There is nothing mysterious or hidden from this refined degree of wisdom. My mind felt different. Since the past, it was like my mind had been weighed down by the heavy burden of the body and mind (*dhātu-khandha*). There had never been a day where my body felt light or my mind felt light. The mind could not remain still. It would turn toward defilements and desires, always flowing along the stream of the world. The mind constantly turned toward defilements and desires without ever having time to take a break. It would take in preoccupations (*ārammaṇa*) that were pleasing or displeasing, and regularly bring about distraction, frustration, and sadness. There was never time for myself.

Use wisdom to contemplate things that are impermanent. Contemplate suffering and the cause of suffering, whether it is physical suffering or mental suffering. Use wisdom to teach your mind at all times. The mind's delusion with sensual pleasures (*kāma-guṇa*) has caused wrong views and wrong understandings to arise. It clings to sensual pleasures in an inseparable manner. Now that the mind sees

the suffering, harmful consequences, and future perils inherent to sensual pleasures, it will be scared and afraid to attach itself to sensual pleasures again. It will distance itself from attachment and yearning for old existences. Use wisdom to contemplate and review the trends of defilements and desires until the mind knows that there is only suffering that arises. There is only suffering that exists as the mind's eternal partner.

As for the wisdom model that provides information with which to teach the mind, there must be actual evidence that can be rationally and profoundly believed. Once the mind receives this true information, the mind will be ready to accept the truth and ready to decide decisively and instantly not to yearn for defilements and desires any longer. The mind realizes that defilements and desires have tricked it into being deluded and has caused it to be pulled along the stream of the world for such a long time. It has suffered and been tortured by birth, aging, sickness, and death this entire time. If the mind is left to continue to follow defilements and desires, there will never be a way for it to avoid this suffering. It will only drown in suffering caused by sensual pleasures without ever being able to come up for air. It will only become more of a perpetual slave to defilements and desires with each passing day. In situations like this, there is no one who can help you. You must rely on mindfulness and wisdom and rely on your own ability. That's it. Be worthy of the phrase, "one is one's own refuge." Why would you rely on others anyway?

Since forever, defilements and desires have dragged my mind out to the great worldly conventions (*mahā-sammuti*) and left it stranded there. There was never free time for myself. I've always been under the power of defilements and desires. However it was in the past, that's how it is in the present life. However it is in this present

life, that's how it must be in the future rebirths. That is, the mind has been brainwashed by defilements and volitional thoughts (*saṅkhāra*). That's why it is "tamo tamaparāyano," in darkness and bound for darkness, without end. There is only infatuation with worldly conventions (*sammuti*) that is without limits. Even when it causes suffering, harmful consequences, and future perils, it is understood to be a normal issue. Any disappointment and suffering are deemed normal issues. There is no wisdom (*paññā*) to fix these things that are normal. Eventually, it will continue to float along the world's currents. It is difficult to become aware and watchful, so things are left to follow the ignorant mind's direction. Who knows how long it will be until the mind becomes aware?

The mind has greed, the mind has anger, the mind has lust, and the mind has ignorance—and it is left to have greed, to have anger, to have lust, and to have ignorance, because these things are considered normal. The mind has ignorance in desires (*avijjā-taṇhā*) and defilements in mental formations (*kilesas-saṅkhāra*)—and this is considered normal. There is no mindful wisdom to study the cause and effect of this "normal" at all. It is of the pada-parama level, it is a mind that is barren and has no chance of absorbing any Dhamma whatsoever. It is a mind that the Buddha cannot grace. It is tamo tama, a mind that is in darkness and bound for darkness. There is no wisdom to fix the problems within the mind at all. If it were a lotus flower, you could say it hasn't even grown a knob on the lotus rhizome.<sup>38</sup> If it were a horse, you could lance it all the way to the bone and it would still refuse to run. Therefore, regarding issues as normal is the way those without wisdom make excuses all the time. Using normal as an excuse plays into the hands of defilements and desires. What a shame.

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<sup>38</sup> A rhizome is the horizontal subterranean stem that sends out shoots and roots from its nodes.

During that period, mindful wisdom, faith (saddhā), effort, and knowledge and realization within the mind were all replete and fully primed. When I contemplated any universal truths (sacca-dhamma), my mind was comprehensive and exhaustive in its wisdom. There were no residual doubts that would cause the mind to be bewildered, wonder, or hesitate in the least bit. Everything was known and seen according to reality in a very clear, transparent manner. There was nothing that was mysterious or hidden about the path of cycling through rebirth (vatṭa-saṃsāra). Regardless of how complex something was, there was an understanding of it all. Only those who do not have mindfulness or wisdom will continue to be lost in the path of cycling through rebirths. Despite having been born and having died in the cycle of rebirth before, it is all regarded as a dream. There is no need to pay attention to that which has passed. They are merely past travels. What is the point of thinking of them when they are all already in the past?

Therefore, all of this being born and dying within the Three Realms are affairs of merit and demerit that sprout from desire. The term “lokavidū,” which the Buddha proclaimed as having wisdom to clearly know and clearly see within the Three Realms, refers to the world of sense-desire (kāma-loka), the world of form (rūpa-loka), and the world of formlessness (arūpa-loka). These three worlds (loka) are simply tourist destinations for all of the world’s sentient beings. It is called vatṭa-cakka, the place where sentient beings cycle through rebirth. In some existences there is happiness, in some existences there is suffering. It depends on the effects of merit and demerit the individual has cultivated.

Those who have cultivated meditation (samādhi) to the point of meditative absorptions (jhāna) will be capable of controlling or

subduing defilements to a degree, enough to have some happiness. But once the power of the meditative absorptions fade, a rebirth within the world of sense-desire (*kāma-loka*) as before is warranted. Defilements and desire will express themselves in the mind. There is love and lust in sensual pleasures just like everyone else. They have husbands, wives, children, and grandchildren just like all other humans. Therefore, those who are reborn in the world of form (*rūpa-loka*) and the world of formlessness (*arūpa-loka*) do not escape suffering. That being so, why should we be enraptured and deluded by these Three Realms? Use wisdom to contemplate such that you know and see these Three Realms in a way that your mind knows and sees the impermanence and the change within them with clarity.

One who is to escape the Three Realms must be replete with mindfulness and wisdom that is astute and sharp. They must understand the phrase, “*sabbe saṅkhāra aniccā*,” all conditioned things are impermanent. There is nothing that is certain. There is birth, and there is change and decay; nothing stays still. Whether the conditioned thing (*saṅkhāra*) arises organically in nature or arises from human creation, whether it is a *saṅkhāra* with a life force (*viññāṇa*) inhabiting it or without a life force inhabiting it, it is all subject to change. Whether it changes quickly or slowly depends on the causes and conditions within that *saṅkhāra*. Even the Three Realms fall under the control of all of these *saṅkhāra*.

Therefore, one should not be attached to the notion of physical conditioned things (*rūpa-saṅkhāra*) or mental conditioned things (*citta-saṅkhāra*) belonging to oneself or being one's self. Whether they are internal *saṅkhāras* or external *saṅkhāras*, near *saṅkhāras* or far *saṅkhāras*, coarse *saṅkhāras* or refined *saṅkhāras*—they are all things that are impermanent. Even merit, demerit, benefit, and

harm fall under the absolute control of all of these saṅkhāras. None of these saṅkhāras can be a permanent refuge. The world's sentient beings suffer and shed endless tears because they are enchanted by these saṅkhāras. Even when the saṅkhāra is supposed (sammuti) to be our self, or supposed (sammuti) to belong to us, it is merely a supposition (sammuti). Once that sammuti changes, suffering arises in the mind, does it not? Thus, suffering in the mind can be generated from many causes and conditions. And though each of them may vary, the result is the same—suffering.

Suffering congregates in a single place—the mind. Happiness also congregates in a single place—the mind. Suffering is not desired by anyone. The aversion to it is evident in animals as well. Though it is not desired, once it arises, it still must be experienced. This is because the cause of suffering has already been generated. Everyone must similarly accept the results. Once the cause of suffering—whether generated intentionally or unintentionally—produces results, it will definitely impact the mind. Whether that impact is small or large is contingent on the causes and conditions that were generated. There are numerous external causes and conditions that engender suffering in the mind. Even the world's natural seasons can cause the mind to suffer. For instance, when it is too hot, when it is too cold, when heavy rainfall causes flooding that impedes travel—all of these can cause suffering. When the body is in pain or sick from some disease, even the various postures (iriyāpatha) that we use every day can cause suffering—standing for too long, walking for too long, sitting for too long, lying down for too long. Even though they are matters of the body, they can affect the mind and cause suffering. Thus, change postures frequently. When you see forms you dislike, hear sounds you dislike, are accused or slandered, are scolded or cursed out—

suffering arises in the mind. When you desire something and that desire is not fulfilled, suffering can arise in the mind as well. When there is upādāna—the clinging and attachment in the five aggregates (pañca-khandha) of form (rūpa), feeling (vedanā), memory (saññā), mental formations (saṅkhāra), and consciousness (viññāṇa) as being self (attā)—regardless of that person's status, they will be impacted by mental suffering. That is why the mind is where all suffering congregates.

One who is to break free from the Three Realms will not continue to negotiate with defilements and desires, will not be friends with defilements, and will not be friends with desires. In previous existences, I had already lost out to defilements and desires, and this life will be my final birth—what do defilements have left with which to bargain? Mindfulness and wisdom will not accept any conditions whatsoever. Defilements and desires have tricked me into believing the five aggregates were self. My mind had been conned by defilements and desires. But now, I have the mindfulness and wisdom to recognize the ruses employed by defilements and desires. I will not be deluded into thinking that rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra, and viññāṇa are self any longer. My mind used to rely on these physical phenomena (rūpa-dhamma) and mental phenomena (nāma-dhamma). This life will be the last life in which I rely on the four elements (catu-dhātu) and five aggregates (pañca-khandha), because the four elements and five aggregates must still arise and cease according to the causes and conditions of this world. Thus, “whatever is of a nature to arise, is of a nature to pass away.” The mind has been deceived by these things that arise and cease for innumerable, unquantifiable rebirths. However it was in previous births, that is how it is in the present life. Or in the future rebirths, it will still be the four elements and the five aggregates,

as before. Whatever rebirth the four elements and five aggregates arise in, that is the rebirth in which they must cease. Once one has the mindfulness and wisdom to clearly understand and realize that the four elements and five aggregates arise and cease over and over, the mind (citta) will become dispassionate and resigned over the four elements and five aggregates without any residual concern whatsoever.



## Vipassanā-ñāṇa Arises

Insight-knowledge (vipassanā-ñāṇa) is a knowledge (ñāṇa) that is courageous. It arises specifically to eliminate mental intoxications (āsava), defilements (kilesa), and desires (taṇhā). This insight arises and doesn't exist for long. Once it directly eliminates all defilements, desires, and mental intoxications from the mind, it subsides and vanishes. It is like a fire burning paper or burning cotton. Once the paper or cotton has burned until no flammable material remains, the fire stops burning. Vipassanā-ñāṇa incinerates the mental intoxications, defilements, and desires within the mind until nothing remains in a similar manner. When insight (vipassanā) has emerged in a practitioner, vipassanā-ñāṇa will not deteriorate mid-way whatsoever, unlike meditation (samādhi) or meditative absorptions (jhāna). Because meditation and meditative absorptions are in the level of worldly conditioned phenomena (saṅkhāra), they are subject to impermanence (anicca)—if it can arise, then it definitely can decay—and can be made to arise. Once vipassanā-ñāṇa arises, there is no intermediate decaying until it has eliminated all mental intoxications, defilements, and desires.

Vipassanā-ñāṇa is the ultimate level of refined wisdom (paññā). Practitioners desperately want wisdom of this level to arise. Although the desire for this wisdom to arise is a desire that is good, the methods

(upāya) that are used to practice mental cultivation (bhāvanā-paṭipatti) are of a completely different path; they don't mix. For the most part, it is taught that once one meditates to a point of serenity, wisdom will arise. Once that wisdom arises, one will shed all defilements and desires and eliminate all mental intoxications from the mind. This is primarily what is taught. Practitioners who lack education will believe their teacher and will have to practice what their teacher taught. They will think that wisdom must definitely come from meditation. This is a wrong understanding of vipassanā-ñāṇa and the methods of practice that lead to it. Read on and you will know.

