

THE LIFE AND DHAMMA PRACTICE OF
AJAHN KALYANO

Phra Sophon Bhavanavithet

PEACE
from WITHIN



BUDDHA BODHIVANA MONASTERY







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Published by
Buddha Bodhivana Monastery
780 Woods Point Road East Warburton
Victoria 3799 Australia
www.buddhabodhivana.org
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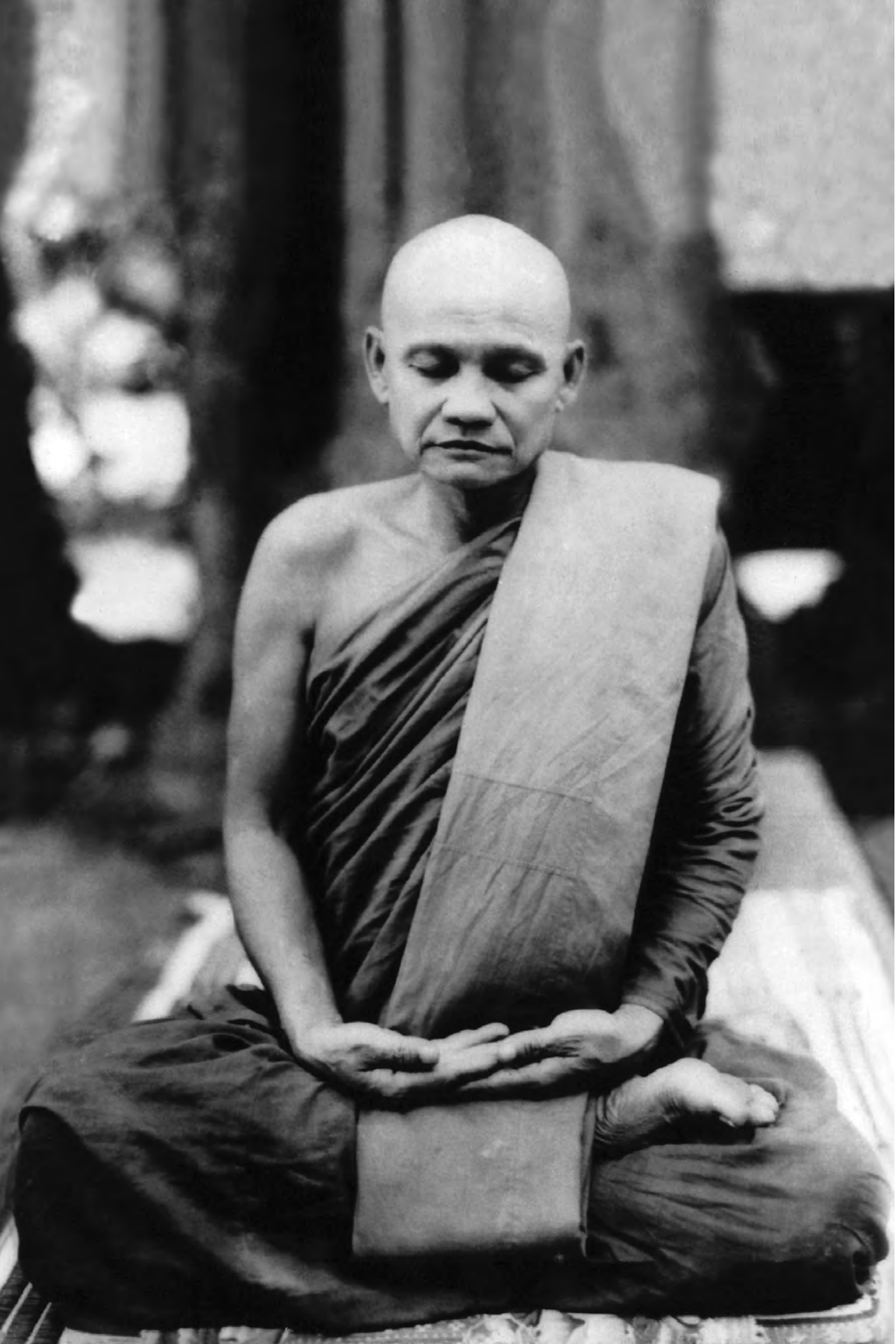
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First edition, printed in Malaysia, 2023

Namo Tassa
Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa
Homage to the
Blessed, Noble and Perfectly Enlightened One

Buddhaṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi
I go for refuge to the Buddha
Dhammaṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi
I go for refuge to the Dhamma
Saṅghaṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi
I go for refuge to the Sangha



Dedication

This book is dedicated to
Luang Por Chah,
who first opened my eyes
to the Buddha's Path of Awakening;
to Luang Por Anan
who kept them open;
to all the Dhamma teachers
I have had the good fortune to meet and learn from;
and to all the lay supporters
who have helped me over the years.



