

No Worries



*Buddhist Teachings and
A Short Biography of Luang Por Liem Thitadhammo*

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Cover picture: View from Bodhivana Monastery, Melbourne
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Buddha image carved by Luang Por Liem as a young monk

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About Luang Por Liem

Luang Por Liem Ṭhitadhammo¹, a Buddhist monk in the Thai Forest Tradition, was born in Sri Saket Province in the Northeast of Thailand on the 5th of November 1941. After higher ordination at twenty years of age, Luang Por practised in several village monasteries throughout the Northeast until he joined the Forest Tradition in 1969. He took up the training under Luang Pu Chah, who later became one of the most famous monks in the country, and whose reputation and influence has continued to spread throughout the world, even today. Living under Luang Pu Chah's guidance in Wat Nong Pah Pong, Luang Pu Chah's monastery in Ubon Province, Luang Por Liem soon became one of his closest disciples. After Luang Pu Chah became severely ill in 1982, he entrusted Luang Por Liem to run the monastery. Shortly thereafter, as Luang Pu Chah's illness prevented him from speaking, the Sangha of Wat Nong Pah Pong appointed Luang Por Liem to take over the abbotship. He fulfils this duty up to the present day keeping the heritage of Luang Pu Chah's Dhamma and characteristic ways of

¹ *In Thailand 'Luang Por' is an affectionate and respectful title given to older monks and means 'Venerable Father'. In a similar way, the appellation 'Luang Pu' or 'Venerable Grandfather' is used for very senior monks and can confer even greater reverence and respect. 'Ṭhita' is a Pali word that translates best as 'stable' and is an epithet for Nibbāna. Luang Por Liem's ordination name 'Ṭhitadhammo' perhaps refers to 'insight into the stability of the principles of Dhamma.'*

monastic training available for monks, nuns and lay disciples.

Shortly after his 60th birthday, almost ten years after Luang Pu Chah's death, Luang Por Liem Țhitadhammo was given the honorary title of Tan Chao Khun Visuddhisamvara Thera² by His Majesty the King of Thailand. For the Sangha at Wat Pah Nanachat (Luang Pu Chah's International Forest Monastery for training non-Thai monks) Luang Por Liem is not only a dearly respected teacher and guide in the monastic life, but has for the last ten years also conducted every monastic ordination ceremony as the preceptor.



Luang Pu Chah



Luang Por Liem

² *“Tan Chao Khun” is an ecclesiastical title roughly equivalent to a bishop. “Visuddhi” means “purity”, carries connotations of authenticity, completion and integrity and is another epithet of Nibbāna. “Samvara” translates as “restraint” or “discipline”. It can refer to the mental qualities of non-grasping and detachment or to the sublime conduct of one practising the Dhamma. “Thera” refers to an elder monk in the Sangha.*

Foreword

The first half of this book is a compilation of Dhamma teachings of Luang Por Liem Ṭhitadhammo that were given during his visit to Australia in May 2004 (2547) in various talks and conversations. The talks were given in Thai with interruptions for translation into English after each couple of minutes. Because of this unusual way of presenting the Dhamma in little packets, it seemed almost natural to pick some of these packets from throughout the trip and put them together with little individual headings in this book, rather than choosing one or two of the complete talks. We hope that the editing, cutting and compiling will serve the purpose of giving a fairly round picture of all the subjects and similies that Luang Por mentioned during the over 30 talks and question and answer sessions during the three weeks of his visit.

Luang Por was invited to Australia by Bodhivana Monastery in Melbourne, a newly established branch monastery of Wat Nong Pah Pong, where he stayed for most of the time of his trip. Most of the Dhamma in this book was given there, but some of it is also from Sydney, Bundanoon (Santi Forest Monastery), and Canberra (Wat Dhammadharo and the Royal Thai Embassy).

The second half of the book is mainly the translation of parts of Luang Por Liem's Biography in Thai called "Ṭhitadhammajahn" (2002/2545). The selected material outlines the development of Luang Por's practice, so many of the interesting anecdotes and stories from the life of a forest monk in rural Northeastern Thailand haven't been included.

The Thai Forest Tradition doesn't emphasize doctrinal theories, but rather application and practice. The translation therefore often faces the problem of finding the right balance between technical accuracy and a rendering of the spirit of what was said. Many of the technical terms in Pali also have quite a different meaning in the colloquial usage of the Thai language, in which the Dhamma talks of the Forest Tradition are usually given. Many of the readers might not be familiar with the specific style of expounding the Dhamma in the Forest Tradition, where the teachers talk freely and unprepared, straight from the heart, coming from personal experience rather than a scholarly point of view. For any doubts or questions arising, one is probably best advised to try and find out the meaning behind the words through one's own practice and investigation. This is very much in line with one of Luang Por Liem's favorite mottos:

***Observe and reveal it,
Give it voice,
Apply it, bring it to being.***

We hope that this book inspires many readers to put the Dhamma into practice. We'd like to apologize for any shortcomings and faults that may occur in this publication, and – last but not least – thank the many monks and laypeople, whether at Wat Nong Pah Pong, Bodhivana Monastery, or Wat Pah Nanachat for their help in this publication,

the translators
Wat Nong Pah Pong, June 2548 (2005).

*“There is the state of coolness...,
coolness in every position.
All worries, concerns or similar thoughts from
the thinking mind are totally gone.”*





Dhamma Teachings
by Luang Por Liem

compiled from various Dhamma talks
during his stay in Australia

Adaptation

In the practice of Dhamma things progress bit by bit. It is not possible to force or hurry things in any way, similar to how we build this monastery³. If one wants to build a monastery, one needs to proceed gradually, bit by bit. One allows for adaptations and new developments to take place during the course of the work. This also should be the attitude towards Dhamma practice. To accomplish everything in a single day is probably impossible, so we need to go step by step.

I didn't expect it to be too different here, as Australia and Thailand are quite similar: that people sometimes start feeling either happy or unhappy should be the same everywhere.

Of course, how one feels under certain living conditions also depends on the climate, but actually the weather only becomes something that we find difficult when our bodily resistance is weak. If we have built up some resistance, there is nothing too hard about a different climate. To think that it's too hot or too cold isn't the point – it's only a matter of adapting oneself. The same is true for the practice. One cannot expect one's practice to always go well. One needs to look further and see the practice as constant adaptation.

³ *Luang Por is relating his feelings about Bodhiwana Monastery, Melbourne.*

Whatever is insufficient one needs to correct, what isn't good one has to give up.

But be aware, if one's views are biased, one's development won't go in the right direction. Whenever one holds biased views (*agati dhammā*), one still isn't accomplished in the Dhamma.

Take the example of somebody who sees an uneven, rough piece of land and considers it unsuitable for use. That's not correct. After adjusting the ground and re-leveling it, the land can be used. Even rough land can be used, if things are arranged appropriately. On the other hand, if things are not arranged well, the smoothest and finest land will turn out bad.

Dukkha

Dukkha⁴ in the Four Noble Truths can be divided into *kāyika dukkha* and *cetasika dukkha*, the dukkha that arises from the body and the dukkha that comes from the mind. Dukkha of the mind arises because of wrong view. It arises whenever the mind is taken over by unwholesome qualities such as delusion or craving.

But when we contemplate bodily dukkha, we realize that it is something that we have to experience constantly in our bodies. One can say it is part of life itself. It has to be there. The bodily organism needing

⁴ Usually translated as *suffering, unsatisfactoriness or stress.*

to excrete and urinate is dukkha. We experience hunger and thirst as unpleasant feelings (*dukkha vedanā*), and the stilling of it as a pleasant feeling (*sukha vedanā*), but in fact, the whole process is nothing but dukkha.

The dukkha that comes directly from the mind arises from the influence of wanting, or *taṇhā*.⁵ *Taṇhā* is a state of insufficiency. Just as the great oceans which all the rivers flow into will never be full, so too *taṇhā* will never be satisfied. The Buddha thus spoke the verse:

There is no river like craving. (*Dhp.* 251)

What is Left?

When we practice mindfulness of the body, we focus on the decay and ending of our body. We focus on seeing that the body does not endure and that it can't be what we call our self.

Every day death keeps happening to us, but it's a hidden way of dying, not the obvious death of the body. One can see it in the fact that things change. We die from being a child when we become adults. This too is death. Even entering the period of life when one's body deteriorates and can't be controlled as easily as before is death. The various constituents of

⁵ Usually translated as *craving* or *desire*.

life (khandhā) do what they are supposed to do and simply fall apart. Earth goes to earth, water goes to water, fire goes to fire and wind goes to wind. Is there anything left that we can take as belonging to us?

Melting Away Like Snow

Time passes relentlessly. The Buddha compared us with cattle that are being pulled to slaughter. Everyday time passes. Our lifespan is like a dewdrop resting on the tip of a blade of grass – or like the fallen snow that one makes into a snowball⁶ – if it is exposed to the sun it melts away, and when the wind comes it vaporizes and disappears.

The Buddha wanted us to reflect on our lives in this way, so we don't get overpowered by unwholesome qualities – our defilements and desires – so we don't have to live in a way that restricts our freedom, and can't be our own masters.

⁶ *Luang Por had just seen snow that day on Mt. Donna Buang near Melbourne.*

The Nature of the Mind

Apart from physical reality there is the reality of the mind. The mind doesn't have material form, but it has a certain character that expresses itself in happiness, suffering, confusion or peace. The Buddha called these *nāma dhammā* (mental phenomena), but we relate to these experiences in terms of "the mind".

Our minds are simply a manifestation of *nāma dhammā*. One can't say that one's mind is not good or "absolutely evil". It all depends on how one approaches things and how one relates to the way things come to be. Just like the physical elements that one can find in nature, for example: stones, rocks, sand or trees, even mountains and water. Water is only a useful resource for our lives if it is processed and made ready for use. If we skillfully use processing, adaptation and development, these resources will be beneficial and useful. That's the way the Buddha saw the mind, as something natural, that needs to be developed and corrected.

The mind that is in an undeveloped state is unfiltered like unprocessed water that is full of dust particles. There are pollutants mixed in with the *nāma dhammā* that are dangerous, so we need to make an effort to cleanse and develop our minds.

Development of the Mind

Development of the mind – or development of one’s states of mind – requires that one puts oneself into the appropriate conditions – conditions that don’t give rise to worries. One establishes oneself in the reality of the present moment, the *paccuppanna dhamma*, and one leads one’s life cautiously and aware in such a way that it provides protection for oneself.

When one considers and reflects on what is appropriate and inappropriate, one gets to know the things that are dangerous and disadvantageous, because these things speak for themselves. It becomes self-evident. One experiences them all the time. Take for example bad mind-states or bad moods. Everybody knows only too well how these things feel.

Heading Towards a Good Destination

The Buddha taught that whatever we have done to develop and support qualities of goodness will bring about feelings of prosperity and progress. Having done this, one can say that one will “go to a good destination” (*sugati*), or in simple words “go to heaven”.

“Heaven” here means a world where one is in a positive state of mind. A world of positive mind-states refers to a mind that is free from irritations and unwholesome attitudes, such as greed, hatred and delusion – a mind that enables us to experience happiness.

Everything depends on us. That’s why the Buddha taught that we should know how to develop and correct ourselves. Just leaving things up to nature won’t be of much help for us. You can compare it to natural resources and raw materials. If we don’t process and shape them into a form, nature won’t do much good for us. That the places we live in provide shelter from sun and rain, heat and cold, is only possible because of the construction and development that took place.

Human beings are not perfect already from birth. All that we have accomplished is only possible because we have gradually built it up, only because of education and training. With education and training over time we possess the potential to change in all kinds of ways. It depends on us to build up an understanding of ourselves in a broader perspective, in a circumspect way – sincerely and correctly. Then we will find that we are heading towards a good destination.

Subduing Māra

There are periods when we face problems and unwholesome states of mind in our practice, caused by how we relate to the sensual realm, where the three daughters of Māra, “Miss Rāga”, “Miss Arati” and “Miss Taṇhā⁷” come to challenge us.

In these periods, try to hold on and ask yourself: Where do these challenges come from, in what kind of form do they arise? They all come by way of perceptions in our own minds. They are mental food that we have created ourselves, they are *saṅkhāras*⁸. This is a very important point we have to understand. Otherwise the doubts and worries that we may experience (about ourselves and our practice) can become so strong that we might think it is better to get up and leave or to put down our efforts towards our task to attain enlightenment.

We are tempted to give it all up, but there is still this tiny little bit of feeling left deep inside of us that tells us that we shouldn't resign. Do you know the type of Buddha image where the Buddha is shown in the posture of subduing Māra? What exactly is the meaning of the Buddha's gesture? Can you see, the

⁷ *Māra: the deity personifying evil. Māra has three daughters, each personifying a certain defilement, rāga: lust, arati: aversion, taṇhā: craving.*

⁸ *In this case: conditioned phenomena of the mind, or proliferations of the mind.*

Buddha's physical body already wants to get up: his knee already is lifted upwards, but his hand still is pushing it down. It is as if he were saying, "Hold on, wait a second, let's have a close look at this first." This is how we need to face this kind of situation.

Experiences

We need to know ourselves – also in terms of our practice towards realizing the Dhamma. Even the Buddha himself didn't have only fully perfected followers. He also had to put a lot of work into improving and correcting them, passing on knowledge to them and making them acquire new habits, until they reached perfection. Before they were truly useful and of benefit it took quite a long time.

With us it is exactly the same. Just think of the fact that in the past we never really paid attention to the world of our mind. All we did was see things according to our desires. What we called good was merely what gratified our wants and wishes. When we start seeing the world from a perspective that takes our true feelings into account, we might be shocked and finally realize that we need to improve in some ways. For example, when we experience unpleasant emotions with negative effects on us we need to find ways and means to bring them to an end.

If we come to the point where we can stop negative mind states, we have truly accomplished

something very beneficial. Bit by bit we gain more knowledge and understanding that we can apply. If happiness or sadness arises, we don't need to express it to the level of getting lost in it and having to experience dukkha.

We see that these experiences are a way of understanding the processes that our inner life goes through. This truly is knowledge.

Focus on Letting Go

Independent of the meditation object we choose, we already possess the means to become peaceful. We only need to focus on letting go of hindering attitudes that give rise to grasping and identification, the likes and dislikes or the worldly dhammas (*lokadhammā*⁹) that otherwise may overpower us.

Just a Vessel

We can apply investigation of the body (*kāyagatāsati*) in order to develop the feeling of seclusion (*viveka*) – seclusion through the experience of not assuming that we have ownership over the body. We try to see the body simply as a manifestation of the

⁹ *These are: praise and blame, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, happiness and unhappiness.*

elements and aggregates (khandhā) that exist in line with nature.

What we are – male or female or anything at all – is differentiated and characterized by the names and conventions of society, but in essence, people’s experiences are the same. The suffering everyone experiences is the same. The happiness or unhappiness, the feeling of satisfaction or disappointment is the same. This is where we need to focus.

If we realize that our own body and the bodies of other people are essentially the same, we can experience a state of mind that is conducive to the stilling of desire and craving. In the end there aren’t any differences between people. We will start seeing other people in an unprejudiced way.

The feeling that somebody is superior, inferior or on the same level as someone else won’t arise. We don’t assume we are any better or worse than others, or equal to them either. Through maintaining this attitude towards ourselves we cultivate an awareness that is not blocked by the conceit and bias of self-importance.

This is the way we practice *kāyagatāsati*. If we attain to seclusion, we can call it *kāyaviveka*, seclusion of the body.

Having a body is like a material object we can use, like the almsbowl for example. The almsbowl is merely a container to receive food for our use at mealtime. It is just a vessel. Similarly, our body is just a

vessel for inquiry, for giving rise to an understanding of reality.

Our Own Tasks

Speaking about seclusion (*viveka*) – in truth, how “secludedly” we live depends on ourselves, at least to some extent. However secluded the dwelling that we have been allotted by the community may be, we need to be content with it and start doing our duties as *samanas*¹⁰ there, all on our own. Whatever the practices, duties and routines are, we just keep on doing them by ourselves. We train to have an attitude of self-responsibility.

The way we feel is entirely our own issue, it’s no one else’s business. Others can not really know our experiences. It is entirely our own task to examine our character traits and habits. Are we the sensual type of person, the angry or the deluded type? Sometimes these characters are mixed. A person can be both the sensual and angry type, or the sensual and deluded type, for example.

To have character inclinations like this is natural. But the attitude we should have towards them is to want to uproot them, make an end to them. In order to do this, we need to aim at peaceful mind states and apply the respective means that lead us to peace.

¹⁰ *Renunciants, ascetics, recluses.*

Seclusion from Society

Human beings are beings that live in society, and there has to be communication, so inevitably we need to relate to all kinds of different impingements coming from society. We need to face the whole variety. So the Buddha advised us to lead our lives consciously aware, with mindfulness and clear comprehension, in the very moment that we get into contact with the world. There is the eye that sees forms and shapes, there is the ear that hears sounds, the nose that smells odors, the tongue that tastes, the body that feels contact, and – finally – there are images arising in the mind caused by these objects.