As for the technique of meditating until the mind is calm, let me reject that notion here and now, because it does not engender wisdom in any way whatsoever. Back in our Buddha's time, when he was newly ordained, he had trained in serene meditation and attained meditative absorptions of a high level. He had meditated to a state of serenity continuously and for a long time. Our Buddha was one who cultivated perfections of character (pāramī) with wisdom being predominant (paññā-dhika). His cultivation of the wisdom pāramī was replete and whole. In other words, he was one who had perfected the pāramī of wisdom. While the Buddha had trained with the two hermits (tāpasa), he had attained full serenity in meditation. Why, then, didn't wisdom arise within the Buddha? Go and read the manuals. What kind of meditation is our serene meditation? Is it a serene meditation superior to the Buddha's meditative serenity? If we respect the Buddha, then we should teach each other the Buddhist way of practice and we should practice like one who is Buddhist. We should not take the principles of the hermits (tāpasa) and ascetics (isi) and mix them with Buddhism too much. People practice like hermits and

ascetics, but proclaim themselves to be practicing like Buddhists. What is this?

Instructors should study the principles of deliverance through wisdom (paññā-vimutti) and principles of deliverance of mind (ceto-vimutti) so that they understand and can distinguish between various topics. They should also read up on the history of the noble disciples (ariya-sāvaka) of the Buddha's era so they understand how the paññā-vimutti types started their practice and how the ceto-vimutti types started their practice. They must be separated. They shouldn't all be taught the same method because those of the paññā-vimutti personality and those of the ceto-vimutti personality are not the same. It is like how the illnesses of sick people are not the same. The doctor must determine what medicine is appropriate for each patient's illness or for each type of illness. The same applies to the practice methods (upāya) of those with paññā-vimutti or ceto-vimutti personality types.

My apologies for straying from *vipassanā-ñāṇa*. This explanation is for you, the reader, to know the origin of *vipassanā-ñāṇa*, and to understand the reason it arises. This way, you will not be confused about the paths and methods that lead to the emergence of *vipassanā-ñāṇa*. Consequently, you will understand the term *vipassanā-ñāṇa* correctly. And if there is some point that you do not understand, I am ready to provide clarity and be an advisor to you. But you must speak with reason, as the truth cannot stray from the principles of the truth.

I will explain how it all started, from the very first step—the method of practice. Observe that when commoners (puthujjana) went to see the Buddha, what model or method did the Buddha

provide them to change wrong views (*micchā-ditṭhi*) to right views (*sammā-ditṭhi*)? See, each person who went to see the Buddha had their own individual way of thinking, but those views flowed with the world's currents, and therefore against the path and fruit of enlightenment (*magga-phala-nibbāna*). So, the Buddha gave them methods to change their worldly thinking to Dhamma thinking. They used impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*) in their thinking methods so that they would know and see according to principles of reality. Once they thought in accordance with these principles on a frequent basis, perception that was correct, righteous, and in accordance with reality would arise. In other words, *sammā-ditṭhi*, wisdom of right view. After this wisdom of right view was used to contemplate the truth on a frequent basis, it became *sammā-saṅkappa*. This is where wisdom starts to form. When using wisdom to contemplate on various things, let it correspond to the Three Common Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*). The fluency of wisdom and the knowledge and understanding in wisdom will become clearer. This is called insight (*vipassanā*).

Vipassanā really just means wisdom. It is *vipassanā* wisdom. Once the level of insight-wisdom (*vipassanā-paññā*) is reached, the knowledge and realization of universal truths (*sacca-dhamma*) is in line with the Three Common Characteristics. There is clarity, and doubts and hesitations are eradicated. There is comprehensive clarity in whatever it is that is contemplated. Clinging and attachments disband because the truth of all conditioned phenomena (*sabbe-saṅkhāra*) is known and seen. Once *vipassanā* wisdom becomes complete and replete, the ultimate level of refined wisdom arises—insight-knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*). You all should analyze and arrange what “wisdom arising” means in the correct way, like I have

explained and broken down here. There is no “wisdom arising” from serene meditation whatsoever. Meditation is solely a method of supplementing wisdom so that is sharper. That’s all.

Another term for insight-knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) is wisdom based on mental development (*bhāvanā-maya-paññā*). This level of wisdom will cause *paṭivedha*, or the path and fruit of enlightenment (*magga-phala-nibbāna*), to result. Once *vipassanā-ñāṇa* wisdom occurs, it will go and wipe out all refined-level defilements and desires from the mind. No mental intoxications will remain in the five aggregates whatsoever. The cause of suffering (*samudaya*)—desire for sensual pleasures (*kāma-taṇhā*), desire for existence (*bhava-taṇhā*), and desire for non-existence (*vibhava-taṇhā*)—that had previously been solidly buried in the mind and had led the mind to create existences and rebirths (*jāti*) in the endless cycling through rebirth (*vatṭa-cakka saṃsāra*) will all be completely annihilated by *vipassanā-ñāṇa*. Where would existences and rebirths come from anymore? If existences and rebirths don’t have happiness and suffering, they are worthless. Once the mind no longer contains fuel for defilements and desires, the door to enlightenment (*nibbāna*) instantly opens to welcome you.

The term, “stream of enlightenment” only exists for the noble individuals (*ariya-puggala*) to access. At the very least, they must be noble individuals (*ariya-puggala*) of the stream-entry (*sotāpanna*) level. The route that directly leads to the stream of enlightenment exists solely in Buddhism. All Buddhists want to attain enlightenment, but how many people will enter the stream of enlightenment in this lifetime? As for those of us who are following in the Buddha’s footsteps, we must practice in accordance with the Buddha’s path in a correct manner.

The Buddha has delineated the path very clearly. That is, the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-magga*) that we all know. The Buddha has already arranged the way of practice. It should not be corrected or changed from the original. If we follow the original principles that the Buddha laid forth, it is *sammā-ditṭhi*, or wisdom of right view, and *sammā-saṅkappa*, or purposeful thought and contemplation in accordance with reality in a manner that is righteous. These two are wisdom (*paññā*) based. The bases must first be established. *Sammā-vācā*, or right speech; *sammā-kammanta*, or right action; and *sammā-ājīva*, or right livelihood—these are morality (*sīla*) based. *Sammā-vāyāma*, *sammā-sati*, and *sammā-samādhi* are concentration (*saṃādhi*) based. If one practices according to the original path that the Buddha laid forth, it will be wisdom (*paññā*), morality (*sīla*), concentration (*saṃādhi*). If you don't believe this, then just go look up the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the original path that the Buddha very clearly laid out.

Allow me to return to the skunk vine once more. It was a metaphor (*upāya*) that I used in contemplating with wisdom. The wisdom that arose at that time was unlike any wisdom that I had previously contemplated. It was a level of wisdom that had only arisen that time, and I knew very clearly that wisdom had arisen. It was courageous and decisive wisdom, and it was refined, sharp, and incredibly deep. However refined the wisdom was, so was the knowledge (*ñāṇa*) refined in its knowing, simultaneously. It was wisdom based on mental development (*bhāvanā-maya-paññā*), or insight-knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*). It was wisdom-knowledge (*paññā-ñāṇa*) that directly eliminated all defilements (*kilesas*) and desires (*taṇhā*) from the mind. It was an uprooting wisdom, as in, “*samūlam taṇham abbuṭha*,” wisdom that pulls up defilements and

desires along with its roots. It is wisdom that goes in and destroys the cycle of rebirth so that it stops spinning and is utterly demolished. It is wisdom that wipes out all conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhāra*) and conventions (*sammuti*) so that they're completely extinct. It is wisdom that uncovers the secrets of the Three Realms, with nothing remaining hidden. It is wisdom that completely cuts off the current of the Three Realms and liberates a person from it. It is wisdom that wipes out both small and large defilements and desires that reside in form-based phenomena (*rūpa-dhamma*) and mind-based phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*), so that nothing remains. Although there is the form aggregate (*rūpa-khandha*)—the four elements (*catu-dhātu*) of earth, water, wind, and fire—they are pure elements. And although there are eyes, ears, a nose, tongue, and body, there are no defilements or desires concealed within. They are pure sense-bases (*āyatana*). *Nāma-khandhas*—*vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*—are pure *nāma-khandhas*. There are no desires or defilements to lead to rebirth anymore. That's why it is called extinction (*nirodha*).

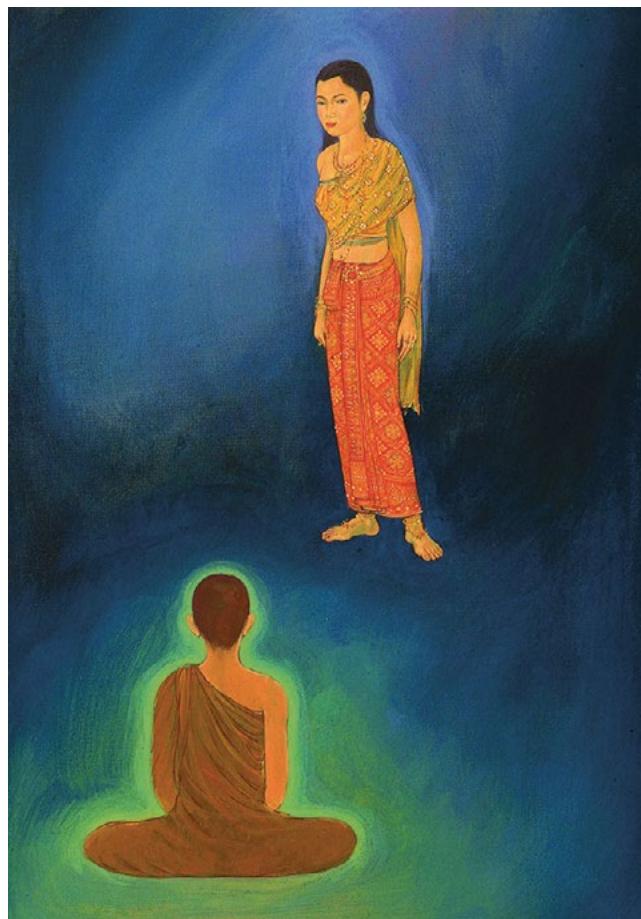


## A Vision of a Visit From a Woman

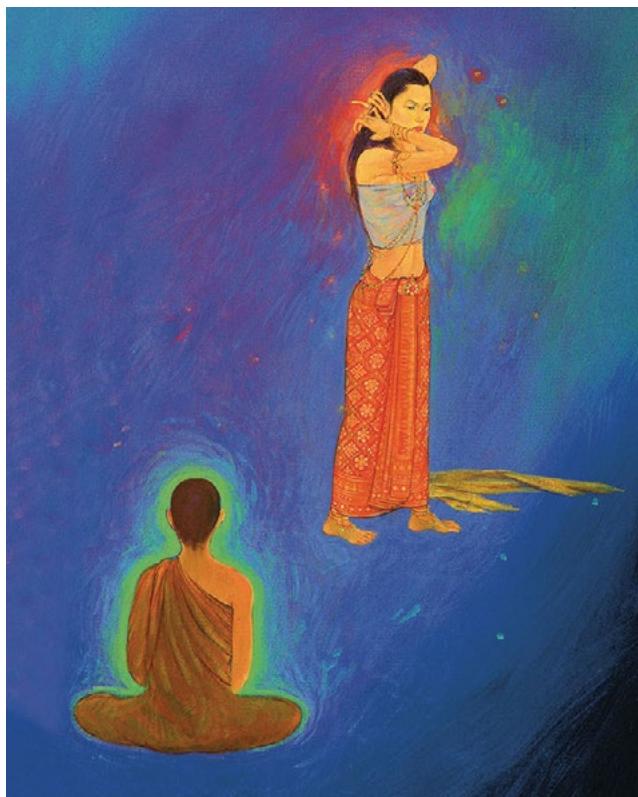
After I contemplated the skunk vine Dhamma metaphor (*upāya*) in the afternoon of that day, wisdom (*paññā*) metaphors continued to arise continuously, as previously explained. I used wisdom to contemplate continuously from 3 p.m. until 6 p.m. Once I had applied wisdom to contemplate to the point of clearly knowing and clearly seeing the world system (*loka-dhātu*) in its entirety, there was nothing left in the Three Realms (*bhava*), there was nothing that I would not know or would not see. Or in other words, you could call it wisdom that purifies<sup>39</sup> the world. The mind had no attachments within the Three Realms. There was no place in the Three Realms that the mind would not know. The world was the world. Dhamma was dhamma. They had separated in a way that I could know and see with utmost clarity. That is, dhamma was not attached to the world, the world was not attached to dhamma. Just like pure gold that has separated from the lump of ore, there was no way that they could revert to being a single entity ever again.

Then, around 6 p.m., my mind wanted to reside in a state of calmness. Normally, I am one who meditates to calmness very easily. Once I focused the mind (*citta*) into meditation (*samādhi*), within a

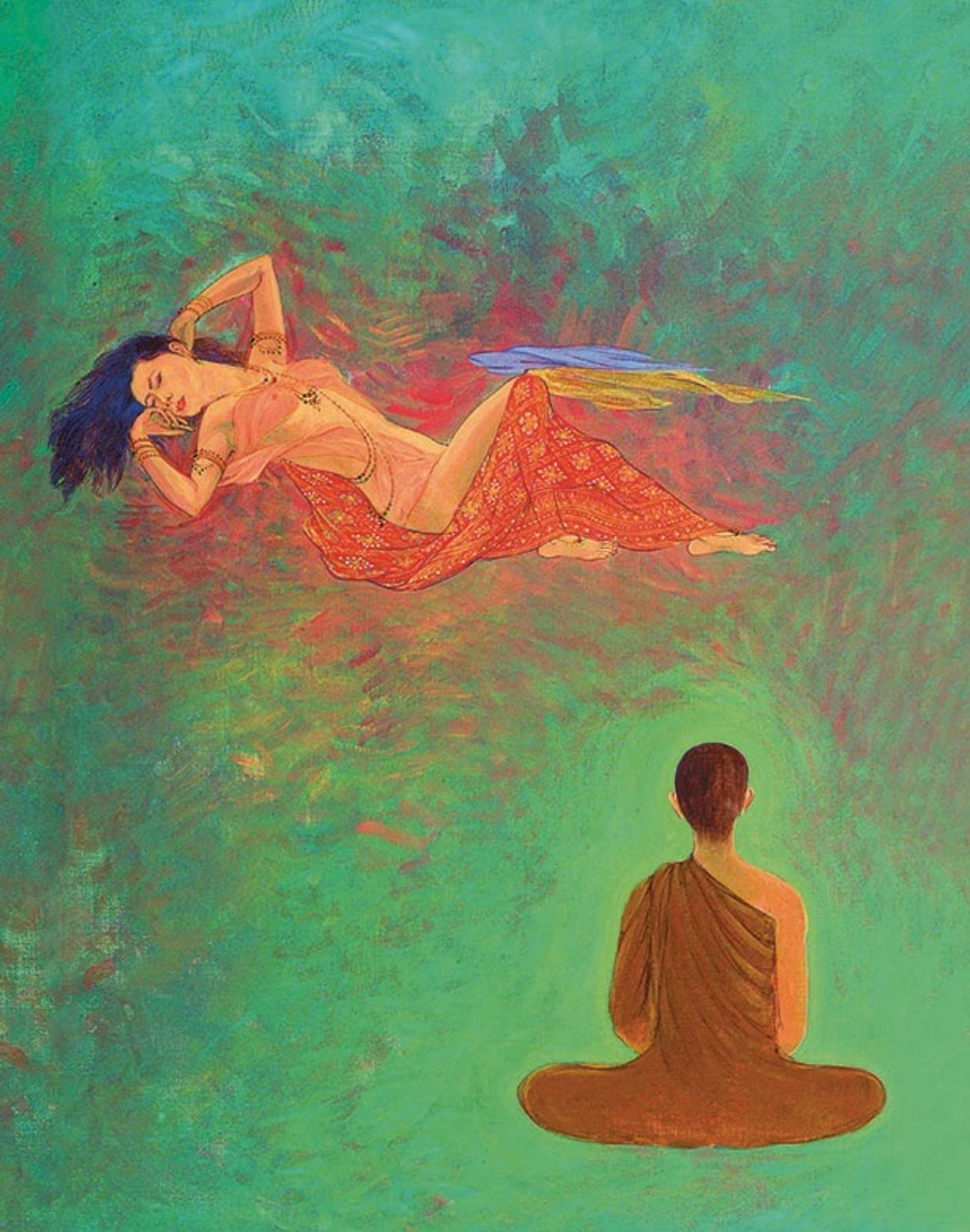
<sup>39</sup> In the Thai text, Luang Por Thoon uses a word that can mean purify, wash, clear, or cleanse. Wisdom purifies the world in the sense that it makes everything clear. It separates the world from the dhamma so that they stand as pure entities.



few minutes, the mind entered a state of complete serenity. This lasted until around 4 a.m., when the citta began to withdraw a bit. Then, a vision (nimitta) arose of a beautiful young woman. There was no one in this world who was as beautiful. She was of medium build and attractively proportional. I don't know what her clothing and accessories were made out of, but they were all beautiful. The woman walked up to me in the hut (kuṭī), smiling as if we had known each other for many lifetimes. Suddenly, it felt like the small kuṭī expanded into a considerably large kuṭī.



At that moment, I did not ask anything. I only thought, “*What has this young woman come here for?*” The woman removed her outer layer of clothes. Her eyes smiled at me with dripping sweetness, very obviously exhibiting her love and lust for me. My citta was unaffected; I didn’t feel anything. Then, the young woman removed the rest of the clothes that covered her body and employed various feminine wiles in order to arouse love in me and satisfy her urges. My citta was unmoved and still. I was wary of what the young woman would try to do to me. That instant, she leapt toward me, intending to embrace me, while I simultaneously directed the citta to be ready to take aim. As she lunged forward, I focused the citta on deflecting her advance with great force, and she went flying backwards.



The young woman saw that she wasn't going to get anywhere, so she gathered all her clothes and left the kuṭī. She sat crying outside of the kuṭī. There were both lamentations and tears of disappointment. She cried and complained, "Since the eternity you and I have shared in happiness and shared in suffering together, what have I done wrong that you have left me? Why don't you think of the past when we were in love? When we were together, we were happy. Why have you gone on without me? From now on, you and I will no longer have a relationship." She cried and lamented about how our love had been destroyed. "From this moment forward, I will never see your face again until the end of the world," and then she walked down the stairs, simultaneously walking and lamenting and crying in disappointment. Then, the mind withdrew from meditation.

I used wisdom to analyze who this young woman was and where she came from. From knowledge-experience (*ñāṇa-dassana*), I knew and understood all that pertained to this young woman, her back story, and what her relationship to me was in the past. I'll leave you, the reader, to surmise, evaluate, and draw your own conclusions about this young woman. I believe that, for the most part, you will be able to make sense of it.

Thereafter, I entered into meditation. The citta was in a state of complete serenity until around 6 a.m. The citta withdrew from the refined level of samādhi, but did not withdraw completely, as in the past. As the citta and body were separating from one another, each time I moved my body, it required great willpower in order to actually move, to raise an arm or a leg, or to glance to the left or right. To get my feet walking, I really had to will each stride in order to actually be able to walk. I had never been this way before. While the citta and five aggregates were separating, there was no association or

connectedness (sampayutta). The five aggregates were the five aggregates. The citta was the citta. That's why there was emptiness. There was nothing to be self or self-belongings whatsoever. In that moment, that's why there was extinguishment; or in other words, nirodha, the cessation of suffering. You should understand that the calm from meditation or the calm from meditative absorptions (jhāna) is not like the extinguishment that is nirodha in any way. This is because meditative serenity of any level still requires consciousness (viññāṇa) of mindfulness (sati). As for nirodha, the cessation of suffering, there is no consciousness (viññāṇa) of anything at all. That is, there is no consciousness (viññāṇa) in anything.



## Nirodha: The Cessation of Suffering and the Cessation of the Cause of Suffering

The instant consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is extinguished, the physical aggregate (*rūpa-khandha*) and mental aggregates (*nāma-khandha*) cease. There is no feeling and consciousness of anything in any way. Normally, consciousness will exist entirely in the physical aggregate and mental aggregates. But now that consciousness had been extinguished, the sense impressions of the internal sense-bases (*āyatana*)—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind—ceased. There was no consciousness of anything. The ears I had were merely ears. The nose I had was merely a nose. The tongue I had was merely a tongue. The body I had was merely a body. The mind I had was merely a mind—there was no consciousness in any of the external sense-bases whatsoever. Despite the external objects still existing, it was not possible to sense them. For instance, there was no consciousness of form, sound, scent, flavor, touch, or mind-objects (*dhammārammaṇa*) in any way. Even though the body and mind (*dhātu-khandha*) which are corporeality and mentality (*rūpa-nāma*) exists, there was no consciousness of body and mind either. There was no consciousness of “*this is me*,” “*this is you*,” “*this is an animal*,” “*this is a person*.” There was no consciousness that “*this is self*” in any way. The internal sense-bases and external sense-bases are unable to connect at all, because

that which communicates to the internal sense-bases—consciousness—had been extinguished. There is no agent or go between for the external sense-bases at all. This is the extinguishment of form-based phenomena (*rūpa-dhamma*).

In the cessation of mind-based phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*), feeling (*vedanā*), memory (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) are pure mind-based phenomena (*nāma-dhamma*). *Vedanā* is the preoccupation or object (*ārammaṇa*) that the mind senses. This object (*ārammaṇa*) is amassed from the five sensual pleasures (*kāma-guṇa*) of form, sound, scent, flavor, and touch. That which is called a mind-object (*dhammārammaṇa*) is that which is pleasing, that which is not pleasing, as well as that which is indifferent. These types of objects (*ārammaṇa*) then fuse with and develop into object-based feeling (*vedanā-ārammaṇa*). *Saññā* records memories of the internal sense-objects and records memories of the external sense-objects. *Saṅkhāra* crafts mental formations from the internal sense-bases and crafts mental formations from the external sense-bases. *Viññāṇa* denotes consciousness of form-based phenomena, consciousness of mind-based phenomena, consciousness of that which is internal, and consciousness of that which is external—the whole lot.

Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is the big breaker. It is the switch that turns on and off all the lights that are interconnected. If one switch is turned off, the entire flow of electricity stops working immediately. Similarly, only consciousness (*viññāṇa*) has ceased, and the consciousness of both physical form (*rūpa*) and mental factors (*nāma*) cease. There are no preoccupations (*ārammaṇa*) to become *vedanā*. There are no memories in *saññā*. There are no formations in *saṅkhāra*. No consciousness of any kind exists in *viññāṇa*. Defilements (*kilesa*),

desires (*taṇhā*), delusion (*moha*), ignorance (*avijjā*), and mental intoxications (*āsava*) of various magnitudes that used to exist in the mind, or the fuel that generates future rebirths and existences, have all been extinguished in the mind. Nirodha, the cessation of suffering, means extinguishing the cause that leads to existences and rebirth (*bhava-jāti*). If there is no rebirth, that essentially means that suffering has ceased.

Thus, ignorance (*avijjā*) ceases, mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) cease; mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) cease, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) also ceases; consciousness (*viññāṇa*) ceases, mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*) also cease; mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*) cease, the six senses bases (*saḷāyatana*) also cease; the six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana*) cease, sense impression (*phassa*) also ceases; sense impression (*phassa*) ceases, feeling (*vedanā*) also ceases; feeling (*vedanā*) ceases, desire (*taṇhā*) also ceases; desire (*taṇhā*) ceases, attachment (*upādāna*) also ceases; attachment (*upādāna*) ceases, becoming (*bhava*) also ceases; once becoming (*bhava*) ceases, birth also ceases; once there is no more birth, from where would aging (*jarā*), death (*maraṇa*) come?<sup>40</sup> Sorrow, despair, and all forms of mental suffering also completely cease. There is no residue of the fuel for future rebirth remaining in the mind. That's why it is called, "nirodho hoti"—suffering has completely ceased. No impurities remain in the mind whatsoever.

Thus, form (*rūpa*) is not self, self is not form (*rūpa*), form (*rūpa*) does not exist in self, self does not exist in form (*rūpa*); feeling (*vedanā*) is not self, self is not feeling (*vedanā*), feeling (*vedanā*) does not exist in self, self does not exist in feeling (*vedanā*); memory (*saññā*) is not self, self is not memory (*saññā*), memory (*saññā*) does not exist in self, self does not exist in memory (*saññā*); mental formations

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<sup>40</sup> This is dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*).