All these experiences need filtering. They need to be faced with caution – that means, in a way that enables one to understand all the various impingements that occur. If one sees things clearly, all these objects will lose their value by themselves.

This process is just like when we are together with children. Children find a lot of fun in playing around. But if we see the toys of a child, we probably all agree that they are meaningless – a puppet for example.

If we look back on our experiences, after some time, we start to see them as merely a heap of trash, as something that isn't of any real use. We don't give importance to these things any more – whether it's anger, greed or delusion, desire, aversion or ignorance – all this we will see as heaps of trash. Trash is

probably not something all too desirable for people. No one sees any value in trash, so it fades away from our consciousness. The mind state of anger fades away, the mind state of greed fades away. Eventually seclusion from these states arises. Seclusion from association with “society” arises – seclusion from “society” with what the eye sees, the ear hears and the nose smells.

When the feeling of seclusion has arisen, there is shade and coolness, and we experience that we have a refuge. Having a refuge grants us freedom from worries. It feels like living in a house sheltered from the sun and the rain, the heat and the cold. There is nothing that can cause us trouble.

Granting Opportunity

The Buddha suggested for people that practice together in groups and are interested in the welfare of their community to give each other the invitation for admonishment. The Buddha called this *pavāraṇā*, to “give each other opportunity.” In the conventional framework of the monastic society, *pavāraṇā* is a formal communal duty.¹¹

¹¹ *The pavāraṇā ceremony replaces the recitation of the pāṭimokkha (the monks’ rules) on the last Observance day of the annual rains retreat in any monastery where five or more monks have spent the rains (vassa) together. Every member of the community recites in Pali: ‘I invite (admonition according to Dhamma from) the Venerable*

It means to grant each other the opportunity for admonishment and constructive critical comments. Criticism here is not done with a mind state that is fixed on one's views, opinions or conceit. It is simply meant to point out issues that arise, or warn each other about potential problems. It is done without any arrogance or conceit, because all of us are not perfect as we walk this path.

Sometimes we only look ahead and don't see what's behind us. Maybe we have some weak points. Here we rely on others to shine a light. Or they can show us a mirror to see ourselves more clearly and help us focus our attention on areas where we need to grow. This is why we grant each other opportunity for criticism. In this way development can take place.

When somebody points out where we are at fault or didn't do well we simply accept it. We trust that it is not out of prejudice that another person warns us about what we are not doing correctly.

Whenever we act with strong emotions such as anger or even physical violence, we need to admit that this is ugly, dirty behaviour. If we grant others the opportunity to address us, it helps us to re-establish our awareness of what we are doing. Behaviour that we don't like, other people probably won't like as well. Such actions are unacceptable in society. If we do

Ones with regard to what has been seen, heard or suspected. May the Venerable Ones admonish me out of compassion, having seen (my offence) I will make amends."

them we tend to annoy others and might be perceived as an unskilful person.

The Sangha practices pavāraṇā as a formal communal ceremony that has to be carried out irrespective of rank, status and age of membership in the group. It also is done irrespective of the experience and skills one has.

The Society of Trees

Living together we rely on each other. This can be compared to the “social life” of a forest. In the “society of trees” it is not the case that all trees are the same. There are big ones and small ones. In fact, the big trees also have to rely on the small ones and the small ones on the big ones for the situation to be safe. It isn’t true that a tree isn’t threatened by dangers only because it is big. When a storm comes it is the big trees that fall. Similarly the small trees need to rely on the big ones. If there weren’t any big trees to lean on they’d break.

Any society needs to cooperate like this. Following the principles that the Buddha laid down can mitigate the problems that occur when unbeautiful situations arise. Human beings should use their intelligence, their faculties of mindfulness and wisdom, and rise above the behaviour of the animal realm. That’s why the Buddha praised the qualities of mindfulness and wisdom.

Utterly Normal

If we see the normal suffering of living in society as something very heavy, it is indeed very heavy. If we see it as something natural, it becomes simply natural. Just like when we look at a tree, if we see it as something big, it becomes big, if we see it as small, it becomes small. But if we neither consider the tree big nor small, then there won't be much to say about it. It becomes utterly normal that way.

A Dam

Sometimes, in our situation of living in a society with very wide boundaries – this community living together in the world that we could call our “big family” – we need to use a lot of patient endurance. When situations arise where we have the feeling that we don't know where we are at, we might carelessly do something wrong, so we generally should be able to patiently hold ourselves back a bit.

Patient endurance is a kind of energy. It is just like the energy that is generated from the dam of a reservoir that retains water, like we have here close to Melbourne. Patient endurance similarly is a potential ready to benefit us.

We patiently endure circumstances where we come into contact with emotions from people around

us. Whether we receive what we wish or not, we endure patiently. If it is the case that we can let go of things and put them down, patient endurance becomes renunciation or sacrifice in itself, an important quality for mutual support in society that gives us a better understanding of life.

A Praiseworthy Duty

I really would like to praise the workers that do the duty of taking care of human beings that have come to the end of their existence, namely, that have reached death¹². They do their work in a very motivated way when they arrange cremations so that they don't display any offensive, ugly sights. They do their work as if they were the blood-relations or brothers and sisters of the departed.

This is a way of relating to our friends in the human realm that pays respect to the fact that everybody is in the same situation of birth, old age, sickness and death, a situation that can't be avoided. To take care of each other in this way is indeed something most praiseworthy.

Ceremonies like this reflect the way we fulfil our duties of support and care for each other. The Buddha praised this duty towards the departed. He wanted the

¹² *Luang Por had visited the Lillydale Crematorium in Melbourne.*

monks in the Sangha to take care of their fellow practitioners who have reached the end of their lives in a neat and orderly way, seeing it as chance to do service to one another.

Sick Persons

That we sometimes feel displeased when we are confronted with society is due to contact with the worldly dhammas, the fear and dread that comes from other people. If others are pleased with us, they will praise us, if they are displeased, they will blame us. When they blame us, we sometimes feel insulted and unhappy. But if we actually saw it from a perspective of mindfulness and wisdom, we'd realize that those who blame us must be in a state of suffering, they must be feeling unwell. They should be compared to people who have an illness, whose health is deteriorating. Those who do the duty of looking after sick persons, the nurses and doctors, know well enough, that sick persons usually behave in a way that shows irritation and discontent. Nurses or doctors wouldn't pay attention to behaviour like this. They would consider it normal for a sick person.

Our situation is similar. We should see the people who express criticism towards us in a way that gives rise to loving-kindness, goodwill, friendliness and compassion (*mettā* and *karuṇā*), as those who are making the criticism are in a state where their hearts are afflicted and they don't know themselves anymore. If

we can give rise to feelings of mettā we won't fight back but rather express friendship and support. In this way we give the emotions the chance to settle down, abate and become peaceful.

They Don't Want it

Having cut off the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion, the Buddha was able to spend a life without negativity and anger. His mind was abundant with benevolence and compassion – mettā. But not the kind of mettā that is still associated with taṇhā. Mettā that goes together with desire is still insufficient, still not perfect.

The Buddha suggested to simply look at the world in the light of emptiness, to see through the world as void. He didn't say that we should think that we are supposed to help out and give support whenever we see a person suffering and in pain. This is not the way the Buddha saw the world.

The Buddha said:

Kammunā vattati loko

(The world is driven by kamma¹³).

If we start giving advice to people who are still under the influence of their kammic dispositions they

¹³ *The law of cause and result of all actions with intention.*

will object to our advice. They won't accept our help. They don't want it.

You can compare this to giving food to an animal – for example human food to water buffaloes or cows. They don't want it. What they want is grass.

Infatuation With the World

The Buddha taught that the beings in the world – which means the world in our own minds – are constantly situated in the realm of sensual desire. We experience sensuality carrying us away. We constantly are travelling around in the realm of desires, based on desirable objects.

Desirable objects actually refer to this very “self” and the material things that relate to it. They make us feel obsessed, infatuated and captured. That's why the Buddha taught us to make an effort to see these processes in the world and ourselves with insight. If we focus on these processes in accordance with their true nature, we'll recognize them as experiences which are not fully perfect and evidently deficient.

One needs to realize that infatuation with the world is a state of imperfection which leads us to experience discomfort and all kinds of sorrow and bereavement. Both pain and pleasure, good and evil eventually cause us to feel imprisoned in a state of suffering that burns us up.

We need to make an effort to see this in order to react to it and change our attitudes towards it, seeing the danger in the round of existence. We become one who is alert and careful when he relates to the world, becoming someone who sees worldliness as something to get rid of, along with all the associated infatuations, involvements, and entanglements. In turn we aspire for liberation and escape from our identity and self.

Well Equipped

If one divides the dhammas that lead to awakening (*bodhipakkhiyā dhammā*) up, as it is generally done in the Buddhist scriptures, they comprise:

the four right efforts, the four foundations of mindfulness, the four bases of power, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors for awakening, and the noble eightfold path.

If one wanted to summarize all these factors into a single one, it would surely be the factor of mindfulness.

All of us are already well equipped with the four foundations of mindfulness – the body, feelings, the mind and dhammas – in one way or another. We indeed have a body and we do have feelings, whether they are feelings of happiness or suffering, appreciation

or aversion. Our memory and our awareness are well accomplished. We do experience saṅkhāras, the proliferations of the mind, whether they are good or evil qualities, and we possess consciousness (*viññāṇa*) the faculty of receiving information coming from the sense organs. So we really need to put this teaching of mindfulness into practice.

Mindfulness should be established in relation to every situation of our lives and in the very moment we experience it. That's why the Buddha taught us to lead our lives with awareness and clear comprehension, mindfully focusing, observing and investigating.

What we need to do first is to try to settle our minds in the present, not worrying about the past and the future, giving rise to the present moment (in our minds), becoming established in this place of full perfection. The present moment is both cause and result, as it is in the present moment that we create good or bad causes and conditions (for the future). For this reason the Buddha taught that we should lead our lives in a way that is conscious and aware.

So, these dhammas that lead to awakening are something that we already possess. Coming together and supporting each other in the practice, especially living in a place like this monastery, we don't need to experience the ties to the outer world with all the chaos and difficulties of society.

All that is left for us to do is to study ourselves, observe ourselves in a more careful and circumspect way. Applying care and circumspection will give rise

to right view (*sammā ditṭhi*). Right view itself actually equals peace.

What is it that one sees when one has right view? One sees dukkha as something that should be known, one sees the cause of dukkha as something to abandon, one sees cessation – *anicca, dukkha, anattā*¹⁴ – as something to realize, and one relates to life in a composed and restrained way. These are the Four Noble Truths, dukkha, origin, cessation and path. Living one's life in accordance with these truths, one can say, is the bodhipakkhiya dhamma, the dhamma leading to awakening. Right view takes one to clear understanding, to peace, coolness. It takes one to purity of mind.

These dhammas are qualities that are appropriate for us to develop and make much of. Everybody is able to do this if he puts forth effort, if he puts his heart into it, gives it importance and doesn't stop, doesn't give up. This is what they call relentlessly walking until one reaches one's goal at the end of the path, until one succeeds.

Viriyena dukkham accenti

(Dukkha can be overcome through effort.)

This is a very clear statement of the Buddha, so we should practice and conduct ourselves accordingly. Don't fall under the influence of the hindrances of laziness or slackness. Laxness and sluggishness

¹⁴ *These are the Three Characteristics of existence: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self.*

weaken us, drain our strength and lull us to sleep. What we need is resoluteness. Have you ever heard how the Buddha made the firm resolution:

“Willingly, let only my skin, sinews and bones remain, and let the flesh and blood in my body dry up, but I will not get up and relax my energy, nor stop putting forth effort until I attain awakening.”

This vow of the Buddha shows that he had very strong and firm determination. He was truly a noble person. We could call him the ideal, perfect being, even a “hero”, a man with outstanding, unparalleled steadfastness of mind. He didn’t have thoughts of “I can’t do this”, because the Dhamma is something that human beings are capable of carrying out and putting into practice. All of us are human beings, so this should be sufficient for acknowledging the fact that there must be at least some way to give rise to that which is of true benefit.

No Conflicts

In a certain sense, what is called “entering the stream” (*sotāpatti*) in the scriptures means the reduction of the forcefulness related to the way we live our lives, becoming somebody who is possessed of peace. A stream-enterer has alleviated greed, desire, hatred, anger and diminished delusion and ignorance.

It means that he lives his life less violently. All kinds of conflicts gradually become less and are finally resolved.

A life with no conflicts at all is a life where one truly feels happy. This kind of happiness stems from having no dark character traits. There is nothing that can give rise to anxiety in any way. It is truly a good way of existing.

In the time of the Buddha one could find many examples of this, because the disciples of the Buddha generally led their lives in a virtuous, mindful and wakeful way. If someone is possessed of this quality of presence of mind, their spiritual and emotional life is generally in a wholesome state. There is the feeling of being on a path without obstructions and dangers.

To lead one's life like this is not only the task of a monk. Everyone who is still alive has the duty to live with an attitude of mind that doesn't give rise to conflicts.

No Worries

After one has reached seclusion from sensual pleasures and unwholesome states of mind in the practice, all kinds of things stop arising and proliferating in the mind, even what we call "*vitakka*" (thoughts). Only mindfulness and clear comprehension remain. The entire range of unwholesome thoughts has been abandoned.

“Unwholesome thoughts” also refers to the wish to have ever-increasing pleasure in life. As we know, to indulge in sensual pleasures is reckoned as a danger in the Buddha’s teaching, and so is the wish for more and more of it in the future. All these thoughts need to be cut off.

When unwholesome mind states cease, one is left with an experience of rapture and joy (*pīti*) and a feeling of great happiness (*sukha*). Following rapture comes the experience of this tremendous happiness. But if one looks carefully, this happiness also has its drawbacks. It can turn into a kind of derangement or distortion of perception, called “*vipallāsa*”. *Vipallāsa* is the opposite of *vipassanā*¹⁵. *Vipassanā* means the revelation of clarity, an experience of complete understanding.

So when these feelings of rapture and bliss arise, what we need to do is to continue to uphold mindfulness, so that we don’t get lost and deluded at the point when we experience this immense happiness. Don’t mistake yourself to have attained to being “this” or “that”. One has to be able to let go and get down to the level equanimity (*upekkhā*).

In simple words: stop the speculations and concerns and just be mindful. Stay in the reality of the

¹⁵ *Clear insight, a way of practicing meditation that focuses on development of insight rather than tranquility, which is the aim of samatha or samādhi.*

present moment, the paccuppanna dhamma. No worries about anything.

If one practices like this, there will be true happiness with no concerns about external things. No worries about one's conditions of living. One could either eat or not eat. The Buddha proved this to us with his enlightenment. Did you ever notice that after he had finally eaten Sujātā's milk-rice (on the day of his enlightenment), all he did was to do his duty in putting forth effort in meditation? There was not the slightest concern about the requisites one needs to sustain a living.

All the Buddha consumed was the bliss of seclusion, the result of having cut off his cravings and defilements. This experience changed everything completely. If there is no more black any more, everything becomes white – that's a law of nature. It is a change that automatically takes place, ruled by nature.

We will experience a feeling of not desiring anything, neither liking nor disliking things in the way ordinary people do. The sense organs are still in use, but in a way that there is nothing that gives rise to a bigger picture deluding us.¹⁶ The ear keeps hearing sounds, but without the deceiving context. The eye

¹⁶ *While talking Luang Por switched between two words which sound quite similar: "paab ruam" (the whole picture) and "paab luang" (literally: a deceiving picture or illusion; specifically meaning mirage or hallucinations).*

still sees things – you can see men and women, but without illusions.

It is a different experience than that of an ordinary, unenlightened being (*puthujjana*), who immediately thinks “this is good,” when he sees something or, “this is no good,” when he sees something else. The difference lies in that the enlightened person doesn’t have feelings of agreement or disagreement. This is where the enlightened person is different from an ordinary one. This is the nature of the change that takes place in enlightenment.

Have you ever experienced something like this? Anybody can experience this! (*Luang Por laughs...*)

*“...not worrying about
the past and the future,
giving rise to the present moment,
becoming established in this place of full perfection.”*





*Questions and Answers
with Luang Por Liem*

*compiled from various conversations
during his stay in Australia
with the laypeople, monks and novices
at Bodhivana Monastery*

When one uses a meditation word (parikamma), normally, should one repeat it aloud?

It doesn't matter. If one is alone, one can repeat it aloud, but if one is together with others, it's not necessary to do so.

When one breathes in one repeats the syllable "Bud—" and when one breathes out "—dho". What one repeats is a name in a language (Pali) that people respect and that gives rise to good feelings. "Buddho" means the one who knows and is awake. It refers to awakening, just like after we have slept. When we become conscious, get up, and start picking up all kinds of impressions around us, what we apply is the faculty of knowing and wakefulness.

Another method that one can use generally is to focus one's mind with awareness, paying attention to mind states and observing them in order to build up some understanding of one's mental experiences. To observe one's mind, the Buddha said, leads to safety. One observes in order to become free from Māra's snare. In this context Māra refers to certain feelings we experience in our minds that we call moods. The Buddha said:

***Ye cittam saññamessanti
mokkhanti mārabandhanā***

*Whoever follows his mind observing it
is freed from the bonds of Māra. (Dhp. 37)*

I heard that you went to see cremations at the crematorium in Melbourne. What would be some good reflections to use on this topic?

One can take what one sees at a cremation as a theme for questioning oneself. For example: today they have burned this person, but tomorrow who knows who is going to be burned... could it be me? These are good questions because they make us skilled in dealing with the reality of life. When the inevitable events that nature brings arise, we won't be stirred up in confusion.

The Buddha praised seeking out cremation sites so we won't lose ourselves in pleasures and fun until feelings of infatuation take hold of us. We have a look at that which helps to alleviate our desires and aversions. We look at cremations to reduce the delusions of self-importance, "me" and "mine". To question oneself in this way can bring about peace of mind to a certain degree.

If we reflect on death like this, is it possible that the result is that one gets depressed? Does one need a teacher to guide one, or how does one prevent depression from coming up?

In the beginning it is possible that symptoms like this arise, but if one gets used to this contemplation over a long time, this will change.

This makes me think of the time when I was a young man, together with my friends. Everyone felt they had great fun the way young people do, but when I'd start mentioning the subject of death, it seemed that

nobody wanted to talk about it. Everyone would run away, evading the topic.

People don't want to face things like death. They don't want to get involved. It is considered something inauspicious. But when I brought this subject up, it was meant as a reminder, to make people conscious of death. In Isahn¹⁷ the ceremonies for the departed are called "Good-house-festivals". These "Good-house-festivals" are events that make us experience the reality of life.

I see you sitting here, smiling, relaxed, at ease and in good spirit, but when I turn back to look at myself, I see that I'm still suffering, and can't really smile all too much. This is because I haven't yet practiced the Dhamma in the correct way, isn't it?

You'd probably know.... But any way, the practice probably needs some factors of support, so it gets stronger. If there is more strength, things will work out by themselves.

Is part of the practice like climbing up a mountain, which naturally has to be exhausting, but if one has reached the top, all the weariness is gone?

That's probably the way it is. Luang Pu Chah used to quote a local philosophical saying:

¹⁷ *The northeastern region of Thailand.*

*If you climb a tree don't be slow, hesitate or go back.
If you climb a mountain go slowly and gradually.*

Is there a way to always experience happiness while one is practicing or does there also have to be some suffering?

If we take a meal the purpose is to become full. If we don't stop eating, we *will* surely become full. While we are eating we still have the desire to allay our hunger, but if we keep on eating, the hunger will disappear.

Even though we still experience suffering in our practice we are probably also building up some good qualities. What is your advice, where should we develop goodness?

There are many forms of goodness, but whatever form goodness appears in, it only serves a single purpose: to support us in not having to experience suffering. In his own language the Buddha called this goodness *puñña*¹⁸.

What does *puñña* include? Among other things it includes giving support and help to other people. For example, when we see an accident while traveling, we can give help. When we help others we build up the quality of *mettā*.

¹⁸ Usually translated as merit, goodness, or wholesome *kamma*.

One is also offering something to others. But in Thailand, people are afraid of helping others in an accident. In the old days, people were honest and trustworthy. Today people are not so friendly anymore.

These days, if somebody simply helps out without thinking, if there are no witnesses, he might find himself being accused of causing the accident. That's why people today are cautious and suspicious. This is a symptom of a changing society where people don't trust each other anymore. But to help out others is a way to build up goodness and mutual support.

To practice abstaining from doing evil, abstaining from the path to what is called "the disasters of hell", is a path that gives rise to beneficial feelings. In fact, all the things that human beings have invented and created are meant to be of benefit, but if they are used in a bad way, they become dangerous and disadvantageous. Drugs like morphine or caffeine, for example, are widely used. If they are used in the wrong way, people become crazy, deranged and their nervous system becomes out of balance. We need to understand what is good and what isn't. Surely the Buddha had good reasons for teaching us to refrain from things that lead to conflict or aggression, to be determined to do good. This is a matter of intention.

The very beginning of the training is the practice of *sīla*¹⁹. Then one develops the meditation practice, maintaining mindfulness – mindfulness in relation to the different postures of the body (for example). Furthermore one needs to lead one's life with skill and wise reflection.

¹⁹ *Moral conduct, ethical behaviour.*

The other day I spoke about the fact that in our lives we rely on using electric energy. When we use electric light we have to be mindful and aware (because electricity can be dangerous). If used mindfully and with circumspection, electric energy is of great benefit and use. We can derive happiness from it and use it as we wish, but this depends on correct practice.

I would like to ask about developing mettā as a specific meditation practice. As far as I know it is not something that the kruba-ajahns²⁰ in Thailand speak about a lot, but in the West it is very popular. What is your point of view on this matter?

The reason that the kruba-ajahns in Thailand don't talk about mettā as a specific meditation practice comes from the understanding that the perfection of upholding sīla brings about mettā by itself. Mettā goes along with sīla because sīla naturally takes one on the path of non-conflict.

Mettā also needs to be coupled with equanimity (upekkhā). If mettā lacks upekkhā it isn't complete, and it might not give rise to proper development in the practice.

There is also mettā that is actually love, isn't there? And there is love that is coupled with mettā. Can you remember the senior Western monk who had "mettā" for a handicapped friend (and disrobed to

²⁰ *Highly venerated monks in Thailand, especially the meditation teachers in the Forest Tradition.*

marry her). I think they are separated again, aren't they?

Can I ask you for some advice how to alleviate sensual desire?

On the coarser level sensual desire has to do with food as a stimulus. If we can reduce this factor, it will become less strong, but not to the extent that it fully disappears. But at least it goes down to the level where one can investigate it a bit. If I continue speaking like this, I might get into conflict with the big (food) companies... (*Luang Por laughs...*)

Is Thai food particularly dangerous?

Whatever food, if one eats much there is much danger. The principles that the Buddha gave are to know the right balance, the appropriate amount. This is called *bhojane mattaññutā* (knowing the right amount in eating).

Is to reflect on anicca, dukkha, anattā in a way that leads to real wisdom different from our normal understanding?

It is different. If the reflection is (deep) enough, everything will stop. If it isn't that deep yet it is still useful as a means to trigger and stimulate our memory (*saññā*). Enough for an approach (to real wisdom or *paññā*).

...if we merely know from memory, really...

That's also useful, just like when we know a map well. Knowing the map is useful.

I'd like to ask about saikhāras arising and ceasing in the mind, anger for example. Sometimes, when I see a certain person, anger arises. When this person leaves, the anger disappears. But later, even after many years, if I meet the same person again, the anger comes back again. And then again it ceases. How shall we deal with situations like this where anger arises repeatedly? After all, it seems that the anger is still present in the heart...

We actually don't have to deal with or try to prevent anything from arising at all. We only need to be carefully aware of ourselves, continually.

Emotions like this are like visitors. They are just dropping in, coming to see us. Nevertheless, they can be dangerous, so one needs to be a bit careful with them. After all, as the Buddha said, the things that arise will also cease.

So no need to inquire why we get angry, or think much about it? Or all we need to observe is that the anger, once arisen, ceases again...?

...well, we still need to apply ourselves to the practice of *samādhī*²¹ a bit!

Just like when one works, one also needs a break from time to time. If work is combined with rest, one establishes a good balance. We shouldn't be heedless in our activities. We need to train developing peace of mind from time to time so we'll be more and more able to relax. But don't build up your meditation on the basis of wanting and wishing. Just keep doing your practice of meditation until it becomes part of your habits.

I sometimes have very clear dreams telling events of the future or other events, like accidents or other bad news. Are these things that I should pay attention to, go tell other people about, or should I keep these things to myself?

These kinds of things should be kept to oneself. If other people are involved, it is not appropriate to tell them, partly because sometimes the messages may be very clear, but other times, they aren't.

Dreams are a part of *saṅkhāras*, the *cittasaṅkhāras*²². They can be telling about the future. Sometimes they are right, sometimes they aren't. There

²¹ *The development of a sustained, blissful, unified, one-pointed awareness on a meditation object leading to tranquility.*

²² *In this context: conditioned phenomena of the mind, it may also be hinting at the common Thai usage meaning proliferations or imaginations of the mind.*

are mistakes. We can understand them as a kind of knowledge and observe them, but we shouldn't hold on to them too much.

I've heard others talk about having visions (nimittas) of heavenly beings (devas) and all kinds of things when they meditate. For somebody who is new in the practice and doesn't have much experience, how important is it to believe in these visions?

They are a hindrance in the development of samādhi. This is something to be well aware of.

The appropriate way to practise is, of course, to practise samādhi wherever you are, but not to the point of overdoing it. We should allow a little exposure to sensory input and practise building up some sense restraint.

The practice needs to be backed up by supporting factors. The Buddha called them consummations for the qualities of Dhamma (*guṇasamāpatti*).

The first supporting factor is restraint in sīla and the second is motivation or intention.

Motivation or intention means to be possessed of an honest and pure feeling with steadfast aspiration and determination.

The first factor, restraint in sīla, deals with our relation to the sense-doors. The sense-doors are the place where taṇhā arises – and where it is extinguished. Taṇhā arises in connection with delightful and pleasurable things (*piyarūpa* and *sātarūpa*) whenever the eye sees forms, the ear hears sounds, the tongue tastes flavours and the body feels

contact. We practise restraint with the mental objects arising in our minds in order to not allow feelings of like and dislike to take control over the mind.

Here you need some extra determination, because once likes and dislikes have arisen in the mind they are there and can't be stopped. They are states of mind in their own right. If they have arisen, we need to watch their cessation. The feeling of liking something is a form of *kāmatanḥā*²³, and the feeling of disliking is a form of *vibhavatanḥā*²⁴. We have to watch the course on which these feelings take us. The likes are deceitful, illusionary, and we get carried away by the experience of fun and pleasure they give rise to. They stimulate desires and wishes, but we can control them when we are restraining our bodily actions. We can put them aside.

There is some danger in the other factor, as well. Motivation and intention to practise can turn into quite an obstacle. At first we all come to the practice with a mind of faith and the feeling that our aspirations are being satisfied. But at some time the satisfaction will become less and the feeling of dissatisfaction naturally will increase. Eventually we become discouraged, tired and fed up. It is normal that there has to be some discouragement in the practice too. In the times we feel strong, we say we can do our job, but in times of weakness, we say we can't stand it any more. That's the way it goes.

We constantly have to be aware, keep observing and questioning ourselves in our practice: "Why do

²³ *Sensual desire.*

²⁴ *Desire not to be, not to have.*

these states of mind come up?” We might not be able to prevent these states of mind, but what we can do is to keep our minds focused one-pointedly. At least we practise to be careful with those factors that lead us into delusion and danger. In doing so, the feeling of being tied up, depleted or enslaved into some narrow perimeter where we don't have freedom any more will become less severe and we will be composed and restrained.

The third supporting factor in the practice is *bhojane mattaññutā* (knowing the right amount in eating). Concerning our lifestyle, we always need to be able to know the right amount. If we previously lived in circumstances where we always were able to gratify our desires, the practice situation we are in now surely will feel restricted. We'll experience a lot of unpleasant feelings including hunger and thirst. But if we encounter experiences like this, we get to know them and understand them. In some of the cases, what we experience may simply be normal for our physical body. Our body urinates and defecates, so it has to respond with feelings of hunger and thirst. This is nothing to worry about. Still, anything that we aren't used to yet will require some adaptation. This of course takes time, but it can be done. When we eventually are physically used to our new circumstances of living, our lifestyle is nothing much to worry about anymore.

Nevertheless these doubts and worries about the conditions of living are usually a big issue for new monks. That's why in the “four dangers of a new monk” the Buddha warned us to not be somebody who gets overpowered by only thinking of his stomach, and to not be somebody who can't bear difficulties.

The fourth supporting factor in the practice is *jāgariyānuyoga* (devotion to wakefulness). This factor has to do with keeping up awareness, following the mind and upholding clarity of mind. It means to be cautious, not to let evil tendencies arise in oneself. The word “evil” refers to the defilements and stains of character that we all know too well. The Buddha taught the principle of being devoted to wakefulness so we become aware of the unwholesome characteristics of mind. At the same time there should be the effort to support the wholesome qualities of mind. What is “wholesome” we surely must know too.

The wholesome qualities of mind need to be supported in quite a few different ways so that feelings of discouragement, exhaustion and resignation won't arise. Still this can happen. When lack of motivation and discouragement occurs it needs to be faced, looked at and warded off. One has to protect oneself from this. Not only you – I myself have gone through experiences like this. I almost quit the job, to put it simply. But, given the fact that we are in a state of training and still need to practise, we need to remind ourselves that this process takes time. It's not just in a few seconds that one adapts to new circumstances. Everything naturally takes time.

The last two factors of the “four dangers of a new monk” (following “thinking only about one's stomach” and “not being able to bear difficulties”) are: infatuation with sensual pleasures, or wanting to experience ever increasing happiness, and, finally, a danger which all of us who are part of one specific group of biological sex should be well aware of: the danger of male relating to female.

On another occasion you spoke about sensual pleasures and compared them to fire inside our hearts. If we investigate with mindfulness we can see their disadvantages, their impermanence, the fact that there is nothing substantial or stable in sensual pleasures. If we reflect on these truths often (when exposed to sensual pleasures), is it possible to see these dangers in the very moment that agreeable phenomena (iṭṭhārammaṇā dhammā) arise?

If we've got mindfulness, it should be possible to see them.

Agreeable phenomena are part of what the Buddha called the worldly dhammas (lokadhammā). Those dhammas dominate the world. Agreeable phenomena are what is reckoned as happiness in the ways of the world, whereas disagreeable phenomena are what the world refers to as suffering. But for someone who understands things from a perspective of seeing the danger in the worldly dhammas, there is nothing but suffering (or dukkha) arising. There is nothing to be found that is happiness (or sukha). Nothing but dukkha arising and nothing but dukkha ceasing. Someone who sees this understands the world in a way that makes the common truths of existence²⁵ become obvious. This person constantly realizes the impermanence of existence and develops a feeling of

²⁵ A Thai expression: *sāmañña of saccadhamma*.

being fed up with the world. “To be fed up” in this context refers to the fact that there isn’t anything constant, stable, sure or reliable in the world.

What do the eight worldly dhammas, as they are mentioned in the theoretical framework of Buddhism, comprise? You sure know well enough. They deal with wealth and possessions that, when we obtain them, are called “gain”. Our “gain” then becomes “loss” when we lose it. In connection with society there is the praise we get from people if they appreciate us and there is blame when they don’t. So the eight worldly dhammas are: gain and loss of wealth, attainment of rank, fame or status and the loss of it, praise and blame, and happiness and suffering.

Actually, one can sum all the eight worldly dhammas up into two: sukha and dukkha. But the *ariya puggala*²⁶, who lives in accordance with the common truths of existence, and possesses views in accordance with them, would say: there is nothing else but dukkha arising and nothing else but dukkha ceasing. There is nothing stable, constant, sure or reliable in the world. Thus, what the *ariya puggala* experiences is a feeling of being fed up with things. That’s all, that’s the way the experience is.

And if one has practised to the last step of enlightenment, is it equanimity (upekkhā) that will arise – no matter what one gets into contact with, whether good or bad?

²⁶ *The noble being who has reached one of the stages of enlightenment.*

If we've reached the end of the practice, in terms of the sense spheres or in terms of living with other people, there will be no experience of likes and dislikes anymore. Male and female – these are just aspects of conventional reality, there will be no more feelings that lead towards objects of sensual pleasure. The experience is, that all those likes and dislikes are simply no longer existent.

There are many different phenomena that we might then experience. For example, the nervous system up in the brain feels cool. The experience of sensory contact is not of the kind that leads into a path that gives rise to changes (in one's mind). There will be a quality that can be called neither agreeable nor disagreeable.

It is a reality of nature that is very pure. This means, although one sees with one's own eyes what they call "beauty" there is nothing beautiful there. Not in a negative sense though – just that there isn't anything.

It is an experience of emptiness – all empty. That's a bit what it's like. It's emptiness in a way that gives us the feeling of being unaffected or untouched. Just like there isn't anything more that we have to respond to or prevent from happening. What is left is simply the feeling of utmost emptiness.

But the experience is not one of indifference in the sense that one doesn't have a clue of what's going on. It is indifference in the sense of feeling that there is enough of everything. One is satisfied already. One has had enough. There is nothing more that can be added.

What is left is only a matter of taking different bodily movements and postures, for example, when we

take a rest. One doesn't rest out of any kind of desire. Taking a rest is just a specific way of relaxing the physical tensions in the body. When the time comes to have a rest, one can take a rest without having to experience the *nīvaraṇas* (the five hindrances).

The same is true for the time when one is awake. One really knows to be awake when it is the time to be awake. When one sleeps one is aware that one sleeps. Sleep is a method that the body uses, but (on behalf of the mind) awareness is still present. It's just like the saying "to sleep while being awake (and to be awake while being asleep)." (*Luang Por laughs gently.*)

At the same time that we experience sukha vedanā (a pleasant feeling) through the sense-doors in some way or another, there has to be the arising of saññā (memory or perception) telling the mind that this pleasant feeling is something that we want to have. This is a mechanism that necessarily arises, until we have managed to develop our minds to be able to see things mindfully in time.