(saṅkhāra) are not self, self is not mental formations (saṅkhāra), mental formations (saṅkhāra) do not exist in self, self does not exist in mental formations (saṅkhāra); consciousness (viññāṇa) is not self, self is not consciousness (viññāṇa), consciousness (viññāṇa) does not exist in self, self does not exist in consciousness (viññāṇa). Once this feeling exists within the mind, it is called anattā, or something that has completely ceased to exist. Though still living, the feeling within the mind corresponds to this, so there is nothing that is me or you. Everything is merely a state that arises and decays. That's why it is called nirodha, the cessation of suffering.

Before arriving at the cessation of suffering, knowledge and realization in insight (vipassanā) as well as knowledge and realization in insight-knowledge (vipassanā-ñāṇa) had already arisen. That is why it is called "wisdom arising." That is, what arises is clear knowledge and clear realization of things that arise and cease within the entirety of the Three Realms. Everything is merely a conventional supposition (sammuti-paññatti) that is only given a name for the sake of communication within this world. That which is labeled doesn't realize what it is. That thing is nature—it arises and decays according to its innate nature. It doesn't know that humans have named it, and it doesn't fall under anyone's control. It arises and ceases, as is normal. However, humans want it to be according to their individual desires and needs. And once that thing doesn't go the way of their desires, the result is suffering, is it not?

During the cessation of suffering, there is another knowledge—that is, a subconscious knowledge. It is extremely refined and delicate, but it is not knowledge that arises from consciousness (viññāṇa) in any way. It is not knowledge that arises from body and mind (rūpa-

nāma) in any way. It isn't knowing within conventional reality (sammuti), but knowing beyond conventional reality (sammuti). It is knowledge that isn't represented or marked (nimitta) by any sammuti. It cannot be described or explained by any sammuti. It is knowledge that stands out and is unique to itself. It is as if this knowledge has no value; it doesn't attach itself to anything. It is knowledge that no sammuti can explain. It is like the number "0"—you can write a hundred "0's" and they wouldn't have any value. Or, if you write "0" one hundred times followed by "1," it still has the same value as "1," that's all. This knowledge is the same way. It is knowledge that is not supplemented by sammuti, so it is knowledge that is without any meaning. I am observant. That is why I am able to clearly reconstruct and put into order every single symptom that arose.



## Cessation is Fleeting

The cessation of suffering went on for one hour. It seemed to flare up a bit and then became bolder in the mind. Once the mind became courageous, mindfulness (sati) and wisdom (paññā) also became courageous. This courage was very extreme. It was as if I could destroy anything and everything, as if I could stomp on an entire mountain and obliterate it within a blink of an eye. It was along the lines of destroying anything within this world, reducing it to microscopic particles within a fleeting moment. Or it was as if I could meditate for one hour but it would feel like meditating for one minute, or I could meditate for a year but it would only feel like meditating for one hour. It felt as if I could do walking meditation (caṅkama) continuously for consecutive months or years. That is what it felt like during that moment's courageousness. It was a courage that had never before arisen. As a result, great mindfulness (mahā-sati) and great wisdom (mahā-paññā) had arisen from this courage. It was a courage that resulted from nirodha, the cessation of suffering.



## Āsavakkhayañāṇa Arises

During the intense courageousness, another knowledge arose, overlapping the courageousness. It was the knowledge that mental intoxication (āsava) would be extinguished in that instant—or in Pāli, āsavakkhayañāṇa. In manuals, scholars define āsavakkhayañāṇa as knowing how to eliminate āsava.<sup>41</sup> However, I would like to define āsavakkhayañāṇa as knowing that āsava will be extinguished. That's all. It isn't knowing how to eliminate them in any way, because the “knowing how” has already occurred during the past processes like developing continuous insight (vipassanā) to the level of developing continuous insight-knowledge (vipassanā-ñāṇa), such that nirodha—the cessation of suffering and the complete extinguishment of the fuel that causes suffering—occurs, so that there are no existences (bhava) left in which to be reborn. Defilements (kilesa) and desires (taṇhā)—both small and large, coarse and refined—that were hidden and concealed within the four elements (catu-dhātu) and the five aggregates (pañca-khandha), and the defilements and desires in the mind, were entirely wiped out of the mind by vipassanā-ñāṇa, by nirodha. Therefore, there is no “knowing how” to eliminate mental intoxication (āsava), whatsoever.

<sup>41</sup> Āsavakkhayañāṇa is commonly defined two ways: 1. the knowledge of the destruction of mental intoxication, and 2. the knowledge to destroy mental intoxication, or the knowledge for the destruction of mental intoxication.

Therefore, āsavakkhayañāna is clearly defined as knowing that mental intoxication will be extinguished, that's all. If I have interpreted this incorrectly, then I apologize. I think that the well-informed will likely grant me forgiveness. As the courageousness and āsavakkhayañāna occurred simultaneously, I also realized that mental intoxication would be extinguished that very moment. If I were to set a determination (pañidhāna) like the Buddha had under the Bodhi tree, it would be inappropriate. So, I resolved, "*These perpetually endless rebirths within this world, this earth that I have stepped on for eternities—in this moment, I will step on this earth for the final time.*" This meant that I would do walking meditation (caṅkama) and step on the earth for the final time in my life, and I would return to sitting. And once I was sitting, if mental intoxication was not extinguished, I would not get up from where I was and step on the earth ever again.

From there, I went out to do caṅkama. After around ten laps of caṅkama, something amazing happened within a last thought moment (carimaka-citta), in a mere split instant. It felt like the ground was shaking, like the world was swaying, and I knew that, "Nibbindaṁ virajjati virāgā vimuccati, vimuttasmiṁ vimuttamiti ñāṇam hoti, khīṇā jāti, vusitaṁ brahmacariyam, katam karaṇiyam. Pārisuddhi attānam samāhitam."<sup>42</sup> Though this phrase is in manuals, once I knew the cause and knew the effect, in that moment, it became a Dhamma theme that concluded the results of all Dhamma practice. They were consonants and words replete with immensely deep, personal significance.

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<sup>42</sup> With the exception of the final line, "pārisuddhi attānam samāhitam," which roughly translates to "purified by oneself, steadfast in a single preoccupation (ārammaṇa)," this quote resembles part of the Ādittapariyāya Sutta (Fire Sermon Discourse)—"Nibbindaṁ virajjati virāgā vimuccati, vimuttasmiṁ vimuttamiti ñāṇam hoti, khīṇā jāti, vusitaṁ brahmacariyam, katam karaṇiyam nāparam itthattāyāti pajānāti ti." Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is released. With release, there is the knowledge, 'Released.' He discerns that, 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world.'

I personally felt that I had traveled along the world currents, being born and dying in a multitude of existences for unquantifiable aeons (*kappa*), for perpetuity. And now, the cycle of rebirth (*vatṭa-cakka*), or desires (*taṇhā*), have been completely destroyed by *vipassanā-ñāṇa*, *nirodha*, and *āsavakkhayañāṇa*. There would be no more being born and dying within a multitude of existences any longer. The endless cycling through rebirth (*vatṭa-cakka samsāra*) has reached its end.

That same moment, I thought a lot about the Buddha. If the Buddha were still alive in this world, wherever he was, I would go and pay my respects to him to my heart's content. But going to pay respects to the Buddha would not be with the intent to receive a guarantee from him. Nor do I need to receive a declaration (*vyākaraṇa*) from the Buddha in any way. Rather, it would be to bow to him, to express gratitude for his benevolent grace in having laid down his teachings so that practitioners who follow them may experience the result of being free of the suffering from birth, aging, sickness, and death within this world—that's all.

Then, I thought a lot about Luang Pu Mun, because this era had long been without a disciple (*sāvaka*) heir, or one who possessed a high level of virtue. Luang Pu Mun had searched for and discovered the original path that the Buddha had laid forth. He had taken those Dhamma methods (*upāya*) and practiced them until he reaped the results of *visuddhi-dhamma*, that which is pure and complete. He had disseminated those practice methods to his numerous followers, who in turn passed them down to future generations, up to the present. There were many who had attained enlightenment and become pure. Without Luang Pu Mun, I don't know whether or not forest tradition

(kammaṭṭhāna) monks would exist to this day. That is why I thought a lot about Luang Pu Mun at that time.

What I did and what happened that day are all personal matters. If I were to describe all the personal matters of the day, this book would be much too long, and it is not necessary to write about them here. That night, I went to rest in the mind's residence (vihāra-dhamma), as usual. At the same time, it turned out that a great elder (mahā-thera) monk walked toward me, and came up the hut (kuṭī). I thought, "*I should lay out a seat, to welcome him.*" I hadn't even put out the seat for him to sit on when he lay down on the bamboo planks of the kuṭī. He was the first great elder monk who appeared before me after I had attained the fruits of practice. He said one thing, "Thoon, from now on, you're on your own," then he got up and walked out of the kuṭī. That mahā thera monk was a great master that was well-known during that time. Then, the citta withdrew, and I considered his words—"Thoon, from now on, you're on your own." What did it mean? What did it pertain to?

I thought about it and concluded that during the past, in 1963, I had spent the vassa at Wat Pa Nong Saeng with Luang Pu Boowa. It was after the cremation ceremonies of Luang Pu Chao Khun Dhammadchedi at Wat Photisomporn in Udon Thani province of that year. Luang Pu Chao Khun Dhammadchedi was my preceptor (upajjhāya). When I took higher ordination as a monk (upasampadā), I was his last attending monk (saddhi-vihārika). In 1961, I was the 9,117<sup>th</sup> monk ordained. I attended his funeral but hadn't gotten any books.<sup>43</sup> After the ceremonies, I returned to Wat Pa Nong Saeng. A few days later, Venerable Luang Pu Boowa of Wat Pa Nong Saeng distributed a book, authored by one who is enlightened, to the monks and

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<sup>43</sup> Dhamma books are often distributed at Buddhist funerals or the funerals of monks.

sāmañeras, and explained a few things about the ceremonies. I don't recall the title of that book anymore.

That night, I read that book and felt bliss (pīti). I felt incredibly replete and content. Each Dhamma phrase was steeped in unbelievably deep meaning. As I read, tears of happiness fell. In my life, I had read numerous Dhamma books, and they were all ordinary. But once I had read this Dhamma book, authored by an authentic enlightened one, I couldn't hold back the tears, because the Dhamma was such a great fit with my mindset. It was like the enlightened author had removed my heart and inscribed the entirety of it into a book. Though I wasn't a direct student of his, I had mentally aspired (pañidhāna) to be one with earnest intent. I kept that book in a high place, and bowed and paid respect to it regularly. I had applied the Dhamma methods (upāya) from that book to my own practice in a continuous manner. Wherever I went, I took that book with me, until I had received the ultimate results of practice in 1969.

It was like that book had supported and led me to know and see the truth in universal truths (sacca-dhamma). Thereafter, the book's duties were over because I could now rely on myself. I could fully be on my own. Even if I didn't have the book, it wouldn't be a problem. Though I hadn't listened to the Dhamma directly from the author, the Dhamma in the book was akin to listening to Dhamma directly from him. That's why he appeared in a nimitta and told me, "From now on, you're on your own." It meant, "kataṁ karaṇiyam," what had to be done is done. I no longer had to rely on his methods of practice, and I no longer needed to study and find Dhamma topics to practice in order to be one way or the other.

# Glossary

**Abhiññā** – knowledge; special knowledge; supernormal power; psychic power; intuitive powers that come from the practice of concentration; the six higher powers consist of five mundane powers through the utmost perfection in mental concentration (samādhi) and one supermundane power attainable through penetrating insight (vipassanā): magical powers like flying and walking on water (iddhividhā), clairaudience or divine ear (dibba-sota), telepathy or knowing others' thoughts (ceto-pariya-ñāṇa), recollecting one's former existences and past lives (pubbe-nivāsānussati), divine eye or knowing others' kammic destinations (dibba-cakkhu), certainty of the extinction of all cankers (āsavakkhaya).

**Ācariya** – teacher; regular instructor; senior monks of ten or more vassas.

**Adhi** – up to; over; on; above; higher; used as an emphatic modifier.

**Adhikarana** – settlement of issues; lawsuit; procedures for dealing with disputes, accusations, offenses, and duties.

**Adhitṭhāna** – resolution; resolute determination; determination; self-determination; will; decision; can refer to an asseveration of truth or an act of truth (sacca-kiriyā)—an utterance regarding a certain fact followed by a command or resolution.

**Aggi-bhaya** – *lit.* fire-danger; fire-based natural disasters.

**Akusala** – unwholesome; unskillful; demerit; sin; bad action.

**Arīsa** – shoulder; a part, a side; a monk's upper inner garment, the sleeveless one-shoulder singlet or vest that monks wear under their other robes.

**Anāgāmī** – non-returner; the third level of enlightenment on the path to nibbāna. one who will attain final enlightenment in the Pure Abodes (suddhāvāsa).

**Anāgārika** – *lit.* homeless one; a lay attendant who typically lives at a monastery, wears white, and observes the Eight Precepts.

**Ānāpāna-sati** – mindfulness of breathing; meditation on in-out breathing.

**Anattā** – non-self; not-self; not-ego; cessation of existence in a conventional or supposed form; substanceless.

**Anicca, aniccam** – impermanence; change; transience; inconstancy.

**Aniṭṭhārammaṇa** – displeasing ārammaṇa; a displeasing preoccupation or object; a displeasing emotion.

**Anumodanā** – rejoice; an expression of thanks, gratitude, or appreciation; sympathetic joy.

**Anusāvanācariya** – *lit.* ordination teacher; second ordination teacher; junior examining monk; the monk who serves as mentor during monastic ordination.

**Āpatti** – an offense committed by a monk; any breach of the monastic code.

**Apāya-bhūmi** – state of deprivation; plane of misery; the four lower levels of existence into which one might be reborn as a result of past evil actions (kamma): hell (naraka), hungry ghost (peta), angry demon (asura), animal (tiracchāna).

**Arahant** – *lit.* worthy one; perfected one; one who has reached ultimate enlightenment (nibbāna) and will not be reborn again; a fully enlightened one.

**Ārammaṇa** – object; preoccupation, or focus of the mind at a given moment; in Thai, refers to mood, emotion, or temper; sense-object, of which there are six kinds: form or visible object, sound, scent, taste, touch or tactile sensation, mind or mental object; refers to that which occurs when the internal sense-bases (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body) interact with the external sense-bases (form, sound, scent, taste, touch). Once the interaction occurs, there are three types of ārammaṇa: pleasing (itṭhārammaṇa), displeasing (anitṭhārammaṇa), and neither pleasing nor displeasing (upekkhā-ārammaṇa). The residue of the three types of ārammaṇa are called dhammārammaṇa, or mind-objects.

**Ariya** – noble; distinguished; one who has attained higher knowledge.

**Ariya-magga** – noble path; refers to the Noble Eightfold Path; the sublime paths of the holy life; the sequential path leading to the end of suffering: 1. right view (sammā-ditṭhi), 2. right thought (sammā-saṅkappa), 3. right speech (sammā-vācā), 4. right action (sammā-kammanta), 5. right livelihood (sammā-ājīva), 6. right effort (sammā-vāyāma), 7. right mindfulness (sammā-sati), 8. right concentration (sammā-samādhi).

**Ariya-puggala** – *lit.* a noble person; a holy individual; noble ones; one who has attained one or more levels of enlightenment: stream-enterer (sotāpanna), once-returner (sakadāgāmī), non-returner (anāgāmī), enlightened (arahant).

**Ariya-sacca** – *lit.* noble truth; objective, universal truths; the Four Noble Truths: suffering (dukkha), the origin of suffering (samudaya), the cessation of suffering (nirodha), the path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering (magga).

**Ariya-Saṅgha** – the community of individuals who have attained a stage of enlightenment (ariya-puggala).

**Ariya-sāvaka** – noble disciples.

**Arūpa-bhava** – immaterial existence; an existence in the Immaterial Realm.

**Arūpa-brahma** – a divine being of the Formless Sphere (arūpa-loka); inhabitant of the higher heavens.

**Arūpa-jhāna** – immaterial absorption; refers to four states of formless meditation:

1. infinite space (ākāsānañcāyatana), 2. infinite consciousness (viññāṇañcāyatana), 3. infinite nothingness (ākiñcaññāyatana), 4. neither perception nor non-perception (nevasaññānāsaññāyatana).

**Arūpa-loka** – the formless world; the world of the formless; the Formless Realm; the Immortal Sphere; four heavenly realms devoid of substance and form: the infinity of space, the infinity of consciousness, the infinity of nonbeing, the infinity of neither perception nor nonperception; rebirth in these realms is caused by attainment of formless meditative absorptions (arūpa-jhāna).

**Asaṅkheyya** – incalculable; innumerable; infinite; an immense period.

**Āsava** – *lit.* influxes, inflow, influence; canker; taint; corruption; intoxicant biases; ideas which intoxicate the mind, mental intoxication; mental bias or mental effluent, pollutant, or fermentation; in a practical sense, āsava is the impression or bias gained from the permanent view that arises when kilesa and tañhā come together; refers to the four āsavas of: sense-desire (kāmāsava), existence (bhavāsava), views (diṭṭhāsava), and ignorance (avijjāsava).

**Āsavakkhayañāna** – the knowledge of the cessation of mental intoxication; the knowledge that mental intoxication will be extinguished.

**Asubha** – filthy; ugly; unattractive; loathsome; foul.

**Asura, asurakāya** – demon, angry demon; titan; demi-god; lower-level deities known for their anger and supernormal powers.

**Attā** – self; identity; ego; conceit; pride; refers to the delusion of and clinging to the five aggregates (pañca-khandha) as ‘self’; there are two types of self (attā): 1. self in form (rūpa), 2. self in mental factors (nāma).

**Attaññutā** – knowing oneself.

**Atṭha-sīla** – eight precepts; the Eight Precepts; the eight precepts customarily observed by devotees on holy days (uposatha-sīla); refers to eight training rules to abstain from: 1. taking life, 2. stealing, 3. sexual activity, 4. incorrect speech, 5. intoxicating liquors and drugs that lead to heedlessness, 6. eating after noon and before dawn, 7. dancing, singing, music, watching shows, wearing garlands, using perfumes and cosmetics, 8. high and luxurious seats and beds.

**Avijjā** – ignorance; delusion; delusion about the nature of the mind; unawareness; lack of knowledge.

**Avijjā-ogha** – the flood of ignorance; refers to how ignorance leads to being deluded by views (diṭṭhi-ogha), deluded by sensuality (kāma-ogha), and deluded by becoming (bhava-ogha), which in turn lead to endless rebirth.

**Āvudha** – weapon.

**Āyatana** – sense bases; there are six internal sense bases or cognitive faculties (five sense organs—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body—and the mind) paired with six external sense bases which are their respective objects (visible form, sound, scent, taste, touch, mental objects).

**Bāla** – ignorant; foolish; a fool.

**Bala** – strength; stability; powers; the Five Strengths: faith (saddhā), effort (viriya), mindfulness (sati), concentration (samādhi), wisdom (paññā).

**Ban** – (*Thai*) home or house; town or village—i.e. Ban Pa Lan is Pa Lan Village.

**Bhadra-kappa** – auspicious aeon; Buddha era; a world period (kappa) in which Buddhas are to appear.

**Bhava** – becoming; existence; life; realm; birth; state of becoming.

**Bhava-jāti** – *lit.* becoming-arising; birth; rebirth.

**Bhāvanā** – contemplation; development; cultivating; producing; mental cultivation; mental development.

**Bhāvanā-maya-paññā** – experiential wisdom; wisdom based on mental development.

**Bhāvanā-paṭipatti** – mental cultivation practice; to practice mental cultivation.

**Bhava-ogha** – the flood of becoming; refers to how being deluded by existences—whether desiring pleasing existences or not desiring displeasing existences—leads to endless rebirth.

**Bhava-taṇhā** – desire for existence; desire for a feeling to remain the same; craving for becoming; craving to be; the desire to be something pleasing.

**Bhaya** – peril; fear; fright; danger; impending danger; can refer to disasters, as in ‘natural disasters.’

**Bhikkhu** – Buddhist monk; monk; a fully ordained monastic; a fully ordained disciple of the Buddha; a monk who abides by 227 precepts.

**Bodhipakkhiya-dhamma** – virtues partaking of enlightenment; requisites of enlightenment; seven sets of enlightenment qualities; thirty-seven qualities contributing to or constituting enlightenment; the Thirty-seven Factors of Enlightenment: the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (satipatṭhāna), the Four Right Exertions (sammāppadhbhāna), the Four Bases of Mental Power (iddhipāda), the Five Spiritual Faculties (indriya), the Five Strengths (bala), the Seven Factors of Awakening (bojjhaṅga), and the Noble Eightfold Path (ariya-magga).

**Bodhisatta** – a Buddha-to-be; a future Buddha; he who will necessarily become the Buddha; a term used to describe the Buddha in his former existences and pre-enlightenment.

**Bojjhaṅga** – enlightenment factors; the Seven Factors of Awakening; the Seven Factors of Enlightenment: mindfulness (sati-sambojjhaṅga), investigation of the law (dhamma-vicaya-sambojjhaṅga), energy (viriya-sambojjhaṅga), rapture (pīti-sambojjhaṅga), tranquility (passaddhi-sambojjhaṅga), concentration (samādhi-sambojjhaṅga), equanimity (upekkhā).

**Brahma** – a divine being of the Form Sphere or Formless Sphere; inhabitant of the higher heavens.

**Brahma-loka** – Brahma world; a heavenly realm comprised of the Fine-Material Realm (rūpa-brahma) and Immaterial Realm (arūpa-brahma); (see: Three Realms of Existence).

**Buddha** – known; understood; perceived; one who has attained enlightenment; the Enlightened One; one who is awakened.

**Buddho** – awake; enlightened; an epithet for the Buddha.

**Caṅkama** – walking meditation; meditation in the form of walking back and forth along a prescribed path.

**Cāra-dukkha** – transient suffering; itinerant suffering; suffering that comes and goes.

**Carimaka-citta** – *lit.* the last citta; last thought moment; last conscious state; final mind, final consciousness; the split instant before becoming an arahant; an acute mental moment immediately preceding the attainment of enlightenment.

**Catu-dhātu** – four elements; the four physical elements or properties: earth (solidity), water (liquidity), wind (motion), fire (heat).

**Catu-paccaya** – four requisites: food, clothing, medicine, lodging.

**Ceto-vimutti** – deliverance of mind; freedom of mind; awareness release; those with the concentration-oriented personality type.

**Chanda** – contentment; pleasure; zeal; will; the will to do; resolve; impulse; desire to act.

**Citta** – mind; consciousness; state of mind; a state of consciousness; as one of the Four Bases of Mental Power (iddhipāda), concentration.

**Dāna** – generosity; giving; gift; charity; offering; alms, almsgiving.

**Dandhābhīññā** – slow intuition; slow in knowing the Truth; slow in attainment.

**Dasa-sīla** – ten precepts; the Ten Precepts; the ten precepts observed by novice monks (*sāmañera*); refers to ten training rules to abstain from: 1. taking life, 2. stealing, 3. sexual activity, 4. incorrect speech, 5. intoxicating liquors and drugs that lead to heedlessness, 6. eating after noon and before dawn, 7. dancing, singing, music, watching shows, 8. wearing garlands, beautifying oneself with perfumes and cosmetics, 9. high and luxurious seats and beds, 10. accepting gold and silver (money).

**Dassana** – *lit.* seeing; sight; realizing; intuition; insight experience; view.

**Dassana-ñāṇa** – seeing and knowing; experience followed by knowledge.

**Dāyaka** – donor; giver; supporter; benefactor of the Saṅgha.

**Deva, devatā** – *lit.* radiant one; deity; heavenly or celestial being; divine beings.

**Dhamma** – 1. the Dhamma; the Doctrine; the Teachings (of the Buddha), 2. the Law; nature 3. the Truth; Ultimate Reality, 4. the Supramundane, especially nibbāna, 5. quality; righteousness; virtue; morality; good conduct; right behavior, 6. tradition; practice; principle; norm; rule; duty, 7. justice; impartiality, 8. thing; phenomenon, 9. a cognizable object; mind-object; idea, 10. mental state; mental factor; mental activities, 11. condition; cause; causal antecedent.