Is it saññā itself that takes over the duty of telling us "this feeling is something we'd like to have?"

You need to put yourself into a position that isn't controlled by the power of wanting. We practise for the sake of practice, not for wanting anything.

Let's examine things that are related to the practice that we can directly see. This may take us back into history, but still, it can give us some guidelines for our practice. Take Venerable Ānanda for

example, the Buddha's attendant. You probably know from your studies what happened after the Buddha had laid down his khandhas²⁷. Venerable Ānanda upheld a perception or memory in mind (*saññā ārammaṇa*) that he had received from the Buddha himself. The Buddha had told him, that he would be able to finish his work in the practice in this lifetime.²⁸

When the time of the first council came, Venerable Ānanda remembered this *saññā* very well and increased his efforts in practice immensely, relentlessly doing walking meditation. He exhausted himself completely following the craving (to become fully enlightened), until he finally resigned and gave up his hope for what he wanted to achieve, thinking that the Buddha's words were probably only meant to be a little encouragement in a casual way. But the moment that Venerable Ānanda relaxed and let go of his craving he fell into a natural state free from wanting and wishing anything. An experience of peace and seclusion arose, and he was finally released from all impurities of mind.

Whatever work we do under the influence of wanting and wishing will still be insufficient in some aspects. In our work, we need to rely on what we are doing itself for instructions. Just like when we plant a tree, our duty is only to dig the hole, plant the tree, put some earth on top, give it some fertilizer and water it. The development of the tree, how it grows, is the tree's

²⁷ *To lay down one's khandhas is an expression for the parinibbāna, the death of an enlightened being.*

²⁸ *I.e. to become an arahant, the last step to full enlightenment.*

business. It is beyond our power to influence it. There is a limit to the responsibility here.

So “to give everything” in our practice means to let things be the way they are. We don’t wish for something to be or to wish for it not to be. The practice is about the natural course of things. Progress or accomplishment – these are things that come automatically. To think that one is great, supreme or the best, or to have other perceptions about oneself means that there is something wrong with one’s practice.

It is worth noticing that there is a training rule in which the Buddha forbid monks to proclaim superhuman states about themselves, even if the statements are true. Isn’t this so? The Buddha didn’t want things to develop in an inappropriate direction. These proclamations open up an opportunity for people to get into some very unsuitable things.

Why don’t you try reflecting like this, for a change: Wherever it is dirty, there is also cleanliness. If one removes the dirt from a place it becomes clean. Wherever there is dukkha there is also non-dukkha.

In the year 2514 (1971) I spent the rainy season together with Tan Ajahn Sumedho. On washing days, when the monks wash their robes using the water boiled down from chips of Jackfruit wood, Tan Ajahn Sumedho wasn’t familiar with this particular way to wash robes yet. While he was washing his robes he said, “Where does the dirt go? The dirt is still in here.”²⁹

²⁹ *This traditional process of washing the robes with the brown-coloured astringent water of Jackfruit wood is actually a re-dyeing of the robes. The robes are soaked in a small amount of washing water, which one tries to keep in*

(*Luang Por laughs.*) Although the robe is still dirty, its colour becomes very beautiful.

It is right where one is obsessed with craving that non-craving is to be found. Just look very carefully.

Is that what is meant when the Buddha teaches that we all have everything we need to practise and to see the Dhamma inside ourselves already? We only need to make the effort and try to practise and we will see?

The development should go according to a principle that the Buddha gave as a guideline, one that he found appropriate for seeing the truth – the principle of the ‘*ariyavaṃsa*’, the lineage of the Noble Ones. The Buddha defines the members of the ariyavaṃsa as the ones who are happy with whatever they have or are given. They are content and easily satisfied.

We all know what contentment means: that there is no need to overburden oneself. To be easily satisfied means to appreciate whatever there is and whatever comes in correct ways. A member of the ariyavaṃsa lives in a restrained and composed manner, as this is the basic principle of a *samaṇa*. A good example of this from the time of the Buddha is Venerable Assaji, who we can take as a teacher and a model for the principle of restraint.³⁰ I myself use this principle. I think it is very beneficial and helps us to build up new

the robes as well as possible. There is no rinsing or wringing out of the dirty washing water. So the dirt is actually washed into the robe, gradually darkening the robes' color.

habits that prevent wrong actions and shortcomings from arising. Furthermore, the principle of restraint also prevents us from wanting anything that could make us bound or tied up.

To be restrained and composed is something very beautiful. It shows good manners that are pleasant to look at. If one thinks about it, the way it is told, the Buddha was born into the caste of kings and warriors, in which manners and etiquette are given great attention. Whatever a king or a warrior does is supposed to be spotless and without fault.

Actually all this is about mindfulness and awareness, and to be able to discern the various things that happen in life straight away. The average person usually only judges things generally. Anything that seems agreeable to one is called “good”, whereas what seems disagreeable is “bad”. We all have feelings of liking and agreeing for certain things. Sometimes we even assent to do something wrong or cause other people problems. Is this really a good way to behave? This is something to reflect on.

Our behaviour really depends on our states of mind, on our emotions. This becomes quite obvious on certain occasions, for example when we experience desire and love, or jealousy, enmity and aversion. The very emotions that one can clearly see are already perfect for us to study, observe and get to know. If we were drawn into emotions like these, what would be our tools for cutting them off, for stopping them or

³⁰ *Ven. Assaji was one of the first five monks following the Buddha. His quiet and composed way of going on almsround in Rājagaha inspired Ven. Sāriputta to also become a disciple of the Buddha.*

preventing them from arising? We need to use some method to deal with emotions, and in fact, it all goes back to what we call *‘kammaṭṭhāna’* (the classic techniques of meditation)³¹, the practice of developing oneself and one’s mind states. When we use the *kammaṭṭhāna* methods, unwholesome feelings won’t arise.

In the example of *asubha kammaṭṭhāna*³² we use what is called “*asubha*”, the unbeautiful and loathsome, as a tool. This may be something we don’t like, don’t find agreeable. But, after we have practiced for some time, this method is very useful for providing a basic experience of relief to feelings of sexuality, lust and desire. This is a process of change and adjustment, similar to when one washes a dirty piece of cloth with detergent, and transforms it into the state one wants it to be in. That’s what one needs the *kammaṭṭhāna* methods for.

The practice can be done in all postures, standing, walking, sitting and lying down. Whenever certain experiences come up we apply our object of *kammaṭṭhāna* in order to observe and investigate them. It is similar to when something isn’t even or straight – then we need to fix it and level it out, just like when we use raw building materials to make a dwelling. Raw materials are not yet perfect for use, they need to be put into shape a little.

³¹ *Literally: basis for action.*

³² *The contemplation of the component parts of the body, investigating their unattractive, loathsome and foul nature, and seeing them as impermanent, suffering and not-self.*

To shape and adjust our practice in this way until we attain our intended goal is sometimes difficult and troublesome. But it is not something that is beyond our capabilities. If it was beyond our capabilities, the Buddha surely wouldn't have taught it.

The Dhamma is a teaching that human beings are supposed to see, supposed to understand. Who is it that gets enlightened? Human beings. Who is it that ends suffering? Human beings. That's the way to think.

Wherever there is happiness there is suffering, wherever there is suffering, just there is peace. That's the way it is. We need to keep looking on and on, for long times, make an effort to figure it out. In fact, I'd say to simply look is enough.

If you've seen it, there's nothing to see. If you look at it, it will speak for itself. Whatever arises will do its job in giving us the chance to develop understanding.

We need to observe things in the way one observes wild animals in the jungle, to see how they live and what their behaviour is like. Because they are very shy and easily scared, usually the animals in the jungle will try to hide away. They don't want human beings to get to know their habits and ways of living. So when we enter the jungle, we need to be very careful not to make these animals suspect or fear anything. We have to not let them notice us. If we understand the way to approach the situation, eventually the animals will show their nature and display their habits. In our practice of kammaṭṭhāna, the process is the same. We have to keep on looking, and what we have seen will reveal its nature by itself. We will eventually be able to see our weak spots.

We'll be able to abandon what needs to be abandoned, as the Buddha said. Dukkha is something to be focused on and to be known.

Luang Por, this young girl here has got brain cancer. The doctor says it is going to heal, but the cancer is still there. How should she deal with this problem?

Every human being has got “cancer” – all together... (*Luang Por laughs*). Everybody has got “cancer” – an untreatable disease – that is: death. Even though you treat this “cancer”, it won't go away. Do you understand this?

We can't assume that we'll get away without any problems. This body is a nest of diseases. That's the very nature of our physical bodies. No worries... that's all. Take what you have and use it up. To be anxious and concerned a lot just causes a lot of worries, and this makes one's bodily system not work properly.

Me, too, I've also got “cancer”. I went to the doctor's and when he checked me he found that my heart-beat is irregular. “It's a bit abnormal,” that's what the doctor said. But I said, “No, that's normal. The heart has been used for a long time, so it's worn out.”

In the lifespan of a human being there is a time when things fall apart. Everything needs to follow the law of nature – no worries. When the time is ripe things automatically do what they are supposed to do (*Luang Por laughs...*). Relax. If your heart is at ease, you'll be able to feel happy.

Whatever one has to face, the Buddha wanted us to be “the one who knows”, and to relate to life in a

way that we can let things be and let go. If we can let go, then there is nothing heavy. It's only when we carry things around that they are heavy. To carry things means to hold on to them as if they were ours, but, really, in this world there is nothing that belongs to us.

There is the outside world, the surface of the planet Earth, and there is the inside world. In the inner world there are the bodily features and components, the constituents of the animal that we call our self. But we cannot call these constituents that are put together like this "our own". Everything is bound to fall apart. All that exists has to disintegrate. Eventually all things change into a state where nothing belongs to us any more.

So the Buddha wanted us to see our lives from a perspective where we don't misperceive things. When we misperceive things we start to grasp and hold on to them. We develop so many worries that it feels like we are imprisoned and tied up by all kinds of fetters without any freedom left.

No matter what kind of common illness we have – please don't think of it as a big problem. All this is nature. Everything, once it has arisen, has to keep transforming. That's normal.

Illness is something absolutely normal and natural. The Buddha therefore taught us to take it as a field of study and investigation and find methods for understanding it. In this way we can guide our feelings towards a path that leads to freedom from being tied up with fetters. It is possible that peace, coolness and shelter arise from an illness.

But if we hold on to things, other factors will take hold of us: anger for example, or greed and delusion.

Desire, aversion and delusion – they are mainly responsible for the problems that overwhelm us. That’s why the Buddha taught us to practise and investigate so these states of unwellness won’t arise.

All the teachings of the Buddha are about dukkha and the method to end it. That’s all the Buddha taught, if one wants to summarize his teachings.

Dukkha exists because of desire. It becomes strong because we allow it to be supported. But it becomes less if we know how to stop and object to it. One is freed from dukkha if one knows how to let go.

So one needs to know the methods of letting go and letting things be. We develop ways to focus on what reduces the sense of self, the grasping that the Buddha called “*attavādupādāna*,” the holding on to the self.

The principle that the Buddha teaches in order to reduce the grasping and the feelings of self-importance is simply to stop first, and cultivate a state of mind called *ekaggatā* (one-pointedness), or, in other words, the present-moment-dhamma. To establish oneself in the dhamma of the present moment provides not only a basis of resistance and firmness but also enables one to develop an understanding of oneself.

The methods that the Buddha gave us are not very far fetched. We only need to focus our attention and investigate with a mind that’s free from worries, doubts and any kind of anxiety.

Focus on the nature of the physical constituents, aggregates and conditions of your body. Start with questioning yourself about the body and the conventional world, reflecting whether there is anything that belongs to us. The body can be separated into many parts. On the top of the head is

hair, then there is the hair of the body, the nails, teeth and the skin that wraps up and covers the whole body.

The Buddha wanted us to investigate and analyze these bodily parts in order to see that they are in a state that's not enduring and lasting. In the end they will disintegrate into various elements. Seeing this, we can't assume ownership. We can't claim any right for them to be permanent. We only have a temporary relationship to the body.

You can compare it to when we spend the night in a hotel or a rented house. There is a fixed time for which we can stay, one night, for example. When we have reached the time limit, the owner of the house will have to tell us to go and leave. The same is true with our lifetime.

The Buddha saw these processes as aspects of nature and reality which manifest in everything. When things arise they also have to cease and eventually end. To reflect like this brings about dispassion. It alleviates our holding on to things and our self-importance. We won't have to worry if others tell us about this and that illness.

Everybody has got illnesses. At the very least we have the illness of dukkha vedanā that we try to cure every day through eating food – that is the painful feeling of hunger. When we have countered it through giving the body food, it shows itself again, through the need to urinate and excrete, creating another burden again. All this is illness.

Illness is something to look into and reflect on. The Buddha taught that we shouldn't be too worried about it. He wanted us to practise in a well-balanced way that is just right, similar to our breathing. We don't force our in- and out-breaths to flow in and out.

The nature of the elements and aggregates of our body takes care of itself. That's how we see these phenomena so we won't give rise to grasping and holding on to things. We put ourselves in a position of equanimity.

We are the ones who know the common characteristics of our existence, the Three Characteristics of anicca, dukkha and anattā, immediately. This gives rise to peace of mind. There is nothing that is stable and everlasting. We observe and reflect on these truths in order to let go of our grasping and holding on. We accept that reality has to be like this. This is a way of seeing things that enables right view to arise.

*“Whatever arises will do its job
in giving us the chance to develop understanding.”*





*A Short Biography of
Luang Por Liem
Thitadhammo
(Phra Visuddhisamvara Thera)*

Early Life Experiences

Luang Por Liem (named Nay Liem Chantam at birth) was born into a warm and friendly family in the midst of the morning mist of nature above the vast rice fields and forests of the Isahn to live the simple upcountry life of an ordinary farmer. He was born on the 5th of November 2484 (1941) on a Thursday, the third day of the rising moon of the twelfth month in the year of the dragon. His home was Bahn Kog Jahn, Tambon Tung Chay, Amphur Utumpornpisay, Sri Saket Province. He had two younger sisters, one younger brother, an older brother and an older sister. His older sister along with his mother, Khun Yaai Chi Baeng, both became nuns at Wat Nong Pah Pong. His father's name was Khun Por Peng Chantam.

Luang Por's family was very quiet. In fact, because they rarely spoke with the neighbors or even amongst themselves, they acquired a reputation in their village of being a bit unusual. When one met them, they would give a broad smile, but refrain from any small talk, reserving their words for very precious occasions. The life in the northeast of Thailand at that time was much more rugged and difficult than today. Every member of Luang Por's family was well versed in their various duties on the farm: cultivating the fields, gardening and looking after the cows and the water buffalos. In the local village school, Luang Por attended classes up to fourth grade. As he grew older, he helped his father and mother with the farming, looking after the tools and oxcarts.

At the age of seventeen Luang Por left the familiar comforts and ways of life of his home in order

to seek experiences working in other regions of Thailand, traveling down south to the Chonburi and Trang provinces. Throughout his youth, Luang Por was known as a person who loved peacefulness, always naturally inclined to be circumspect and refined in his actions. He never drank, nor did he ever gamble. As was normal for his generation, he had a few relationships with women, but nothing too excessive that would have brought him trouble.

When Luang Por left the familiar environment of his home village, he contacted a world that struck him as quite displeasing. He found that his new colleagues were interested in indulging in a lavish lifestyle. For example, he met many people who were keen to eat meat from large animals, such as cows and buffalos. Having grown up in a family that would only eat small animals – a custom which they still uphold today – he found this disgusting and morally repulsive.³³

In Trang Province in the South of Thailand, Luang Por worked for a Muslim family. To his surprise, his master didn't resent the fact that he was a Buddhist and affectionately took Luang Por under his wing and looked after him as if he was his own child. He even let Luang Por take part in various Islamic ceremonies and didn't pay attention to the fact that, in worldly terms, Luang Por was from a family of different ethnicity, belief and socio-economic level. Based on his experience with Muslims at an early age Luang Por

³³ *In Thailand, especially the poverty-stricken areas of northeast Thailand, the belief is that a larger animal has a more developed consciousness than a smaller animal and thus it is considered more morally reprehensible to kill a larger being than much smaller beings like fish and insects.*

contemplated that although the culture and background of some people may seem different or foreign to our own, there is nothing wrong with other belief systems as long as they also uphold moral virtues and “spiritual qualities that enable people to have trust and respect in each other”. When Luang Por requested from his master to return home in order to help his parents again his master shed tears and didn’t want to let him leave.

Going Forth as a Novice

In fact, when Luang Por arrived back home, as it turned out, he didn’t take up farming again. It is the custom of young men in the Isahn (and most of Thailand, although this tradition has faded considerably in recent times) to ordain as a Buddhist monk, some temporarily, some for life, in order to further their education, learn and practise the Buddha’s teachings more sincerely, and generally grow in maturity in order to be a more valuable member of one’s family and society. Luang Por decided to “go forth” as a novice when he was nineteen years of age in order to be well trained in Dhamma-Vinaya³⁴ by his twentieth year, at

³⁴ *The name the Buddha gave to his own dispensation. Dhamma refers to the ultimate truth of reality, the teachings about this truth, and the practice leading to its realization. Vinaya refers to the training and discipline undertaken by the Buddhist practitioner.*

which time he would be old enough to take full ordination as a *bhikkhu*³⁵.

Luang Por entered the village monastery, Wat Bahn Kog Jahn, of his home village on the 12th of May 2503 (1960). In the short period of just over two weeks, while preparing for his novice ordination on the 28th of May, he completely memorized all the traditional monastic chants (a feat that takes some monks years to do), except for the funeral chants. As things happen, on his first day as a novice there was a funeral at his temple.

Luang Por, being extremely unhappy not to be able to chant along in the services for the departed, started to memorize these auspicious funeral chants while he was busy preparing washing water for his teacher. Just by the time the pot of water came to a boil, he finished learning them, enabling him to participate in the funeral services with the other monks.

In Wat Bahn Kog Jahn at that time there were nineteen fully ordained monks plus the nine other novices who had ordained together with Luang Por. One of the daily duties for the novices was to fetch water for drinking and bathing from the well. In those days the village was not yet developed and they had to walk one and a half kilometers to the well and return with the hauled water the same distance – a round-trip of three kilometers.

Concerning Luang Por's practices as a novice, he tells his experiences when facing the fear of ghosts and death while staying at a cremation ground:

³⁵ *Buddhist monk.*

“Already when I was a novice I tried to go to contemplate corpses. At that time they frequently brought corpses to charnel grounds to bury or cremate. The place was said to be full of ghosts. I tried to face this. Of course I was frightened. To persuade oneself to go to a charnel ground is not easy. It’s really difficult. At the time I used to go, there wasn’t anybody to rely on, because I would go when it was tranquil and lonely, often when it was dark.

When I went, I always felt a mixture of courage and dread. Sometimes there were dogs searching for leftover food. If the dogs saw me, they were scared too. They would immediately run away. All my hair would stand on end, and I would feel like screaming out. But I couldn’t. I would have to go through with it. It felt like my body was on fire. I couldn’t believe it. In the end, I’d think, ‘If I have to die, I’ll die.’ I would keep thinking this over and over. Though I told myself there weren’t any ghosts, just dogs searching for some food, I was still scared. Everywhere there was fear. If I stayed long enough, I thought, the fear might recede, but it was not that simple. Just when the fear would be about to dissolve, it would come back even worse.

In this type of experience one dreads everything. It’s obvious that one is deluded, but in an unknown situation like this the saṅkhāras take over easily, tricking and cheating one to the point that one becomes frightened.

So there I was, full of fear, no way out. I finally said to myself, ‘Here we are. Frightened. So what? I accept it. It’s just fear! Death? So what, I’ll die!’ That’s how I finally faced fear, many times,

over and over again. The fear didn't subside completely though. It was still there; but you can't say that it's a bad thing to have fear like this. It's good in a way, since it makes you alert. So I accepted it, thinking, 'Okay, I'll fully accept the fear, I'll be with the fear. I don't have to be anywhere except with this feeling of fear.'

In the rainy season Luang Por studied *Nak-Thamm Tri*, the first level of the nation-wide scriptural Dhamma exams. He also learned to read and write the special script for writing the holy texts (*Dtua Thamm*) that were used to give the sermons after the rainy season retreat. Luang Por has always upheld that studying and education is a precious opportunity to raise one's knowledge to a higher level. At that time books and facilities to study were lacking in many ways, and mostly Luang Por had to find the means to get knowledge by himself. Whenever it was possible and suitable, Luang Por pursued his studies with diligence.

Ordination and Dhamma Practices as a New Monk

On the 22nd of April 2504 (1961) Luang Por took higher ordination as a bhikkhu at Wat Bahn Kog Jahn. Just five days after his ordination he took leave from his *Upajjhāya*³⁶ Phra Kru Tahvarachayakut, because he felt a lot of distraction coming up in him as a result of living so close to his brothers, sisters, friends and relatives, inevitably witnessing all the happiness and suffering in their lives. Luang Por then went to stay with Luang Pu Gao Mahāpañño (Phra Kru Mongkonchayalag) in Wat Bahn Jahn Saen Chay in another village in his home district. He continued his studies there for the following two years. During that time he also completed carving three small Buddha statues, including one made of sandalwood (see page 3). At the wish of Luang Pu Gao, the sandalwood Buddha was kept in a place of honour, and to this very day the villagers of Bahn Saen Chay still revere it as the guardian sacred object of their district.

Luang Por tells about his experiences and motivations during his practice as a new monk as follows:

When I was newly ordained, I tried to practise qualities such as relinquishment, letting things go, letting things come to an end and become empty. It is not all right to get ordained simply for the sake of

³⁶ *Ordination preceptor.*

the robes, or for the sake of having the status of a monk. We really need to progress following the footsteps of the Buddha. We ordain as bhikkhus in order to uproot and abandon our cravings and defilements.

When I looked at my practice, it still seemed insufficient. Sometimes I was able to do it, but sometimes I wasn't. This is due to one not feeling sure about oneself. Sometimes all we can do is to acknowledge what kind of state we have fallen into. We call it practice, but actually it's too immature and too insufficient in many ways.

Even during my novice period I had read about the standards of conduct in the monastic life, for example, what to do in the evening, during the day and in the middle of the night. I wondered, what "sitting samādhi" during the night meant. To sit was simply to sit, wasn't it? I didn't know what it meant to "sit samādhi".

I looked at the biographies of the Buddha and his disciples who are called "the Ones who were able to cut off the fetters"³⁷, to cut off dukkha, to end all suffering, dissatisfaction and stress in the heart", but looking at myself I was still all too hopeless. I had ordained according to the customs and traditions in my home, where we think that if one is born as a boy, one should go and ordain and study. That's the actual reason for young men to go forth. I had read

³⁷ *I.e. cutting off certain crucial defilements or negative character traits. To cut off the first three of the ten fetters means to attain the enlightenment stage of stream-entry. The destruction of all of the ten fetters means full enlightenment.*

in a book that becoming a monk one needs to practise in order to get to know something about oneself, but my monastic life seemed to be as if I hadn't started to practise this yet. I was only doing my duties in serving and helping my revered teachers. Although I attempted to practise, the practice I did was too broad. It was beyond my level of mindfulness and wisdom to find out how to get hold of the right point, but still I was committed enough to see that since I had become a monk already, to practise was the appropriate thing to do and I should try and find opportunities for it."

Luang Por remembered that the word *'Phra'* ("Venerable monk" in Thai) was usually translated as "somebody who is excellent". But he felt rather hopeless – he hadn't yet been able to bring up anything that could be called "excellent" in his monk's life at all. His whole way of thinking was still that of a layperson, and overall he still enjoyed contact with sense pleasures.

Luang Por shares the reflections that helped him through the period of doubts he had as a newly ordained monk:

"In our practice, since we have just planted our tree, we can't make it flower and bear fruit straight away. We have to rely a little on time. That's natural. It is impossible for perfection to arise instantly. It is natural to depend on the working of time.

When I first started to wear the yellow robe I didn't know anything at all. Even after having been a monk for a while, the tendency would still be

to go back along one's old tracks, since in one's mind one is still a layman.

Being in the yellow robe one is paid respects from all sides, but one still thinks like a layperson with impure and unclean thoughts. Transforming our ways of thought isn't possible until we develop new habits. Even after four or five years the old way of thinking may still be there. It's like having dust in one's eyes.

To live in the sensual world is to live in the midst of constant challenge and provocation. Sometimes we think we can't deal with it. But we know that we must make the effort. Otherwise, when people come and bow and pay respects to us, we feel we are not worthy of it. We start questioning ourselves, "What are we really worth? Why are we so low and vulgar? Why are we as coarse as this?"

One skilful means to deal with doubt is to recollect the life of the Buddha and his disciples. This is very inspiring. Remember that even for the Buddha it wasn't easy to leave worldly life. He had to face many difficulties until he finally transformed his old views. His striving and dedication to practice including all the ascetic practices took a long time. So, if we sometimes fall back to acting like laypersons, that's okay. Sometimes it happens – it happened to me as well. We think, "Oh, we're so hopeless..." Sometimes we might even trample on ourselves and put ourselves down. But actually, thinking in this way is nothing else but thinking. It's saṅkhāras coming up. So why should we give way to hatred and anger in this manner?"

Luang Por spent his first two rains' retreats³⁸ at Wat Bahn Jahn Saen Chay, studying and training with Luang Pu Gao, who also prepared Luang Por for the next level of the Nak-Thamm exams, which Luang Por passed in 2505 (1962).

In the evenings at Wat Bahn Jahn Saen Chay Luang Por would practise either sitting or walking meditation. After continually meditating like this for some time, he was able to see the benefits of sitting samādhi. He was starting to develop awareness and understanding of external and internal conditions, himself and his mind states, and how to counter the various *kilesas*³⁹ and desires that can arise in the mind. When he felt desire and affection towards women, he used the reflection of asubha kammaṭṭhāna as an antidote, which brought some relief in this area.

“As concerns studying the scriptures, I both studied myself and taught others during this period. What one has already committed to memory one can make use of by teaching others. In that way we help each other. When I had finished the Nak-Thamm exams there wasn't any more studying for me to do, so I developed my meditation practice further. At that time I also took up some of the dbutaṅga

³⁸ *The rains' retreat is the focus of the monastic year. The monks are not allowed to travel for three months and traditionally take up special practices, study and train more intensively during this time.*

³⁹ *Defilements, obscurations, or destructive emotions. Their various forms are traditionally summed up as greed, aversion and delusion.*

practices⁴⁰, for example, to always go on alms round or to eat only one meal a day. Sometimes on alms round we received just plain rice. There wasn't anything to go along with it. One just had to pull oneself together. I didn't think of whether this was beneficial or not. To simply practice patience and endurance seemed good enough. After all, the Buddha himself had kept the practice of going on alms round, so we, following in his footsteps, might as well do the same. What was good enough for the Buddha should be good enough for us. When we keep on training with these practices, at some point we get energy out of them. Although the body may lack strength, the heart and mind gain more and more power.

The practice is not about tiring or exhausting oneself, but a question of *saddhā*⁴¹, testing one's physical body and *saṅkhāras* in terms of endurance. Can they bear circumstances that aren't gratifying at all? What response or reaction is there? Leaving aside all the mental aspects, can we bear with the physical effects? If we face circumstances where food is really lacking, we should be able to manage without it. These practices of patient endurance are not supposed to be something great or special in themselves. They are merely a test to see what one can endure. Can one endure hunger or thirst? Can one bear with fatigue? Usually, after having endured feelings of hunger and tiredness for the first two or

⁴⁰ Austere renunciation, special ascetic practices which the Buddha allowed.

⁴¹ Confidence, faith or trust.

three days of a fast, when the fourth or fifth day comes, these feelings disappear and the body feels light. Practising with patience and endurance is not something useless. It is indeed very beneficial for us to have the chance to study our own feelings and our capacity to tolerate them.”

At Wat Bahn Jahn Saen Chay, when a monk wanted to do special practices concerning food, he first would have to inform the teacher, Luang Pu Gao. Luang Pu would then remind him, “We don’t do these practices for the sake of showing off, but in reverence and praise of the Buddha, who in fact suggested and taught these practices. We should try them out in some way and follow them. Also keeping any or all of the thirteen dhutaṅgas motivates our fellow monks who haven’t yet tried to practise them.”

After Luang Por’s second rains’ retreat as a monk had passed, the time he had originally planned to stay in the yellow robes was over. He considered thoroughly whether to stay as a monk or return to lay life. Eventually he decided not to disrobe, reflecting on the fact that the Buddha’s teaching is very profound and refined, well reasoned and – both for his own existence and that of others – very useful. It would thus be wise to build up a stronger basis of understanding this teaching, through further studies, education, practice and training.

The following years (from 2506/1963 onwards) Luang Por Liem went to practise in various other places. He couldn’t stay in one place for more than a year or two. As he stayed on in a particular place he noticed that he became more negligent and uncomfortable in his practice, so consequently, he

moved around to a few different monasteries, all the way down to Bangkok. Eventually, he spent the rainy season at Wat Saeng Sawang in Prachinburi, where his practice went very well. He lived in the cremation ground where corpses were burned and therefore had many good opportunities to reflect on death, as he reports:

“From time to time I tried to go and have a look at dead bodies which were going to be buried or burned. In former times in central Thailand, corpses would be kept very long, and there were no preservatives injected in those days. Sometimes the corpses were kept over a fortnight. Really, this was something worth seeing. The coffin would be opened and you could go and have a long look. All the colours were dull and pale, the corpses were swollen up and bloated, stinking and oozing. Where all the flies came from, I don’t know.”

The impressions from looking at dead bodies helped Luang Por both in continually reflecting on death, but also to counter sexual desire. Still a young monastic, he had to confront the common obstacles a monk inevitably has to face in relating to members of the opposite sex.

Furthermore, there were other obstacles from not being familiar with the new surrounding physical environment. During the rainy season he determined to go on a certain route to collect alms for the whole three months. In the beginning of the rainy season the amount of water that had accumulated on the fields and roads was not yet that much, but as the season progressed it began to rain harder. Eventually his alms

route and the surrounding area became entirely flooded to the point where it became impossible even to find the path for his route. Every day when he returned to the monastery he and his one set of robes were completely drenched. Some days he had to carry his alms bowl on top of his head as the flood at certain parts of his route reached all the way up to his neck. However, because of his firm resolution to never miss alms round for the duration of the entire rainy season and uphold the tradition of the Buddhas, he felt it impossible not to go. So whatever the physical conditions, come what may, he went, each and every day. No matter how pitiful he appeared to the local lay people in the village, he would not give up and rescind his commitment to maintain this dhutaṅga practice.

During this year he felt great inspiration in his practice. On some nights he would do walking meditation around an ancient *chedi*⁴² that had been constructed by people from another era. According to historical records, this *stūpa* was the site of many elephant round-ups and sacrificial ceremonies. Long ago abandoned and only surrounded by paddy fields and regional farmers, the temple now had been rebuilt as a proper monastery, and provided an inspiring environment for Luang Por to continue to develop his diligent effort in practice.

Still, the one problem that all not-yet-enlightened beings inevitably get stuck in is desire, particularly one's way of relating to members of the opposite sex. It is natural for a young monk to lose his way in these matters. During the beginning years of monastic life,

⁴² *A monument in the shape of a dome topped by a large tower in the form of a spire (also called stūpa).*

this is an obstacle that always manages to arise, no matter how devoted and diligent the monk might be in his practice. Of course, Luang Por also had to face this challenge, as he relates:

I looked at all the mental states that were arising in my mind. I found that sometimes I loved a certain person, then only a moment later I experienced aversion. Young men and women really stir each other up, but in truth, that is the way we like it. It can get to the point where there is no woman whatsoever that we think is not beautiful. They are all too beautiful. Looking at men doesn't give rise to a fraction of the attraction, and doesn't carry our hearts away as when we look at women. Something truly overcomes our minds. If we look at it from a neutral and detached perspective, there shouldn't be that much effect. But this attraction certainly does happen, especially if one doesn't cultivate the practice.

For myself, I didn't know how I could live as a monk with thoughts like this. I worried about my feelings, and the more I studied the Dhamma-Vinaya, the more I started to see my own shortcomings. Every time I studied the life and conduct of the Buddha or his noble disciples I felt more and more like a hopeless case. I considered the simile of the four kinds of lotus flowers and thought I must surely belong to the group that is still totally immersed in the dirt and the mud. I felt I was in a state of great danger, but even if I managed to get beyond this situation, I wondered if I would ever be able to blossom at all. Or would I just fall back to be

food for the fish and turtles below? I felt totally unsure.

Nonetheless, the one thing I held on to was faith. When I recalled the life of the Buddha again, the wish to really strive in the practice arose. I wanted to train, give it a try and know things for myself, although I was aware that my attitudes and whole way of thinking were essentially still like that of a lay person. Whenever I had nimittas arise, they were scenes from the lay life, not visions of a monk.

So in that year I did feel motivated, but certainly my mind was not free of kilesas. In fact this was good, as I needed to bring up some special dedication and resoluteness in my efforts in order to overcome the obstacles and challenges that came from sensual desires.

Surely it is natural for someone of that age to experience desire for sensual pleasures. And it is normal for all the fantasies and daydreams associated with it to arise in the mind. Of course, these are the thoughts of someone thinking exactly like the people out there living in the world. They are the thoughts of liking and disliking. They can go into all directions and never ever stop. There were even people trying to talk me into disrobing.”