**Dhammā-dhipateyya** – supremacy of the rule of dhamma; righteousness.

**Dhammadaraka** – water pot; a pot with a filter for straining water used by forest monks.

**Dhammārammaṇa** – an object of ideation, mind-object; cognizable object; mental-objects are the residue of the three types of ārammaṇa (*itṭhārammaṇa*, *aniṭṭhārammaṇa*, *upekkhā-ārammaṇa*) that you hold onto; also relates to perception of sense-objects (*saññā-ārammaṇa*) and perception of ideas (*dhamma-saññā*).

**Dhammāsana** – a pulpit; a piece of stone or mat on which a monk sits while preaching.

**Dhammayut** – *lit.* teachings of the Buddha in accordance with group; a branch of modern Buddhism in Thailand, Cambodia, and Burma; the smaller and stricter denomination of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand; the reform movement that led to the development of the Thai forest tradition (*kammaṭṭhāna*).

**Dhātu** – element; primary elements, the ultimate constituents of a whole; natural condition, property, disposition; a relic, remains of the body after cremation; (see: catu-dhātu).

**Dhātu-khandha** – *lit.* element-aggregate; body and mind.

**Dhutaṅga** – *lit.* shaking off; renunciation; a group of thirteen austerities or ascetic practices: using only abandoned robes, wearing only three robes, all food must be

collected on alms round, not skipping houses or showing favoritism on alms round, taking one single meal per day, only eating from your own alms bowl, refusing all further food, to remain secluded (forest dwelling), to remain beneath a tree without a shelter or roof, to remain in the open air without shelter, to reside among graveyard or cremation grounds, to be satisfied with any dwelling, to live in the three postures (walking, standing, sitting) and never lie down.

**Dibba** – divine; celestial; heavenly.

**Ditṭhi** – view; perspective; position; vision of things; theory; belief; dogma.

**Ditṭhi-ogha** – the flood of view; refers to how being deluded by views—whether right views (sammā-ditṭhi) or wrong views (micchā-ditṭhi)—leads to endless rebirth.

**Dosa** – 1. harmful consequences; blemish; defect; disadvantage, 2. anger; hatred; ill-will; aversion.

**Duggati** – bad destination; woeful course; rebirth in some distressing and pitiful stages of being.

**Dukkha, dukkham** – suffering; misery; anxiety; discomfort; bodily pain; mental pain; unpleasant or undesired feeling; the first of the Four Noble Truths: suffering.

**Eight Precepts** – (see: atṭha-sila)

**Ekaggatā** – one-pointedness of the mind; focusing on a single point; unblinking awareness of the mind.

**Five Precepts** – (see: pañca-sīla)

**Four Noble Truths** – (see: ariya-sacca)

**Gaṇādhipati** – chief monk of an administrative division; ecclesiastical chief officer; ecclesiastical governor; chief monk of a monastery section.

**Ghana** – solid; compact; massive; dense; thick; a clump of something.

**Hiri** – sense of shame; moral shame; shyness; conscience.

**Iddhipāda** – the Four Bases of Mental Power: contentment (chanda), effort (viriya), concentration (citta), analysis (vimarśā); the four paths of accomplishment; the roads to power (or success); the means of accomplishing one's own end or purpose.

**Indra** – aka Sakka; ruler of the Tāvatimśā heaven; lord of the devas; the king of heavenly beings, who is characterized by green skin.

**Indriya** – controlling principal; faculty; sense; the sense-faculties; spiritual-faculties; the Five Spiritual Faculties: faith (saddhā), concentration (samādhi), effort (viriya), mindfulness (sati), wisdom (paññā).

**Iriyāpatha** – *lit.* ways of movement; posture; bodily postures: going or walking, standing, sitting, lying down.

**Isi** – ascetic; sage; seer.

**Itṭhārammaṇa** – a pleasing ārammaṇa, a pleasing preoccupation or object; a pleasing emotion.

**Jarā** – aging; old age; decay.

**Jāti** – birth; rebirth; arising or coming up.

**Jhāna** – meditation; absorption; meditative absorption; a state of serene meditation; deep meditation; trance; there are two types of jhāna: 1. fine-material absorptions (rūpa-jhāna), 2. immaterial absorptions (arūpa-jhāna).

**Jhāna-samāpatti** – meditative attainments; worldly meditative absorptions (jhāna); refers to the Eight Meditative Attainments (aṭṭha-jhāna-samāpatti).

**Kāma** – sense-desire; desire; sensuality; an object of sensual enjoyment; sensual pleasures; there are two types of kāma: 1. subjective sensuality (kilesa-kāma), 2. objective sensuality (vatthu-kāma).

**Kāma-bhava** – sense-desire existence; the Sensual Realm.

**Kāma-guṇa** – *lit.* strings of sensuality; sensual pleasures; objects of sensual enjoyment; objects of the five physical senses: form or visible objects, sounds, scents, taste or flavors, touch or tactile sensation.

**Kāma-loka** – the sensuous world; the world of sense-desire; realm of desires; Sensual Realm; Sense Sphere; eleven realms dominated by the five senses: seven are favorable destinations (one human and six deva realms) and four are unfavorable destinations (demon, hungry ghost, animal, and hell realms).

**Kāma-ogha** – the flood of sensuality; the flood of sensual desires; refers to how being deluded by sensuality—whether subjective sensuality (kilesa-kāma) or objective sensuality (vatthu-kāma)—leads to endless rebirth.

**Kāma-tanhā** – sensual desire; sensual craving; craving for sensual pleasures.

**Kāmesu-micchācārā** – sexual misconduct; adultery.

**Kamma** – deed; action; volitional action; universal principle of cause and effect.

**Kammaṭṭhāna** – *lit.* basis of work, place of work; where the mind goes to work on spiritual development; there are two types of kammaṭṭhāna: 1. calm concentration (samatha-kammaṭṭhāna), 2. insight concentration (vipassanā-kammaṭṭhāna); refers to forest tradition monks.

**Kammavācācariya** – *lit.* act-announcing teacher; first ordination teacher; senior examining monk; the monk who confers the precepts during monastic ordination.

**Kappa** – a ‘world period’; an aeon; an inconceivably long space of time; an incalculable period.

**Kaṭhina** – the annual robe-presentation ceremony in the month following the end of the rains retreat; post-retreat robe-offering.

**Khandha** – aggregate; category; (see: pañca-khandha).

**Khanti** – patience; fortitude; forbearance; tolerance.

**Khippābhiññā** – quick intuition; quick in knowing the Truth; quick in attainment.

**Kilesa** – *lit.* torment of the mind; defilements; mental impurities; mental pollution; stain; depravity; poison; passion; impairment; the object or embodiment of desire.

**Kilesa-kāma** – subjective sensuality; the embodiment of sensual desires that are entirely mind-based.

**Kiriyā** – action; deed; performance; function; operation.

**Klot** – (*Thai*) monk umbrella tent; large umbrella with a wooden pole and insect screen that can be pitched like a small round tent and hung from trees.

**Kong Koi ghosts** – (*Thai*) monkey-like ghosts with red eyes; one-legged, hopping forest vampires that suck blood from the toes of campers.

**Kru Ba** – (*Thai*) teacher; used to address junior monks of less than ten vassas in the northeastern region of Thailand.

**Kusala** – wholesome, wholesomeness; clever, skillful, expert; moral goodness or technical skill; refers to wisdom (paññā), as in having the wisdom to seek and recognize opportunities to make merit in a way that leads to heaven or enlightenment.

**Kuṭī** – hut; single room monk hut; typical abode of forest dwelling monks.

**Loka** – the world; a world; plane of existence.

**Loka-dhamma** – worldly conditions; the Eight Worldly Conditions: wealth, loss of wealth, status, loss of status, praise, criticism, happiness, suffering.

**Loka-dhātu** – *lit.* world element; world system; constituent or unit of the universe.

**Lokavidū** – knower of the world, knower of the cosmos; an epithet for the Buddha.

**Luang** – (*Thai*) venerable; honorable.

**Maccu-māra** – death.

**Mae, Mae Chee** – (*Thai*) *lit.* mother, honorable mother; Thai Buddhist nun; a female renunciant who is not a bhikkhunī; a nun who abides by the Eight Precepts or Ten Precepts; a female devotee or pious laywoman.

**Magga** – *lit.* path; the Path; the way; the Noble Path; the path leading to enlightenment; the fourth of the Four Noble Truths: the path leading to the cessation of suffering; the four transendent (lokuttara) paths: the path to stream entry, the path to once-returning, the path to non-returning, the path to arahantship.

**Magga-phala-nibbāna** – the path and fruit of enlightenment.

**Mahā** – great; superior; a monk who has passed Pāli Scholar Level 3 of the Royal Pāli Examination.

**Mahā Nikāya** – *lit.* great collection; one of two branches of modern Thai and Cambodian Buddhism; the oldest and largest fraternity of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand.

**Mahā-samudda** – the sea; ocean; a large quantity of water.

**Mahā-thera** – *lit.* great elder; an elder monk who has been ordained for twenty or more years.

**Majjhimā** – middle.

**Majjhimā-paṭipadā** – the middle path; the middle way.

**Māna** – conceit; pride; arrogance; refers to the phenomenon of comparing, whether comparing oneself with others or comparing oneself with oneself.

**Manussa-asurakāya** – *lit.* human-demon; one who has the body of a human and the mind of a demon.

**Manussa-devo** – *lit.* human-heavenly being; one who has the body of a human and the mind of a heavenly being.

**Manussa-manusso** – *lit.* human-human; one who has the body of a human and the mind of a human.

**Manussa-peto** – *lit.* human-hungry ghost; one who has the body of a human and the mind of a hungry ghost.

**Manussa-tiracchāno** – *lit.* human-animal; one who has the body of a human and the mind of an animal.

**Māra** – *lit.* the killer; the personification of evil and temptation; the personification of samsāric or anti-nibbānic temptation.

**Marana** – death.

**Mettā** – benevolence; loving-kindness; goodwill.

**Micchā** – wrong.

**Micchā-diṭṭhi** – wrong view; false view; a perception misaligned with the truth; a view converse to the truth of reality.

**Micchā-vāyāma** – wrong effort; wrong exertion; wrong striving.

**Moha** – delusion; ignorance; stupidity; dullness; (see: avijjā).

**Mor Lum** – (*Thai*) *lit.* ‘expert song’ or ‘expert singer’; traditional folk music performers who sing poems ('klon') to the rhythm of a free reed mouth organ. Typical genres include: animism, Buddhism, storytelling, ritual courtship, and

male-female competitive folksongs. In ‘mor lum klon,’ a male and female vocally battle, improvise songs, and tease and mock one another.

**Mūgavatta** – vow of silence.

**Nāga** – a serpent demi-god; an inhabitant of the lowest deva world (cātummahārājikā); an applicant or candidate for ordination. In the Theravāda tradition, a man is called a nāga when he goes to the temple with the intent to ordain and wears white. Later, he shaves his head and customarily goes through the ritual of circumambulating the prayer hall three times before requesting ordination as a 10-precept sāmañera, then as a 227-precept monk.

**Nāma** – mind; mental factors; mentality; intangible, mental components or aggregates; generally used to refer to four mental phenomena: feeling (vedanā), memory (saññā), volitional thought (saṅkhāra), consciousness (viññāṇa).

**Nāma-dhamma** – mind-based phenomena; mental phenomena.

**Nāma-khandha** – mental factors; mental aggregates; intangible aggregates: vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra, viññāṇa.

**Nāma-rūpa** – mind and body; mentality and corporeality; mind and matter; name and form.

**Ñāṇa** – knowledge; real knowledge; comprehension; wisdom; insight.

**Ñāṇa-dassana** – knowing and seeing; knowledge followed by experience.

**Naraka** – hell; hell realm; purgatory; abyss.

**Navakovāda** – *lit.* newcomer advice; instructions for newly ordained bhikkhus and sāmañeras; a basic set of doctrines and disciplines to be learned by monastics of 1-5 vassas.

**Nesajjika** – the ascetic practice of remaining in the sitting position; renouncing the lying posture and instead only sitting, standing, or walking.

**Nibbāna** – *lit.* extinguished; the fires of greed, hatred, and ignorance extinguished for lack of fuel; the extinction of all defilements and suffering; the supreme goal of Buddhism; enlightenment; one who has reached nibbāna has extinguished rebirth.

**Nibbidā** – disenchantment; dispassion; disinterest; results from truly knowing and seeing the repetitiveness and pointlessness of seeking significance within the Three Realms.