In 2507 (1964) Luang Por returned to Sri Saket Province to the monastery Wat Bahn Kog Lahn, where he was able both to practise and study. After the rainy season he completed his exams to the level of Nak-Thamm Ek. At that time it happened, that the *Jao-kana*

*tambon*⁴³ had just resigned and left, so Luang Por was asked to take over this prestigious duty. Being aware of how an official post in the Sangha administration would surely develop into a burden for him, he declined the honour and asked his abbot if he could leave and set out for Central Thailand for further studies on a higher level. He ended up in Saraburi Province, where he waited for an opportunity to join a study monastery. This didn't come to be, so Luang Por accepted the invitation to spend his coming fifth rains' retreat (2508/1965) alone in an empty monastery called Wat Bahn Suan (Ampher Phrabuddhabaht), rather than studying further.

Already the rainy season before, in Sri Saket, he had enjoyed the possibility to stay alone in the *bot*⁴⁴ of the monastery in order to meditate quietly. At times, when it was needed, Luang Por had helped to teach Nak Thamm to the junior monks, but during the nights, he tried to spend his time alone, developing the practice continually. When communal duties at the monastery, or social services for the locals arose, he joyfully fulfilled these tasks, accomplishing many beneficial actions for others as well. But privately, he always searched for opportunities to do sitting and walking meditation alone in a quiet and secluded place, where he could withdraw from community and reflect about his own experiences and ideas.

During that time, Luang Por recalls, his feelings in relation to women were quite frequently a problem that

⁴³ *Title of the monk at the head of the Sangha administration for several villages together in a district.*

⁴⁴ *Short form for uposatha hall or ordination hall.*

weighed heavily on his heart, but what could one do – no matter where one went, eventually one would always end up meeting the opposite sex. It is very difficult to avoid getting into contact with women completely. So Luang Por decided that he would simply continue his quiet, withdrawn practice, the way he used to – come what may.

Then, in Luang Por's fifth rainy season alone in Wat Bahn Suan, quite a few incidents of getting involved with women did occur. This was the cause for many difficulties to arise in Luang Por's heart. As soon as the rains' retreat had ended, Luang Por realized, that he just couldn't bear it any more, and decided to leave the place for a while. When he came back again, although the situation of living in solitude had proved beneficial for his practice in many ways, the problem was again the emotions that arise in relation to women.

“When you live on your own, but in a location that isn't too far from the village, the problem is that you can still see people in the village and they can see you. In my case, I was only about 200 meters away. There was this one woman in particular, the daughter of the village headman, from a family with influence in that region of the country. As an alms mendicant monk dependent on the laity for the four requisites, and a stranger in the region, out of the best of intentions, she fully put her heart into assisting me with many things.

As it turned out, this woman would come to see me every day. Just behind my place of practice was a field of corn. Right next to where I stayed I kept some containers for collecting rain water. If you don't

collect and store the rain water during the rainy season, there won't be any available to drink in the dry season. This woman first came to where I was staying because she was thirsty for a drink of water. When she finished drinking the water, she would sit down and begin to start up a conversation. She was keen to interact and converse.

If I didn't speak to her, it would have looked strange or perhaps rude. I didn't know how to get out of the situation so I established mindfulness and began chatting with her. As polite conversation goes, we'd talk about this and that, around in circles for a while."

When we chat more than five or six phrases, it is the nature of human beings to begin to have their various thoughts and emotions come out. So, as is natural for a young person leading a celibate life, the experience of talking with this lady in private caused him to become a bit scattered, giving rise to a variety of thoughts. After her first visit, the next day the young lady came to visit Luang Por again. This time she brought a farming tool and set it down next to Luang Por's *kuṭi*⁴⁵ to store it there.

I didn't know what was the best thing to do. She kept coming to visit every day. Sometimes the sun would reach the horizon, but she hadn't yet returned to her home. And she was very young and attractive!

Then I thought to myself, 'The village is quite a distance away for her to walk home in the dark if anything happens, this could prove very difficult.' If

⁴⁵ A monk's meditation hut.

this young lady were to become angry or irritated, she could try to ruin my standing as a monk. I kept this in mind continually and made every effort to be careful and circumspect.

But sometimes my mind leaned towards her, or wanted to side with her. When this happened, I tried to think of a method to fix and repair the situation, to bring my mind back to clarity and balance.”

The young lady continued to visit Luang Por at his kuti for a number of days and this continued to bring up many things in his practice.

‘In order to solve the problems with sensual desire that arose at the time, I took up the contemplations of asubha kammaṭṭhāna and maraṇānussati⁴⁶, which helped. I also visited a cremation ground. Contemplating the dead corpses there helped the sensual desire to abate as well. Sometimes these worked well enough to alleviate the suffering at least in some ways. On other occasions I would be invited by a lay person to a funeral to put a cloth on a corpse. I would make an extra effort to look at and contemplate the corpse. This would give rise to a temporary feeling of relief.

But the image of the young lady, the feeling of her presence, was still deeply embedded in my heart. Whenever this feeling arose, it was like throwing petrol on a burning fire of wood. The flames would shoot into the air and become very bright. I was at a loss at how to find ways of extinguishing the fire. Whenever contact with anything about her arose –

⁴⁶ Reflection on death.

the feeling of her presence (e.g., her bearing, grace, dignity and general appearance) – I really couldn't bear it at all.

These kinds of interactions (of monks) with women usually go in the style and manner that the woman chooses, so I didn't have much of an influence at all, and it was easily possible for my situation to turn into a very risky affair. Fortunately, I also had a sense of wholesome shame and restraint, and always kept up the strong sense of being a monk. In that region of Thailand, women don't shy away from monks at all. They love to converse and chat with the monks, and if there is no business to talk about, they will find something. And they won't easily leave. My goodness, they nearly got me too.... I fell into an awful state at that time. Something that had been lying dormant for quite some time got touched. Luckily, I had the awareness to realize that I was getting myself in too deep to pull myself out. So, literally, I seized the first window of opportunity and fled before anything inappropriate happened. I was still a foolish man who wouldn't have been able to free himself otherwise, so I decided to leave without saying goodbye to anybody at all. “

After having cut off the dangerous situation of getting involved with a woman Luang Por returned to Wat Bahn Jahn Saen Chay in Sri Saket Province, helping with teaching Nak-Thamm, together with the monks with whom he previously lived. During the time in Sri Saket he also helped to build a schoolhouse for the children in the village. This activity brought him some release from his problems in relating to women. Nevertheless, attraction to women remained a real

problem, although he tried not to think about it, and his faith in the Buddha and his Teachings remained unwavering.

As the next rainy season of 2508 (1965) approached, Luang Por decided simply to stay where he was, but to make the resolution to take up some special practices in order to build up greater strength of mind. He undertook the dhutaṅgas of always going on alms round and eating only the food put directly into his bowl (i.e., not eating the variety of dishes brought to the monastery). He also determined to not socialize with the group once the time of teaching and guiding the other monks and the novices had passed. He separated himself from the others, went on retreat, and practised samādhi, using mindfulness of breathing as his meditation object. He sustained this practice continually until he felt reasonably peaceful with it. When strong emotions did arise, his practice was firm enough to alleviate them.

After the rainy season of 2508 (1965), Luang Por went to Bahn Buyao where he was asked to train six newly ordained monks in sitting and walking meditation, chanting, and the daily routine of the monastery. He stayed for the rains' retreat of 2509 (1966) and then went back to Wat Bahn Jahn Saen Chay where he spent the next rainy season. He continued to devote himself to diligent practice in these places until after the rains' retreat when he set out wandering to find a new teacher in a practice monastery. He passed through many monasteries, including Wat Sung Noen in Korat Province, where he studied the ways of practice of Luang Por Boon Mee, a disciple of Luang Pu Mun and Luang Pu Tongrat, for three days. Afterwards he traveled to Ubon Province where he

overheard conversations of some lay people discussing Wat Nong Pah Pong⁴⁷ and the teachings of Luang Pu Chah. Luang Por Liem felt an immediate interest to go and learn from the training there.

“When I entered the monastery grounds of Wat Nong Pah Pong and passed under the shade of the trees that lined both sides of the path, I experienced a very cool and soothing feeling. To see monastery grounds so well swept with kuṭis spaced far apart from each other in long orderly rows in the forest was pleasing to the eye and a strange sight I had never seen anywhere else before.”

Luang Por had arrived quite late in the evening, but one of the Wat Nong Pah Pong monks who was doing some work was able to direct him to Luang Pu Chah’s kuṭi. After Luang Por paid respects to Luang Pu Chah and they had a short conversation, Luang Pu Chah instructed him to go and sleep in the *sālā*⁴⁸.

“I immediately liked Luang Pu Chah’s standards of practice very much. The style of practice struck me as very natural. I was very pleased with the good manners and high standards of conduct and deportment in the monks and novices. The whole environment of the monastery was quiet – exactly what I was searching for. Furthermore, even after a short stay and period of practice, I

⁴⁷ Also called Wat Pah Pong.

⁴⁸ Large public meeting hall for chanting and meditation.

experienced peace and seclusion both in my body and mind, so I liked it even more.”

After staying two nights at Wat Pah Pong, Luang Por went back to get permission from his former teacher to live and train at Wat Pah Pong. With a letter of recommendation from Luang Pu Gao, Luang Por came back to Wat Pah Pong in July 2512 (1969). He again paid respects to Luang Pu Chah, who knew many of the places that Luang Por had stayed before. The teaching Luang Por initially received from Luang Pu Chah was about the four boundless qualities of *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*⁴⁹ and *upekkhā*. Luang Por was admitted into the Wat Pah Pong Saṅgha after only five or six days, when Luang Pu allowed him to change his robes and monk's requisites, as it is the standard procedure at Wat Pah Pong that any requisite which might have been acquired in an incorrect way (for example with the use of money) needs to be relinquished. Usually newly arriving monks need to wait for two or three months, thoroughly observing all the standards of practice at Wat Pah Pong, before they are permitted to become a full member of the community.

In this year, when the rains' retreat had begun, Luang Pu Chah instructed all the monks to keep the monastery standards of training very strictly. This meant to put full effort into sitting and walking meditation. Luang Pu Chah expected any activity in the monastery to be done quietly with a sense of care and respect for the fact that everyone has to work together harmoniously. There was no place for selfishness or

⁴⁹ *Altruistic and appreciative joy at the success of oneself and others.*

competitiveness. This was an aspect of the teaching that Luang Pu Chah constantly stressed.

Luang Por summarizes what he found most impressive about his new teacher, Luang Pu Chah:

From all my experience, I would say, Luang Pu Chah was different from anybody else. His character was not like anybody else's because of his strong heartfelt inclinations to sacrifice and giving. In my experience he was absolutely resolute in his actions. He would say what he was going to do beforehand, and he would act like he had said. Somebody practising like this is very hard to find. In his practice and all his actions Luang Pu Chah was always wide awake.

Luang Pu was the kind of character that people always liked. His whole personality was worthy of respect, worthy of bowing to. From all these experiences I felt Luang Pu was somebody who could really give us guidelines in the Teaching and in the practice."

To Luang Por it seemed that everyone at Wat Nong Pah Pong put forth a lot of effort, motivation and faith in the practice. As for Luang Por himself, he was determined to live up to the standards of his new monastery. This didn't seem too hard, as he had gone through many practices before, even though he had stayed in village monasteries. He didn't feel that the routine at Wat Pah Pong put too much stress or pressure on him at all, but rather was an excellent opportunity to practise in a way that suited him well anyway. So he dedicated himself to the practice with all the more energy.

Luang Por's Practice After Newly Arriving at Wat Pah Pong

Luang Por tells about his practice when he first arrived at Wat Nong Pah Pong:

I tried to put much effort into developing sati and sampajañña⁵⁰. This means to observe one's own mind all the time, without interruption and without letting attention slip, looking at one's state of mind throughout the day and night, trying to stop the usual proliferations of thoughts in each and every moment, each and every posture, whether standing, sitting, walking or lying down. I tried to watch the mind, focus it, and investigate it. When one examines one's mind in this manner, one gets to see what it is like. When there is the feeling of liking something, one immediately knows that the mind experiences attraction, and when feelings of dukkha arise, one knows that the mind experiences dukkha.

The time for individual practice at Wat Nong Pah Pong is limited. There are morning and evening meetings where the whole community sits together in meditation, recites Pali verses and listens to teachings on Dhamma and Vinaya. After the daily almsround the

⁵⁰ *Sati and sampajañña are often used as a pair. Sati refers to mindfulness and recollection while sampajañña refers to all-around awareness and clear comprehension.*

monks gather for their single meal of the day. Every afternoon there is a work period. Luang Por tells of his personal daily routines and practices outside the communal activities:

“After the evening meetings in the sālā, where the Pubbasikkhā⁵¹ was read, I’d return to my kuti at eight or nine and start doing walking meditation. Just about an hour and it would be ten o’clock already, and my body would feel like it needed a rest. But going to sleep wouldn’t mean to simply give way to the desire to sleep. One was supposed to sleep only as much as one had determined beforehand. There were no alarm clocks. One would have to tell the time to get up by oneself. Sometimes I would listen to certain sounds in nature around my kuti, the sounds of some insects for example, or the cry of the Graput bird. Sometimes the sound of the train passing in the distance would wake me up. At that time the car from the village that took people to the market would pass the monastery shortly after two a.m. This was just the right time to get up for a change of location (i.e. going to the sālā for the morning meeting). If no one was there yet, I’d use the time to look at the skeleton hanging there. Coming before the other monks, at two or two thirty, it was very quiet in the sālā, a good chance to be on one’s own. In those days the sālā had a tin roof, and all kinds of animals that go out looking for food at night would walk on the sālā roof, for example a chamott⁵². It would make frightening noises. The cries of the chamott sound

⁵¹ The standard textbook for teaching the monks’ discipline (Vinaya) used in the Forest Tradition.

like a human being crying. I thought someone was there, crying and was quite anxious, so I went out and had a look and saw that it was a chamott. Experiences like this help us to build up the facility to face and struggle with difficulties.

In those days the chanting took only 27 minutes, as it wasn't chanted with translation the way we do it today. Afterwards we'd quietly sit together in meditation. When the meditation was finished, we'd clean the hall. While walking on almsround, I'd avoid socializing with the group. For almsround I was scheduled for Bahn Gor, which in those days wasn't such a pleasant route as today. The road wasn't good. It was full of mud and cow and buffalo dung. This was something normal at that time, so I didn't think much about it and just did my duty. Walking through the mud was a good test of the reactions of the mind. I'd establish mindfulness and start walking from the monastery to Bahn Gor. I didn't think much about the past or the future and just stayed with the experience of awareness.

When going on almsround I tried to follow the principle of restraint, in accordance with the standards that the Buddha laid down in the pāṭimokkha. These practices were very good opportunities for training.

I didn't have many belongings or requisites, only the bare necessities. Anything extra would be communal property. At most I had candles and matches for use at night time, so there would be a little light for practising sitting or walking meditation,

52 *A musk or anteater.*

or for going to the toilet. One would use a candle to light the way. There weren't even proper umbrellas in those days, only the paper umbrellas made in Chiang Mai which were given out one day. If one uses these paper umbrellas in the rain they gradually fall apart, because the glue dissolves. One has to look after one's umbrella and dry it in the sun after use. It was just about good enough to get through one rains' retreat, without too much difficulty. I tried to look after it well, because Luang Pu had given it to me. I was considerate with it, because of Luang Pu. I wouldn't want to ask for a new one. It was good enough for one rainy season, but actually it didn't really ward off the rain, only at the head. Down below one would get wet all the same.

After the meal in the dining hall was finished, I'd go back to my hut and do walking meditation. On some days I'd allow myself a little rest just after midday, only thirty minutes, not much. I don't really like to sleep during the day. At one o'clock I'd read some Dhamma book or check up a little on my chanting. I didn't open up the books too much. I didn't want to get into studying, as I had been involved with this before and I felt fed up with it. The studies I had done didn't seem to have helped me much. So I decided to stop. I had come to practise.

In the afternoon I did walking meditation until it was time to haul water, clean the sālā and the toilets and sweep the paths. I used to clean the laypeople's toilets. In those days there were only two of them, but the people that used them were mostly people that had never used a toilet before. Sometimes, they wouldn't flush with water, or they'd leave a used twig in the toilet. (Luang Por laughs). Cleaning those

toilets was good practice! Oftentimes the toilets were blocked and I had to use some wood to clear them. Mostly I didn't mind, but from time to time I felt averse, thinking, "Why do these people rely on me rinsing and flushing the toilet for them?"

When there was no water one had to haul it from the well. Two people were needed to carry the water. There was no cart. Even if there had been a cart, we wouldn't have used it. One was supposed to carry the water.

All these practices build a good foundation for monastic life. A monk accomplishes his duties with diligence, the way it is outlined in the monastic routines in the Vinaya, such as the toilet duty. Actually, in those days, the toilets weren't very clean. It was just a matter of preventing them from smelling.

After chores, I'd bathe, go back to my dwelling and do walking meditation again, waiting until it was time to come together for evening meditation.

These routines are good for building up habits of applying oneself with diligence to the practice, and they help to prevent one from losing the ground of where one's at. To train like this every day also makes people feel in good spirits.

On the Wan Phra days⁵³ I would undertake the *dbutaṅga* practice of *nesajjik*⁵⁴, that is, to refrain from lying down for the whole night. I could actually manage to do this easily, just considering it as a trivial thing to do. Day and night become what they

⁵³ The observance days on the full, new and half moon nights, which occur once every seven or eight days.