**Nimitta** – *lit.* sign; vision; omen; mark; object; meaning; symbol; portent; mental sign; mental image; mental reflex image obtained in meditation.

**Niraya-pāla** – guardian of hell; hell-guardian; protector of hell; warden of hell.

**Nirodha** – the third of the Four Noble Truths: cessation of suffering; cessation; extinguishing; extinction; cessation of suffering and the cause of suffering.

**Noble Eightfold Path** – (see: ariya-magga)

**Ogha** – a flood; stream; current; water; the currents that drag sentient beings into endless rebirth (*vatṭa-saṁsāra*); that which sweeps a man away from emancipation; the Four Floods of Worldly Turbulence: the flood of ignorance (*avijjā-ogha*), the flood of view (*diṭṭhi-ogha*), the flood of sense desires (*kāma-ogha*), the flood of becoming (*bhava-ogha*).

**Opanayiko** – draw inward; referring inwardly; internalize; refers to drawing a parallel from something external and reflecting inwardly, or seeing yourself in the actions or words of others.

**Ottappa** – moral shame and moral dread; conscience and concern.

**Paccattam** – personal; individual; separate.

**Paccaya** – condition; aiding condition; factor; contributing factor; requisites (see: catu-paccaya).

**Pacchima-vaya** – final age; final period of life.

**Pada-parama** – one whose highest attainment is the word of the text, not the sense of it; an idiot.

**Pakīṇṭaka-dukkha** – miscellaneous suffering; various, assorted suffering.

**Pāli** – ancient variant of Sanskrit; literary language of early Buddhists; language the Theravāda Buddhist Canon is written in.

**Paṁsukūla** – a dust heap; offering of cloth; a funeral ritual in which cloth is offered to monks on behalf of the dead.

**Pañca-khandha** – five groups of existence; the five aggregates: form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), memory (*saññā*), mental formations or volitional thought (*saṅkhāra*), consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

**Pañca-sīla** – five precepts; the Five Precepts; refers to five training rules to abstain from: 1. taking life, 2. stealing, 3. sexual misconduct, 4. incorrect speech, 5. intoxicating liquors and drugs that lead to heedlessness.

**Pañidhāna** – aspiration; determination.

**Paññā** – wisdom; insight; intuitive insight; thought; intelligence; knowledge; examination; analysis; discernment; wisdom is the mind's eye or the mind's bright light; there are three stages or levels of wisdom: 1. wisdom based on study (*suta-maya-paññā*), 2. wisdom based on reflection (*cintā-maya-paññā*), 3. wisdom based on mental development (*bhāvanā-maya-paññā*).

**Paññā-dhika** – wisdom predominant; one of three types of Bodhisattas.

**Paññā-pāramī** – the wisdom perfection of character; the perfection of wisdom.

**Paññā-vimutti** – deliverance through wisdom; freedom through understanding; discernment release; those with the wisdom-oriented personality type.

**Paññāvudha** – weapon of wisdom.

**Pāpa** – evil; wicked; wrong action; demerit, the opposite of merit (puñña).

**Pāramī** – cultivated virtues; meritorious acts; perfections of character; qualities developed over many lifetimes; the ten perfections: generosity (dāna), morality (sīla), renunciation (nekkhamma), wisdom (paññā), effort (viriya), patience or forbearance (khanti), truthfulness (sacca), determination (adhitṭhāna), benevolence (mettā), equanimity (upekkhā).

**Parikamma** – preparatory; preliminary; in preliminary concentration (parikamma-samādhī), it can be a meditative word or phrase that is repeated to establish concentration.

**Parikkhāra** – requisites; accessory; equipment; utensil; apparatus; set of four necessities of a Buddhist monk: robes, alms bowl, seat & bed, medicine; eight requisites (attha-parikkhāra): the three robes, bowl, razor, needle, girdle, water-strainer.

**Parisā** – a company; an assembly.

**Paritta** – protective chanting, blessings based on legend.

**Pariyatti** – learning of theory; theoretical knowledge; knowledge obtained through reading, study, and learning; theoretical teachings of the Buddha; the Scriptures; study of the Scriptures; the Teachings to be studied.

**Pathama-kappa** – the world's first era following the creation of the universe, as detailed in the second part of the Aggañña Sutta.

**Pathama-pannā** – a Northeastern Thai folk tale about how humans were created in the world.

**Pathama-sambodhi** – the Buddha's history, spanning the very beginning of his cultivation to the religion's end.

**Pathavī-bhaya** – *lit.* earth dangers; land-based natural disasters.

**Paṭibhāga** – equal; similar; counterpart, likeness, resemblance; refers to wisdom.

**Paṭibhāga-nimitta** – conceptualized image; counterpart sign; refers to when the mind clearly grasps the concept of a mental image and then uses wisdom to contemplate it in order to shed attachment.

**Paṭicca-samuppāda** – dependent origination; dependent co-arising.

**Paṭiggāhaka** – receiving, accepting; one who receives or takes, a recipient.

**Pātimokkha** – a collection of precepts contained in the monastic code of discipline (vinaya); the monk's code of discipline, the 227 rules monks must observe; the code of monk's rules that is recited on all full moon and new moon days (uposatha) before the assembled community of fully ordained monks. At the end of the recital, the reciter asks the members of the Order who are present if any of them has infringed any of the rules.

**Patipatti** – practice; applied practice of the Buddha's teachings.

**Paṭivedha** – penetration; attainment; comprehension.

**Peta** – a departed being; ghost; hungry ghost.

**Phala** – fruit; the Fruit; fruit of one's actions; fruition of results of actions; result; effect; the fruit of enlightenment (ariya-phala); having attained a level of enlightenment from following the Buddhist path (magga); the four transcendent (lokuttara) fruits: the fruit of stream entry, the fruit of once-returning, the fruit of non-returning, the fruit of arahantship.

**Phassa** – touch; contact; tactile sense; sense impression.

**Phra** – (*Thai*) honorable, venerable; monk; used as a prefix to the name of a monk; (see: bhikkhu).

**Pindapāta** – *lit.* food being offered to the monks (piṇḍa), bowl (pāta); a collection of alms; alms round.

**Pīti** – bliss; joy; delight.

**Poo roo** – (*Thai*) *lit.* the knower, one who knows; refers to heightened focused awareness; focused consciousness.

**Puñña** – merit; meritorious action; virtue; righteousness; worth; a beneficial and protective force which accumulates as the result of good deeds or thoughts; the opposite of demerit (pāpa).

**Puthujjana** – *lit.* one of the many folk; worldling; commoner; one who has not realized any of the four stages of awakening, one who still possesses all of the ten fetters (saṁyojana); ordinary persons.

**Rāga** – lust; passion; sensuality; desire.

**Rūpa** – tangible form; matter; form; physical components; corporeality; the body and physical phenomenon in general; object of the eye; visible object.

**Rūpa-bhava** – material existence; fine-material existence; the Fine-Material Realm; the Brahma world.

**Rūpa-brahma** – a divine being of the Fine-Material Sphere (rūpa-loka); an inhabitant of the higher heavens.

**Rūpa-dhamma** – form-based phenomena; tangible, material phenomena.

**Rūpa-jhāna** – fine-material absorption; refers to four form-based higher meditative absorptions: 1. first absorption (paṭhama-jhāna), 2. second absorption (dutiya-jhāna), 3. third absorption (tatiya-jhāna), 4. fourth absorption (catuttha-jhāna).

**Rūpa-khandha** – tangible aggregate, form; form aggregate; physical aggregate.

**Rūpa-loka** – the world of form; the Fine-Material Realm; the Form Sphere; 16 heavenly realms free from sensual desire but still conditioned by form: 13 deva realms and 3 Brahma realms; rebirth in these realms is caused by attainment of meditative absorptions (jhāna).

**Rūpa-nāma** – body and mind; corporeality and mentality; matter and mind; form and name.

**Sabbe-saṅkhāra** – all conditioned things.

**Sabhāva-dukkha** – natural suffering; intrinsic or innate suffering; condition of suffering.

**Sacca** – truth; truthfulness; true; real; vow; promise; commitment; integrity; refers to being true to one's word.

**Sacca-dhamma** – the truth; Truth; the ultimate truth; the indisputable truth; the universal truth.

**Saddhā** – faith; devotion; conviction; confidence; belief.

**Saddhā-dhika** – faith predominant; one of three types of Bodhisattas.

**Saddhā-ñāṇa-sampayutta** – *lit.* faith-insight-connected; rational belief; faith grounded in reason; contemplating with wisdom and reason before believing.

**Saddhā-ñāṇa-vippayutta** – *lit.* faith-insight-separated; senseless, irrational belief; belief without reason.

**Saddhi-vihārika** – a co-resident; an attending monk.

**Sādhu** – *lit.* it is well; an expression of appreciation, assent, or approval; good, virtuous, pious.

**Sagga** – heaven; heavenly realm; a place of happiness.

**Sakadāgāmī** – once-returner; the second level of enlightenment on the path to nibbāna; one who will be reborn in the human world only once before attaining final enlightenment.

**Sakka** – (see: Indra)

**Sakkāya-ditthi** – self-illusion; the delusion of self; belief in a personal self; egoistic view.

**Salāyatana** – the six bases of mental activity; the six organs of sense: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind; forms, sounds, scents, flavor, tactile sensation, mental formations; (see: āyatana).

**Samādhi** – concentration; meditation; one-pointedness of mind; mental discipline; two types of concentration: 1. steadfastly focused concentration, 2. serene, tranquil concentration.

**Sāmanera** – novice monastic; novice; one who is ordained by taking the Three Refuges and observes the Ten Precepts.

**Sāmaññalakkhaṇa-dhātu** – characteristics common to the elements; refers to the Three Common Characteristics (tilakkhaṇa).

**Samatha** – calm; tranquility; tranquility of the mind; meditative calm; quietude of the heart.

**Samatha-kammaṭṭhāna** – calm meditation; tranquility concentration; refers to focusing on calming the mind.

**Sammā** – right.

**Sammā-ājiva** – right livelihood; right living; right means of livelihood; right pursuits.

**Sammā-ditṭhi** – right view; right understanding; a perception aligned with the truth; wisdom of the truth of reality; wisdom of right view.

**Sammā-kammanta** – right action; right conduct; right behavior.

**Sammāppadhāna** – right efforts; supreme efforts; the Four Great Exertions: restraint of the senses (saṃvara-padhāna), abandonment of defilements (pahāna-padhāna), cultivation of enlightenment factors (bhāvanā-padhāna), preservation of concentration (anurakkhanā-padhāna).

**Sammā-samādhi** – right concentration.

**Sammā-saṅkappa** – right thought; right intention.

**Sammā-sati** – right mindfulness; right attentiveness.

**Sammā-vācā** – right speech.

**Sammā-vāyāma** – right effort; right exertion; right striving.

**Sammuti** – construct; social constructs; convention; conventional reality; general opinion; consent; pretend, assume; appointment; supposition; election; anything that is conjured into being by the mind; there are two types of sammuti: 1. the world in which nothing truly exists, 2. sammuti-paññatti, or that which is given labels so that they can be referred to for the sake of communication.

**Sammuti-paññatti** – conventional supposition; conventional names or concepts.

**Sampayutta** – associated; connected.

**Saṃsāra** – *lit.* faring on; the cycle of rebirth; endless rebirth; wheel of existence; the process of birth and death; the continuous process of being born, getting sick, growing old, and dying.

**Samuccheda-virati** – refraining because of eradication; abstinence through eradication (of defilements).

**Samudaya** – origin; source; cause; the cause of suffering; the origin of suffering; the second of the Four Noble Truths: there is a cause for suffering.

**Saṅgha** – community; assemblage; company; a chapter of four or more Buddhist monks; the Order; the Buddhist clergy; the Buddhist community of monks, nuns, novices, and laity; in the Triple Gem, Saṅgha refers to the Ariya-Saṅgha, or community of noble ones who have attained a level of enlightenment.

**Saṅkhāra** – mental formations; volitional thought; fabrications; imagination; all forces that form or condition; conditioned things; conditioned phenomena.

**Saññā** – perception; idea; ideation; memory; recognition; remembrance; association; interpretation; as an aggregate: recognizes the known and gives meaning to one's perception.

**Sati** – mindfulness; attentiveness; awareness; recollection.

**Sati-paññā** – mindfulness and wisdom; mindful wisdom.

**Satipaṭṭhāna** – the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: mindfulness of the body (kāyānupassanā), mindfulness of feelings (vedanānupassanā), mindfulness of mental conditions (cittānupassanā), mindfulness of ideas (dhammānupassanā); four ways of attending to mindfulness; setting up of mindfulness.

**Sāvaka** – hearer; disciple; distinguished disciples of the Buddha.

**Sīla** – morality; moral practice; moral conduct; virtuous conduct; virtue; ethics; code of morality; precepts; right conduct; behavioral discipline; Buddhist ethics.

**Silabbata-parāmāsa** – adherence or clinging to rules, rituals, or ceremonies; clinging to rituals and vows; overestimation regarding the efficacy of rules and observances; believing wrong practices to be right; dependence on superstitious rites.

**Sotāpanna** – stream enterer; stream winner; the first level of enlightenment on the path to nibbāna; one who will achieve final enlightenment after 1, 3, or 7 rebirths.

**Sucarita** – good conduct; right conduct.

**Sugati** – happy course of existence; happy state; blissful state; happy, blissful destination; a happy fate.

**Supina-nimitta** – dream.

**Sutta** – *lit.* thread; dialogue; discourse; a discourse or sermon by the Buddha or his contemporary disciples.

**Taṇhā** – craving; desire; want; thirst; there are three types of craving (taṇhā):

1. craving for sensual pleasures (kāma-taṇhā), 2. craving for existence (bhava-taṇhā), 3. craving for non-existence (vibhava-taṇhā).

**Tāpasa** – a hermit; ascetic; ascetic practices; austere spiritual practices; the self-mortification the Buddha practiced before encountering the Middle Way.

**Tāvatīmsā** – the heavenly realm of the Thirty-three; the second of six heavenly realms; the heavenly abode of which Sakka is the king.

**Ten Precepts** – (see: dasa-sīla)

**Thera** – *lit.* elder; an elder or senior monk; a monk who has been ordained for ten or more years.

**Theravāda** – *lit.* doctrine of the elders; the oldest form of the Buddha's teachings; an orthodox branch of Buddhism based on the Pāli Canon; the dominant form of Buddhism in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, and Cambodia.

**Thoon** – (*Thai*) lift up; raise up; elevate.

**Three Common Characteristics** – (see: tilakkhaṇa)

**Three Realms of Existence, Three Realms, Three Worlds** – the Three Spheres; the three planes that together comprise the entire universe of sentient existence; the Three Realms: the Sensual Realm (kāma-loka), the Form Realm (rūpa-loka), and the Formless Realm (arūpa-loka).

**Tilakkhaṇa** – three characteristics; the Three Common Characteristics: suffering (dukkha), impermanence (anicca), not-self (anattā); the Three Signs of Being.

**Tipiṭaka** – *lit.* three baskets; the Pāli Canon comprised of discourses (sutta-piṭaka), monastic rules (vinaya-piṭaka), and abstract philosophical treatises (abhidhamma-piṭaka).

**Tiracchāna** – *lit.* facing down, going horizontally; an animal.

**Udaka-bhaya** – *lit.* water danger; water-based natural disasters.

**Uggaha-nimitta** – visualized image; mental image; acquired image; learning sign; abstract sign; mark of grasping; when an object is clearly stuck in the mind's eye; refers to when one focuses on a preparatory image (parikamma-nimitta) until at last one retains the mental image of the object and can see it even with eyes closed.

**Upādāna** – clinging; attachment; grasping; sustenance for becoming and birth; attachment to views, precepts, and practices; theories of the self.

**Upajjhāya** – preceptor; spiritual teacher; a monk of more than ten vassas who has the authority to confer full monastic ordination.

**Upāsaka** – *lit.* one who comes or sits near; lay devotee; devout or faithful layman; lay Buddhist.

**Upasampadā** – *lit.* approaching or nearing the ascetic tradition; refers to taking higher ordination as a monk.

**Upāsikā** – female devotee; female lay follower.

**Upāya** – means; method; example; Dhamma metaphor; model; resource; expedient.

**Upekkhā** – equanimity; neither positive nor negative; neutrality; indifference.

**Upekkhā-ārammaṇa** – indifferent or neutral preoccupation; neither pleasing nor displeasing preoccupation; a neutral emotion.

**Uposatha** – *lit.* fasting, i.e. ‘fasting day’ is the full moon day, new moon day, and the two days of the first and last moon-quarters; observance; observance day; holy day; Sabbath day; on full moon and new moon days, monks recite the monastic code of discipline (*pāṭimokkha*), and on the four moon-days many devotees observe the Eight Precepts (*atṭha-sīla*); ordination hall; consecrated assembly hall.

**Uposatha-sīla** – observance of the Eight Precepts (*atṭha-sīla*) on the holy day.

**Uttama-sīla** – highest morality.

**Vandana** – to salute with joined palms; to venerate; to pay homage; to pay respect; called ‘wai’ in Thai, it is a gesture made by pressing the palms together in the position of a budding lotus at chest level, elbows down, and bowing slightly to show respect.

**Vāsanā** – subconscious inclination; behavioral tendency; habitual disposition, or kammic imprint that influences present behavior; that which remains in the mind, tendencies of the past, former impressions.

**Vassa** – rainy season; rains retreat; rains-residence; rains; Buddhist Lent; the three-month rainy season from the first day of the waning moon of the eighth lunar month to the full moon of the eleventh month, usually July through October, in which monks are required to reside in a single place and not wander freely about; a year of monastic life.

**Vāta-bhaya** – *lit.* wind danger, air danger; wind-based natural disasters.

**Vatṭa** – *lit.* round, circular; the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth; (see: saṃsāra).

**Vatṭa-cakka** – *lit.* cycle of rebirth-wheel; cycling through births in the Three Realms.

**Vatṭa-saṁsāra** – round of rebirth.

**Vatthu-dhātu** – material elements.

**Vatthu-kāma** – objective sensuality; sensual pleasures derived from a tangible object—whether that object is living or not.

**Vedanā** – feeling; sensation; there are three types of vedanā: pleasant, unpleasant, neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

**Vedanā-ārammaṇa** – object-based feeling; feeling derived from preoccupations or objects (ārammaṇa).

**Vibhava-tanhā** – desire for non-existence; desire for an end to a feeling; craving for non-becoming; craving not to be; the desire not to be something displeasing.

**Vicikicchā** – doubt; perplexity; skepticism; indecision; uncertainty.

**Vihāra-dhamma** – the mind's residence; refers to where the mind frequently resides or dwells—whether it is in the Dhamma or in detrimental worldly obsessions like jealousy or vengeance.

**Vikāla-bhojanā** – taking food in the afternoon and night; refers to the sixth precept, which prohibits eating after noon and before dawn.

**Vimamsā** – analysis; investigation; discrimination.

**Vimutti** – release; deliverance; emancipation.

**Vinaya** – discipline; monastic code; monastic regulations; the code of monastic discipline; rules.

**Viññāna** – consciousness; act of consciousness; cognizance; taking note of sense data and ideas as they occur; sensing and acknowledging stimuli that come into contact with us through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind; life force.

**Vipassanā** – insight; insight development; clear intuitive insight; insight into the true nature of reality as a product of wisdom development.

**Vipassanā-kammaṭṭhāna** – insight meditation; insight concentration.

**Vipassanā-ñāṇa** – insight-knowledge; insight that arises from vipassanā.

**Viriya** – effort; diligence; exertion; endeavor; striving; persistence; energy; vigor.

**Viriya-dhika** – effort predominant; one of three types of Bodhisattas.

**Visuddhi** – purification, purity; holiness; splendor; excellency.

**Visuddhi-dhamma** – purification Dhamma; Dhamma that purifies; purity of Dhamma.

**Vyākaraṇa** – explanation; answer; declaration; refers to an affirmative declaration by the Buddha of one's attainment of enlightenment; a prediction or prophecy by a Buddha that one will achieve enlightenment and be a future Buddha.

**Wat** – (*Thai*) temple; monastery.

**Wat Ban** – (*Thai*) house temple.

**Wat Pa** – (*Thai*) forest temple.

**Yakhu** – (*Thai*) a Northeastern Thai term for an elder monk who ordains and never leaves the monastic order.

**Yama** – ruler of the kingdom of the dead; the Lord of Death; god of hell; prince of death; guardian of hell; grim reaper; the dead are led before him to be judged according to their kamma.

**Yama-loka** – the world of the dead; underworld.

**Yonisomanasikāra** – thorough attention; systematic attention; wise consideration; analytical reflection; critical reflection; having thorough method in one's thought; contemplating causality until comprehensive clarity is reached and the truth is profoundly understood and truly realized; in actual practice, it is reflecting on an issue in a thorough manner by analyzing it in terms of the Three Common Characteristics, both internal and external elements, zooming in and out of yourself, coarse and refined themes, and both subjects with and without consciousness in order to clearly know and see the causes and contributing factors.

Definitions sourced from Scriptures, Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño, Mae Chee Yo Saranya Thian-Ngern, Access to Insight's online glossary, Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto's *Dictionary of Buddhism*, the Dhammayut Order's *A Chanting Guide*, Ven. Nyanatiloka's *Buddhist Dictionary*, Wisdom Library, and various online dictionaries and websites.

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Mae Chee Neecha Thian-Ngern

## About the Author

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño (Thoon Nonruecha) was born May 20, 1935 at Nong Kho village, Bua Kho sub-district, Mueang district, Maha Sarakham province, Thailand. He was the fifth of Uddha and Chan Nonruecha's ten children.

At the age of twenty-seven, he left his family to ordain as a monk in the Dhammayut Order. On July 27, 1961, he took ordination at Wat Photisomporn in Udon Thani, with Phra Dhammadchedi (Joom Bandhulo) serving as his preceptor.

In his early years, Venerable Ācariya Thoon set out on dhutaṅga in various forest destinations and practiced the Dhamma until he profoundly realized and understood according to the truth. He studied under Venerable Ācariya Khao Anālayo of Wat Tham Klong Phen in what is now Nong Bua Lam Phu province. After having been ordained for eight vassas, Venerable Ācariya Thoon attained arahantship in Pa Lun village, Doi Luang district, Chiang Rai province.

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño dedicated his life to the proliferation of the Buddha's original teachings, both in Thailand and abroad. Venerable Ācariya Thoon's teachings are distinctive in that he emphasizes the importance of starting Dhamma practice with right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). His style of Dhamma practice is unique in that it enables laypeople to effectively practice in everyday settings and achieve a level of enlightenment, as he himself had attained the first level (*sotāpanna*) as a layperson. Venerable Ācariya Thoon also stressed the importance of developing both a comprehensive understanding and a true realization of the suffering, harmful consequences, and perils associated with each issue.

In 1975, Venerable Ācariya Thoon established Wat Pa Ban Koh in Ban Phue district, Udon Thani province. Today, the temple serves as a Buddhist landmark for devotees to honor and venerate the Buddha's teachings and holy relics housed in the majestic pagoda. The temples founded in Venerable Ācariya Thoon's name in the metropolitan cities of San Francisco, New York, Hong Kong, as well as the countless Dhamma retreat centers in America and throughout Thailand that train in Venerable Ācariya Thoon's style of cultivating wisdom continue to grow, to this day.

Over the course of his lifetime, Venerable Ācariya Thoon authored over twenty books, including his own autobiography, and produced various forms of media (mp3, VCD, DVD, etc.) so that Dhamma practitioners from any walk of life could easily access the Dhamma. In 1990, Thai Royal Princess Phra Thep Ratanarachasuda honored Venerable Ācariya Thoon with the Sao Sema Dhammadakkha award for his outstanding literary contributions to the Buddhist religion. In 2006, King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand conferred upon Venerable Ācariya Thoon the clerical title of Venerable Paññāvisalathera.

On November 11, 2008, Venerable Ācariya Thoon passed away at the age of seventy-three due to pneumonia and lung tumor complications. Unique to only the greatest arahants, Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño's relics formed the day of his cremation ceremony.

## **About the Translator**

Born and raised in San Francisco, California, Neecha Thian-Ngern has been a devoted student of Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño since the age of sixteen. She earned a Bachelor's of Science in Electrical Engineering from UCSD and a Master's of Science in Business Administration from SFSU. Neecha ordained as a Buddhist nun at San Fran Dhammaram Temple in 2017.

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