⁵⁴ Thai for *nesajjika* in Pali.

are only through us defining them according to certain experiences we associate with them. When one simply resets one's associations, day can become night and night can become day. Could I really do this? Well, we were supposed to, so I tried. Sometimes I was able to go through the night without lying down quite easily. But sometimes, I must admit, there was a bit of exhaustion, though not to the extent of real dukkha, as I took it as a normal experience. On some days, I looked for other occasions to have a rest. Not having slept all night I sometimes had a rest during the daytime. Actually, to have a rest, doesn't necessarily mean that one has to fall asleep. If one enters the peace of seclusion (by meditating), one also rests and regains energy."

Generally, Luang Por always trained himself in being content with little. Even with his personal tasks and duties he didn't accept the help of his fellow monks and novices. It became his habit to always look after himself, even though he was already one of the elder monks in the monastery. Elder monks in Wat Pah Pong are usually looked after by the junior monks, who do the washing of the robes for them, clean their kuti and look after their almsbowl. It was Luang Por's natural disposition to be responsible for his own things, not wanting to be a burden to others. Not expecting the support of others or having to rely on them, but instead always quietly offering help and support to the community in a variety of ways, he was an inspiring example of selflessness in line with the example of his teacher, Luang Pu Chah. This style of practice is one of the reasons why he didn't socialize much with the

other monks and therefore had the chance to practise fully up to the limit.

I came to Wat Pah Pong with a mind that was interested in the training, practice and development of myself. I undertook some special practices all for myself. For example, after the group meditation meetings in the evening I took the opportunity to put forth some more effort in the practice, trying to develop diligence as a habit. I didn't socialize, I didn't relate to other monks, I didn't speak with anybody. In that rainy season we were almost 50 altogether, if I remember correctly, 47. I didn't get into contact with anybody, living like somebody who really takes his chance. And the opportunities for practice were fantastic. I was trying to train myself in understanding all the feelings that arise when one is completely left to nature. If we are given a chance like this, we need to try hard and be resolute to use it.

But it wasn't always the case that I was very diligent. Sometimes, I also felt lazy. Laziness comes up when egotistic feelings take hold of us. What I did to face this was to ask myself constantly: "What have I come here to do?"

Sometimes, when I felt confused, in a strange mood, or wasn't feeling well, I used the technique of staring at a kasīṇa object⁵⁵. But the focus of my kasīṇa wasn't anything extra-ordinary, I simply looked intensely at the skeleton (displayed in the sālā of Wat Pah Pong). I stared at the skeleton in a way that gives insight into the nature of the material

⁵⁵ *A meditation technique where one gazes uninterruptedly at a certain object, a white circle, for example.*

components of the body (rūpa-khandha). I took up the nimitta of the skeleton for contemplation. The skeleton was my regular meditation object. When one sees a nimitta such as this, it stays with one wherever one goes. If one starts sitting samādhi one sees a skeleton. Whatever ones looks at, appears as a skeleton. On other occasions, when I came back from having a look at corpses, visions of dead bodies would stick in my mind as nimittas.

If one sees nimittas like these, feelings of diligence and motivation in the practice will arise. One won't forget where one is at and what one is doing. There is a feeling of continual wakefulness in all postures. One feels that one has found a place of independence, all by oneself. In sitting meditation, one is able to sit continually – but without falling asleep. There is mindfulness and awareness. One is able to determine how to spend one's time appropriately, and won't let it pass by uselessly."

The rains' retreat is a time when the monks of a monastery usually intensify their efforts in practice. Luang Por's high aspirations and motivation led to a powerful experience at the beginning of the rainy season, of which he tells:

"I experienced something stranger than anything I had ever experienced before. From the beginning of the rains' retreat on up to the second month I felt great saddhā in the practice. There was no decline, no thoughts of discouragement at all in my practice.

The practice went well the whole time, although there were a few experiences of the mind getting

involved with desires or defilements. But they weren't very strong. Take sexual desire for example. If I experienced agreeable feelings arising when relating to women, I could retreat to recollect asubha kammaṭṭhāna, taking either my own body or another person's body as an object of investigation, seeing it as something filthy and unworthy of craving and attachment. For example, I could see it as a skeleton, perhaps one that is walking about, or I could see the internal organs of a person cut up in pieces and taken apart. This leads to a feeling of disgust, dispassion and revulsion with one's own body and the bodies of other people.

To reflect on the body like this alleviates sexual desire and attraction towards the opposite sex. It also makes one mindful, seeing the mind as it relates to the objects of mind. It frees one from being enmeshed in the mind states that come from attaching to pleasure or displeasure with a certain mind object. The very moment the mind is a certain way, one realizes it mindfully.

Possessing mindfulness in this way seemed sufficient for providing clear guidelines in the practice. From then on the feeling of having to think about things in various ways became less. The cittasaṅkhāra, or the thinking mind that goes into all directions, felt like it had no strength. It abated and retreated more and more until it was in a state which one may say it wasn't dangerous any more."

Around the middle of the rainy season of the year 2512 (1969) Luang Pu Chah encouraged the monks to practise with special intensity. They weren't supposed to speak to each other and the communal morning and evening meetings for chanting and meditation were cancelled. Luang Pu Chah saw that it was the time to give the monks more opportunity to do practice on their own. So Luang Por Liem increased his efforts and as he did so, results became evident. On the ninth of September around 10:00 p.m. he experienced an immense transformation in his mind. He had a feeling of extraordinary brightness and happiness, of which he reports:

It is impossible to describe this kind of happiness to someone else. It is impossible to make someone else know and understand it. It isn't the happiness of getting things according to one's wishes and not the happiness because things are agreeable; it's the kind of happiness that goes beyond these two. Walking is happiness, sitting is happiness, standing is happiness and lying down is happiness. There is the experience of delight and joy all the time. Furthermore, one is able to uphold the knowledge in one's mind that this happiness arises completely by itself and eventually will vanish by itself. Both sukha and dukkha in an experience like this are still entirely impermanent states. I was able to maintain the knowledge of this fact all the time. In every posture – standing, walking, sitting and lying down – there was a continuous and equal experience of happiness. The state was the same whether I was doing sitting or walking meditation.

If one were to try to describe the mind in this state one could say there is brightness, but the word "bright" actually doesn't describe correctly what the experience is like. It is as if there is nothing that can make the mind get involved with anything. This experience lasted for a day and then changed again. Then the mind became utterly peaceful, not at all exhausted, tired or sleepy, but filled with clarity, radiance and coolness, imbued with various kinds of delight and rapture. This experience lasted completely without reference to time. It was truly "akālika", timeless. The same feeling continued on through all the four postures. Eventually I asked myself: "What is this?" and the answer was: "A mode of the mind." It is like this in itself. When there is happiness, we simply take it as happiness... it is simply a matter of happiness. When there is peace we simply take it as a matter of peace... and we just look at our happiness on and on and we just look at our peace on and on... unremittingly."

Eventually on the evening of the 10th of September a change to something new that Luang Por hadn't experienced before took place. A feeling of weariness, frustration and fatigue took over. Whenever he sat or walked he felt sleepy. Even after he got up after having rested the tiredness remained. In each posture he felt completely exhausted. It got to the point where he fell asleep while he was doing walking meditation and ran into some thorns. His whole face became scratched and sore. "At least the sleepiness will disappear now," he thought, but the fatigue continued to remain as strong as before. Still he endured, telling

himself that it is natural to face obstacles in the practice, which to some extent everybody needs to pass. With these reflections in mind he understood that he needed to look at this tiredness that previously hadn't been present. After all, this fatigue just arose, so it was impermanent too. Using this insight he attempted to maintain awareness of the sleepiness.

On the eleventh Luang Por experienced another change, namely, a great peace and happiness returned to his mind. In all four postures there was clarity and gladness. Simply being by himself was very pleasant. Nothing could intrude and stir up his mind. External objects⁵⁶ impinging on the mind just couldn't reach it. When working together with the monks and novices during chores, although he was together with others, he felt the same as if alone. He wasn't interested in what they were talking or chatting about. He couldn't be bothered to think much about what was happening at all, and when the chores were finished, he simply went back to his hut.

The next day passed with the ongoing happiness and peace continuing as if it was a normal and ordinary experience. With unceasing attention, Luang Por continued to look at both his mind and the objects of his mind. When the evening of the twelfth approached, he started to question himself: "Why do we actually practise... What's all this practice for?" And the answer arose:

"We don't practise for anything, we practise for the sake of practice. Whatever it will lead to doesn't

⁵⁶ *In Thai: arom.*

matter at all. Our duty is to practise, so we practise and try to maintain mindfulness and awareness with it. In each moment we keep teaching ourselves. Whatever we are doing, we try to have mindfulness and awareness. Whether we are walking to or fro, we keep everything in a state of perfect balance.

Finally I felt I had done enough walking meditation for that day, because I became quite tired and my feet already hurt very much. The bones of my feet felt like they were piercing through the skin, as I had been walking the whole day and night without rest. It is normal to experience painful feelings in the body if we over-use a single posture. But it is also normal that feelings change again, so I thought, it's really enough walking meditation for today. I went up to my hut, put on my robe with the right shoulder open and the outer robe folded over the left shoulder, sat down facing east (the same direction as Luang Pu Chah's hut), thought of my teacher and started meditating."

The meditation was very peaceful and the same reflection as before came up in Luang Por's mind: "We don't practise for anything, we practise for the sake of practice."

Keeping this teaching in my mind, I kept on meditating. Normally I would sit meditation until about 10 or 11 p.m. and then stop to have a rest, but on this day I continued sitting for about eight hours without moving or making the slightest change in posture. With this experience of peace, the mind changed. The feeling of peacefulness shot up and pervaded throughout the whole body, as if something

were taking hold over it. It felt cool, a coolness that suffused the whole body... so very cool... an experience of the whole body becoming completely light and at ease. The head felt so cool the whole day and night, as if there was a fan blowing over it. Cool, peaceful, quiet and still. No experience of thoughts at all, and no clue at all where they had disappeared. Everything silent, completely. It felt totally quiet. The only experience left was that of utter peace and stillness. The body felt tranquil, cool and light.

This experience continued on throughout the whole year, not just for a day or two. In fact, it has continued on unchanging for many years, all from that one go. There is the state of coolness, as if in the brain, whether sitting or lying down, coolness in every position. All worries, concerns or similar thoughts from the thinking mind are totally gone. Thinking in this or that direction ceased. All quiet, just like a forest where there isn't the slightest sound of any bird singing. Truly quiet. No wind blowing at all. Just ongoing tranquility and peace.

It feels like there are no saṅkhāras, no proliferations of the mind. All the suffering that arises with kilesas that had bothered me before, the kilesas concerning the other sex or all kinds of ambitions that I had before, I don't know where they all disappeared. Seeing somebody, I just had the feeling of seeing it as absolutely normal. To see a person as simply a person: just that much. No beautiful persons, no ugly persons – people simply would be specifically the way they were. This is the kind of peace and tranquility that arose. I don't

know what it was, but I also didn't care what it was, always knowing it is like this by itself in just this way.

It is like this through peacefulness and tranquility. There isn't anything to be concerned about, as far as how various things exist. As concerns dukkha, I don't know what dukkha is like. As concerns laziness, I don't know what laziness is like. Questioning myself about laziness, there wasn't any. Questioning myself about dukkha, there wasn't any. The feeling inside my heart was exactly like this.

I tried to recall and pin down that which is called dukkha. What is it? I really don't know. I only know how they discern the meaning in terms of conventional language, because dukkha is just something created by common conventions. When the mind has no dukkha, all conventions whatsoever don't exist in the mind. And the experience of this feeling has lasted on continuously all the time since then; there has been no change all the way up to the present day. This same state still lasts on, and it has been stable, continuous and without changes."

The Years at Wat Pah Pong

In the first years that Luang Por stayed at Wat Nong Pah Pong there were many occasions where he was asked by Luang Pu Chah to help out in the growing number of branch monasteries of Wat Nong Pah Pong, including Wat Tamm Saeng Phet, Wat Pu Din Daeng (where he went after the rainy season of 2513/1970), and Wat Suan Gluay (where he spent the rains of 2514/1971).

For the annual *Kathina* ceremony⁵⁷ all the monks from the branch monasteries gathered at Wat Nong Pah Pong. In those days it wasn't so easy to arrange travel, so Luang Por Liem ended up taking his monks from Wat Suan Gluay to Wat Nong Pah Pong by foot (about seventy kilometers). Starting to walk after the one meal in the morning they arrived just about sunrise the next day. Luang Por tells about this experience:

I felt weary of walking, the bodily saṅkhāras⁵⁸ hurt terribly. The whole body was in pain, but I wasn't truly worried or concerned too much, because there wasn't any mental suffering, only the

⁵⁷ *The occasion where the lay people offer cloth and other useful requisites at the conclusion of the three month rainy season retreat. In the Wat Pah Pong tradition, monks offer all night Dhamma talks and the event is one of the biggest of the year at the monastery.*

⁵⁸ *In this context saṅkhāras means "conditioned phenomena".*

suffering of the saṅkhāras, which is normal if one torments them too much. The monks and novices that accompanied me were complaining the whole time because we were walking continuously with almost no rest, but we managed to arrive just in time to take part in the offering of Kaṭhina cloth at Wat Pah Pong.”

Luang Por returned to Wat Suan Gluay and helped to look after and renovate the monastery until Luang Pu Chah called him back urgently for *Māgha Pūjā* day⁵⁹ 2514 (1971). For the event Luang Por was to give a Dhamma talk in front of the huge assembly of monks, novices and lay people that had come. He comments about having to give Dhamma talks:

“When I need to give a talk on Dhamma I don’t prepare anything beforehand. I’m not eager to give a particularly good talk. When I start speaking, I don’t know where the words are coming from. They gradually come, one after the other, in a flow. I feel relaxed and not worried about giving a formal talk or teaching.”

On the day of *Māgha Pūjā*, he says, he had the feeling that Luang Pu Chah was observing him very carefully, both his words and his demeanor.

“Luang Pu maybe thought, I was getting somewhat carried away – I don’t know. Whatever he

⁵⁹ *Full-moon day of February is a Buddhist holiday which commemorates and expresses reverence for the Sangha.*

may have been concerned about, I certainly didn't think too much at all."

In the rainy season of 2515 (1972) Luang Por was asked to give support to Tan Ajahn Sumedho in training a group of Western monks (including Tan Pabhākaro, Tan Santacitto, Tan Ānando and Tan Thiradhammo), who spent the rains' retreat at Wat Tamm Saeng Phet, together with other Thai monks.

After the Kaṭhina Luang Por returned to Wat Pah Pong. The next rainy season he went to Wat Pah Khantithamm back in Sri Saket Province. After the rains in 2516 (1973) he set out for a *tudong*⁶⁰ walk with Ajahn Sumedho through the hills of Na Chaluay in Ubon Province. On the 5th of December, when Luang Pu Chah received the honorary title "Phra Bodhinyāna Thera", he and Ajahn Sumedho were still wandering around in search of secluded places for practice and couldn't take part in the ceremonies at Wat Pah Pong.

In those days the walking paths up-country were very small, just about as wide as the trail of one's feet. Ajahn Sumedho wasn't so skilled in walking these little paths. We'd been walking for a few days and his feet always keep hitting the roots and undergrowth on the path, so they became swollen quite heavily. But he didn't complain at all. He didn't say that it hurt. We were walking through the forest, which at that time was still very thick. It was close to the end of the year, around December, and the weather was very cold."

⁶⁰ Derived from the Pali word *dbutaṅga*, but in colloquial Thai it means travelling by foot in search of quiet places.

When they were trying to find good places to sleep in the chilly nights, the villagers would quickly bring Ajahn Sumedho a wooden platform to sleep on. They carried it all the way from their houses, so he'd be a little more comfortable, not having to sleep on the ground. As for Luang Por Liem, he chose to sleep on the ground in a low place, sheltered from the wind, on a bed of leaves with a special American isolation sheet that Ajahn Sumedho had given him, which sheltered him from the damp mist. He was quite comfortable and warm under his *glot⁶¹*, whereas poor Ajahn Sumedho endured the cold night on the platform as the cold wind could blow through under him. In those days, travelling up-country together with a foreign monk was something special and the villagers were very helpful wherever they went. They came out to give alms in huge numbers, but for some reason, in that region people thought that tudong monks only eat sticky rice with sesame seeds.

After Ajahn Sumedho's feet didn't get better, Luang Por and he finally had to get a lift back to Wat Pah Pong, where he could see a doctor. Eventually his toe nail had to be pulled. Luang Por comments that he was always impressed with Ajahn Sumedho's patient endurance. He would never complain.

The following year, after the yearly gathering of all the monks from the branch monasteries of Wat Pah Pong at the time of Māgha Pūjā, Luang Por Liem, together with two other monks, asked permission to go study the monastery routines and practices in some of

⁶¹ *Umbrella tent used by monks when travelling, consists of a large umbrella to which a light mosquito net is attached.*

the well known forest monasteries, including some from the Dhammayut sect.⁶² He walked all the way to Chiang Mai, Nong Khai and finally entered Laos, staying in Vientiane for a week. Then he walked all the way down to Bangkok, sleeping under a bridge. Towards the end of his tudong he passed Chachoengsao, Chonburi and Chantaburi, staying with various famous Kruba-ajahns each time for a few days only before finally returning back to Ubon and Wat Pah Pong.

Back in Ubon some Laotian lay supporters invited monks from Wat Pah Pong to open up a forest monastery in the style of the growing Luang Pu Chah tradition in Vientiane. The matter was discussed amongst the elders in the Sangha, and the invitation accepted. Luang Por was designated to be the abbot of the new branch monastery abroad. On the 13th of May a procession of sixteen monks, one novice and twenty-one lay supporters left Ubon heading for Vientiane. Luang Por and some monks spent the rainy season of 2516 (1973) in Vientiane, but they were forced to go back to Ubon soon afterwards because of the dangerous political situation in Laos at that time.

From the year 2516 (1973) onwards Luang Por always spent the rains at Wat Pah Pong. Luang Pu Chah transferred many duties in the monastery to Luang Por, especially the training of the monks and novices. After Luang Pu Chah's first visit abroad in

⁶² *The Dhammayut order was established by King Mongkut about one hundred years earlier. Although most monks in Thailand (including the Wat Pah Pong Sangha) belong to the Mahānikāya order, many of the best forest monasteries are Dhammayut.*

2520 (1977) his health declined and Luang Por was asked to officially become the deputy abbot sharing responsibilities with Luang Por Chu Ṭhitaguṇo (presently abbot of Wat Pah Bodhinyana, also known as Wat Keuan, in Ubon), but he said he wasn't ready yet, although practically speaking he and Luang Por Chu were in charge of looking after the monastery and arranging the medical support for Luang Pu Chah already. Luang Pu Chah's health deteriorated drastically after he had a brain surgery in 2524 (1981). After staying in a hospital in Bangkok for five months, Luang Por invited Luang Pu Chah back to Wat Pah Pong. In the monastery the Sangha took turns nursing him constantly in the new hospital kuṭi which Luang Por and the monks had built supported by donations from the King and Queen of Thailand. In November of that year Luang Por was officially made the acting abbot of Wat Pah Pong by Luang Pu Chah.

Luang Por comments about his taking over of responsibilities from Luang Pu Chah in Wat Pah Pong:

“After I returned from Vientiane I stayed at Wat Pah Pong the whole time. Because Luang Pu Chah recommended me to help out in Wat Pah Pong, I never went anywhere else. I didn't want to do anything more than this because I felt I was just a fledgling new monk. Also, I'm not from Ubon, so I thought it wasn't appropriate for me to accept the leadership position at Wat Pah Pong (the largest forest monastery in that part of the country). But if it turned out to be useful, I would do it. Because I truly respected Luang Pu Chah, I stayed and worked hand in hand with him. He wanted me to stay here. When he suggested to make me vice abbot, I replied that

I didn't want to take on the duty yet. It didn't feel good or appropriate, because there were many monks that had joined Wat Pab Pong before me and were capable in many ways. But Luang Pu responded by saying that we should do our duties – by helping each other out with teaching we also benefit Buddhism as a whole. So I have tried to, in all ways, and never with unwholesome feelings.

I do this work with a pure mind, with a mind of love and devotion for the Dhamma-Vinaya, and also for other people. Whatever is of communal benefit, I try to support, even though it may be difficult. I don't derive any personal advantage from the work. Things that benefit the community need to be done.

To maintain and renovate the monastery isn't beyond my skills. I can easily do this, but there are some parts of the duty that are beyond my capabilities. Sometimes the people coming to the monastery looking for advice may not be so happy with the person they meet here, because I don't get into the habit of ingratiating myself with people or praising them. My character is of the type that doesn't have likes and dislikes. I don't follow the behavior pattern of being charming to people, encouraging them to like me. I'd rather stay indifferent and aloof, not particularly close to anybody. I think it is not necessary to receive visitors showing them around and telling them much, just a sign saying where the toilet and the drinking water is should be enough. There is enough clear water for drinking or using in the toilets. We don't have to give advice in order to ingratiate ourselves with people the way it's usually done in other places. To do so can be

a cause for some very unbeautiful incidents happening in terms of the Dhamma-Vinaya.

The Buddha taught that asking things from lay people, praising them in order to get requisites, giving ingratiating gestures or hints, even with the body – all these are unfitting for a samāna, so I try not to do these things. We try to live like samānas, to be ones who dwell in seclusion and peace. We are not in opposition to anybody, nor do we harm anyone, but give support in countless ways wherever we can. Still, whether people like it or not depends on them. We can't pressure anybody, which is usually the style of the world. Never mind. We assume that they don't understand. If people really understood the principles of the Dhamma-Vinaya, they would consider what we are doing as being very natural.

Coming to Wat Pah Pong feels truly natural, as feelings related to the world don't arise. There is no one causing anyone to worry. Unwholesome mind states, biases and prejudices don't come up because we don't socialize and express preferences ingratiating ourselves with people.

The Buddha himself lived like this. If somebody really needs advice, he will approach us and ask, and we answer accordingly. That's all we do, for the sake of correctness, the sake of the Dhamma-Vinaya and in order to not get both ourselves and the lay people into trouble. Both sides conduct themselves like Dhamma practitioners. Our monastery is a practice monastery. We take the Buddha's standards as guidelines for practice, for the benefit of the sāsanā⁶³, of the society. If this is done in the correct way it will

⁶³ *The Buddha's dispensation, i.e. Buddhism.*

reverberate in people's feelings. This reverberation has no sound, but it resonates in the hearts of those who have "entered the Dhamma". They will experience a feeling of profundity arising in their hearts, a state of firmness, but not a harsh or rough one, but a wisdom and discernment that can be made use of very well.

These are the guidelines for what we are doing here in Wat Pah Pong, and although I always have done everything in line with Luang Pu Chah's standards, sometimes there may be shortcomings on my side. There are things that I just don't notice, but if I do, I will immediately act – if it is in accordance with the Dhamma-Vinaya. If it is not, or even is destroying the Dhamma-Vinaya, I won't, because I try to lead my whole life in absolute purity. I don't know whether everything will go according to this aspiration, but this is how I am determined to live.

Luang Pu Chah had the vision of creating a place – Wat Nong Pah Pong – that is built up in an absolutely pure way. In Wat Pah Pong we don't ask for, hint at or instigate donations, for example. We do things quietly, not knowing at all ourselves what to expect. If one has pure intentions and respect and love for the Dhamma-Vinaya as deep as this, coupled with some good kamma and barami⁶⁴ accumulated in the past, help and support will tend to always arise, and one will be able to create something that is of use. Eventually, both the world and the Dhamma will benefit.

⁶⁴ *Barami is the Thai rendering of the Pali pārami, colloquially meaning accumulated merit or spiritual potential.*

If we maintain these standards, the reverberating sound will still echo for a long time, maybe for many life spans, hundreds or thousands of years. If we don't uphold these principles, it won't continue very long. To keep them for even just one life is already very hard. This is what I think about Wat Pah Pong, and I'll try to live up to these ideals."

In the ten years until Luang Pu Chah finally gave up his saṅkhāras and passed away, Luang Por looked after the monastery in many ways, both in the training of the monks and in the maintenance of the monastery buildings. During this time he installed a water system that was capable of catering to the masses of visitors coming to pay respects to Luang Pu Chah. He also built a commemorative museum for Luang Pu Chah's requisites, and rebuilt a new large Dhamma sālā and a new dining hall. This sālā and the dining hall were sorely needed to accommodate the continually increasing number of followers of Luang Pu Chah coming to Wat Nong Pah Pong both on a daily basis and on big festival occasions or retreats. They were finished on the night of January 15th 2535 (1992). The following day, January 16th, at 5.30 a.m. Luang Pu Chah passed away and his coffin was displayed in the new sālā for people to pay respects.

Luang Por comments about the right attitude towards doing hard work, in the construction or maintenance of the monastery buildings:

"If we still think in selfish or egotistical ways, our work becomes something very tiring. Similarly, if we are excessively eager or hurried while working, we will tend to become anxious and upset. We should in

fact approach work thinking that it is only a change of meditation posture that simply involves some movement. Just exercise for the body. Work should be done with an attitude of 'emptiness', just continuing to do it as if there was nothing hard or heavy about it."

In the year 2535 (1992) the Wat Pah Pong Sangha and Luang Por accomplished the enormous task of preparing the royal cremation ceremony, including the building of the cremation site, the *chedi* commemorating Luang Pu Chah. Over one million people attended the funeral by its conclusion, with over half a million people including His Majesties the King and Queen of Thailand, and the prime minister of Thailand, visiting Wat Pah Pong on the last day.

Although he wished to decline the position, Luang Por was officially made the new abbot of Wat Nong Pah Pong in 2537 (1994). In 2539 (1996) he was authorised by the Thai ecclesiastical authorities to act as an upajjhāya and since then he frequently gives both novice and full ordination at Wat Nong Pah Pong, both for Wat Pah Pong itself, but also for some of the more than 200 branch monasteries, including Wat Pah Nanachat, the training monastery for foreign monastics. Each year in the second week of September Luang Por calls all his disciples together for a week of training in meditation and monastic etiquette, as he feels is his duty as upajjhāya. Instead of on his birthday, the 5th of November, his disciples use this opportunity to pay respects to Luang Por.

To the Sangha of Wat Pah Nanachat Luang Por has always given advice and encouragement, but in the last few years he has also helped out the foreign monks

in the fifteen branch monasteries overseas by visiting them. In the year 2540 (1997) he was invited to visit Bodhinyana Monastery in Perth, Australia, and in 2541 (1998) he accepted an invitation from Bodhinyanarama Monastery in New Zealand. In 2542 (1999) Tan Ajahn Sumedho invited him to attend the opening ceremony of the new temple at Amaravati Monastery near Hemel Hempstead in England. In 2543 (2000) and 2547 (2004) he visited the new branch monastery Abhayagiri in California, USA, and in 2547 (2004) he went to Melbourne, Australia as a guest of Bodhivana Monastery. Also in 2547 (2004) Luang Por had the chance to do a pilgrimage to the Buddhist holy sites in India.

Each time that Luang Por accepts an invitation to travel abroad he enjoys sharing his interesting experiences and insights derived from living in a different culture with the monks and laity of Wat Pah Pong on his return. Luang Por would share his observations about the differences in culture, customs and climate, about the vegetation, animals and people in the country he had visited. He would tell the Thai Sangha about the monks and lay Buddhists abroad and the state of Buddhism in the various countries, but most of all he would give a summary of the aspects of the Buddhist teachings that he had found most relevant during his visit. After Luang Por's visit to Australia in 2547 (2004), for example, he shared the following reflections:

“Going abroad one will always meet things that aren't the same as at home, but still, wherever one goes, the body and the saṅkhāras of people are similar. The people in Australia also aspire to qualities that take them on a path which leads them to

useful and meaningful experiences in their lives. This is why they give importance to the principles of the Buddha's teachings. So we had the chance to exchange ideas and talk about the Dhamma a lot. I tried to speak in such a way that people understand that the Dhamma is a teaching that is applicable to the lives of each and every person. No matter where people come from and under what circumstances they may live, there is always a way in which the teaching relates to their situation. Because there is nothing much different about all of us. We are all the same, apart for those aspects that are subject to our delusions, that are built on diṭṭhi-māna⁶⁵. Those areas where we are arrogant and full of self-importance are the only exceptions (to the fact that people are all the same). But those people who don't have diṭṭhi-māna surely have the capacity to understand the truth about themselves. Although we may live in different surroundings or a different climate, this truth is in fact the same. If we human beings stripped off all the cloth and decorations from our bodies, we'd be all the same. There'd be no need for discriminating people according to this or that criterium. We all know that everybody wants goodness and happiness, all together. Nobody wants things that bring suffering and unpeaceful experiences."

Each year on the birthday of His Majesty the King of Thailand a number of monks throughout the country are honoured for outstanding personal qualities and

⁶⁵ Views and opinions that are based on conceit, arrogance and pride.

meritorious engagement for the benefit of Buddhism and society as a whole. On the 5th of December 2544 (2001) Luang Por Liem was thus given the ecclesiastical honorary title “Tan Chao Khun Visuddhi-saṁvara Thera”⁶⁶ by His Majesty the King of Thailand. All of Luang Por’s disciples were most proud and happy about this recognition, so Luang Por took the chance to remind them by saying, “To give honorary titles is an expression of praise for good qualities in the way people in the world do it.” Luang Por still remains the same Luang Por.

⁶⁶ *See explanation in footnote 2.*



Glossary

- anattā *Non-self, not-self.*
- anicca *Impermanence.*
- arati *Aversion.*
- asubha kammaṭṭhāna *The contemplation of the component parts of the body, investigating their unattractive, loathsome and foul nature, and seeing them as impermanent, suffering and non-self.*
- bhikkhu *Buddhist monk.*
- bhojane mattaññutā *Knowing the right amount in eating.*
- cittasaṅkhārā *Conditioned phenomena of the mind, may also mean proliferations or imaginations of the mind in the common Thai usage.*
- Dhamma (Sanskrit: Dharma) *The ultimate truth of reality, the teachings about this truth, and the practice leading to its realization. Specifically meaning the Buddha's teaching or doctrine.*
- Dhamma-Vinaya *The name the Buddha gave to his own dispensation.*
- dhutaṅga *Austere renunciation, special ascetic practices the Buddha allowed in order to "shake off" kilesas.*
- dukkha *Suffering, unsatisfactoriness or stress.*
- dukkha vedanā *Unpleasant or painful feeling.*
- Four Noble Truths *The truths that the Buddha realized through his enlightenment: 1) the truth of dukkha, 2) the cause of dukkha is taṇhā (craving), 3) when taṇhā ceases dukkha ceases, 4) there is a path to the cessation of dukkha, the Noble Eightfold Path.*
- Isahn *Northeastern Thailand.*
- kāmatanaḥā *Sensual desire.*

kamma (Sanskrit: Karma) *Action with intention, the law of cause and result of all actions with intention.*

kammatthāna *Literally: basis for action, generally: meditation techniques.*

karuṇā *Compassion.*

khandhā *The five aggregates, or basic constituents of life: rūpa (form), vedanā (feeling), saññā (perception or memory), saṅkhārā (volitional formations), viññāṇa (sense-consciousness).*

kilesā *Defilements, obscurations, or destructive emotions. Their various forms are traditionally summed up as greed, aversion and delusion.*

kruba-ajahns *Highly venerated monks in Thailand, especially the meditation teachers in the forest tradition.*

kuṭi *A monk's meditation hut.*

lokadhammā *The eight worldly dhammas: praise and blame, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, happiness and unhappiness.*

Māra *The deity personifying evil which, according to the legend, tried to obstruct the Buddha before his enlightenment by sending his three daughters to tempt him.*

mettā *Loving-kindness, goodwill, friendliness.*

Nak-Thamm *The nation-wide scriptural Dhamma exams in the three levels of Tri, To and Ek.*

nāma dhammā *Mental phenomena.*

nibbāna (Sanskrit: nirvāṇa) *The extinction or complete fading away of all defilements, the complete ending of suffering, the ultimate fulfillment of the Buddhist path.*

nimitta *Sign; in the context of meditation: a mental image or vision.*

nīvaraṇā *The five hindrances in meditation: sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and agitation, doubt and uncertainty.*
pañña *Wisdom, discernment.*
paccuppanna dhamma *The reality (or dhamma) of the present moment.*
puñña *Merit, goodness, or wholesome kamma.*
puthujjana *Ordinary, unenlightened being.*
rāga *Lust.*
sīla *Moral conduct, ethical behaviour.*
saddhā *Confidence, faith or trust.*
sālā *Large public meeting hall for chanting and meditation.*
Saṅgha *The monastic community.*
saṅkhārā *Conditioned phenomena of the mind, or proliferations of the mind, sometimes all conditioned phenomena.*
saññā *Perception, recognition or memory.*
samādhi *Concentration. The development of a sustained, blissful, unified, one-pointed awareness on a meditation object leading to tranquility.*
samaṇa *Renunciant, contemplative, ascetic, recluse.*
sammā ditṭhi *Right view, part of the Noble Eightfold Path.*
sampajañña *All-around awareness and clear comprehension. The Thai usage as ‘roo dtua’ also means consciousness.*
sati *Mindfulness and recollection.*
sukha vedanā *Pleasant feeling.*
taṇhā *Craving or desire, sometimes also translates as wanting.*
Three Characteristics *Impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self (anicca, dukkha, anattā).*

tudong (Thai) *Derived from the Pali word dhutaṅga, but in colloquial Thai it means travelling by foot in search of quiet places.*

upajjhāya *Ordination preceptor.*

upekkhā *Equanimity.*

vinaya *Training and discipline undertaken by the Buddhist practitioner, or the monks' discipline with its 227 major rules.*

viññāṇa *Sense-consciousness.*

vibhavaṭṭhā *Desire not to be, not to have.*

viveka *Seclusion.*