“

And what, *Bhikkhus*,
is that middle way
Awakened to by the *Tathāgata*,
which gives rise to vision ...
which leads to *Nibbāna*?

It is this Noble Eightfold Path; that is
right view, right intention, right speech,
right action, right livelihood, right effort,
right mindfulness, right concentration.

This, *Bhikkhus*,
is that middle way
Awakened to by the *Tathāgata*,
which gives rise to vision,
which gives rise to knowledge,
which leads to peace, to direct knowledge,
to enlightenment,
to *Nibbāna*.

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta
(*Samyutta Nikāya* 56.11)



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Introduction

On the occasion of my 60th birthday, I received some requests from the monastic Sangha and the lay supporters of Buddha Bodhivana Monastery who wished to know more about my life and practice as a monk. In response, it seems like a good idea to commit some of my various recollections to paper before they become lost through the passage of time. This book includes some of my personal recollections and insights from my life in the robes, rather than providing lengthy explanations of the Buddha's teachings. The language used is simple and without too much reference to many of the Pali technical terms that we use daily as we talk about the Buddha's teachings.

If the words contained in these pages can be of any use to the reader to provide inspiration or insight and assist them with their own cultivation of the Dhamma, then please take them as an offering given in support of fellow students of the Buddha.

Acknowledgement

I have found in my life that I have constantly benefitted from the assistance of others and the making of this book is no exception. I wish to express my gratitude to the team of editors and graphic designers, both Sangha and laity, who freely shared their knowledge and skills and gave their time to bring this book to completion. In particular I would like to thank the supporters of the BuddhaDhamma Foundation and the Katannuta Group for all their practical help and support with the book.

I also express my gratitude and appreciation to the lay donors in Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand who helped to fund the printing and distribution of the book as a gift of Dhamma.

Ajahn Kalyano

Buddha Bodhivana Monastery

1 October 2565/2022



Ajahn Kalyano at the age of three.

“

*Yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ
nirodhadhammaṃ ti*

Whatever is subject to origination
is all subject to cessation.

*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta
(Saṃyutta Nikāya 56.11)*

1

Where Does That Peaceful Feeling Come From?

Birth And Early Childhood

I was born to my parents, Brian and Jill Jones, at 9.00pm on Monday 1 October 1962 in their home in Dulwich, South London, United Kingdom. My parents were both teachers from a town called Oswestry, on the English side of the border with North Wales. My mother remembered that in August, she almost gave birth prematurely when the family was staying in a small cottage in North Wales. She experienced strong premature labour pains and recalled that I wanted to come out early and be born in the mountains. The local doctor said that if my mother had given birth then, I would be skinny and weak. He recommended that she hurry back to London.

It turned out that when I was born I was larger and heavier than my siblings. I had an elder brother, Justin, and an older sister Naomi. I was the youngest. Even though I was brought up in Dulwich, I spent almost every school holiday in a small cottage in the valley of Llansillin, North Wales, where my grandparents and other paternal relatives were from. Many of my mother's relatives originally came from Edinburgh, Scotland.

Inner Peace

I remember that from the age of four, there were occasions when my mind quite naturally turned inwards, and became unusually peaceful. I experienced strong and pleasant feelings of rapture and happiness. For example, when I was sitting on the floor playing with my toys or reading in the corner of a room, while my mother or father went about their business, I found myself gradually absorbing into a state of calm and serenity, experiencing a profound feeling of well-being. Even though I might be physically close to my parents or siblings, I felt as if I was totally alone. I experienced intense rapture with tingling sensations going up and down my body, goose bumps on my skin and my hair stood on end. At those moments my body felt light and weightless and occasionally it felt like my body disappeared altogether; and all that was left was my mind just knowing things internally.

These experiences arose quite naturally without me seeking them out. They happened when I became engrossed in whatever activity I was involved with. I felt light and happy for a few hours and sometimes for the rest of the day. Entering such a state of rapture happened from time to time, throughout my childhood and I remembered the experiences clearly. I asked myself where these peaceful feelings came from because I did not know the cause. All I knew for sure was that I experienced a feeling of well-being and happiness. It seemed to be an exceptionally strong happiness coming from within my mind that was independent of other people or material things.

I also remember that after the age of seven, I occasionally had lucid dreams, such as premonitions warning me about some obstacle that I had to face or about an upcoming event. The first clear dream I remember was during my first year of primary

school, when I dreamt that my teacher, a young woman, picked me up off the ground in a warm embrace but at that moment her skin began to peel off and blood and other repulsive liquids began oozing out all over her body. As her body began to disintegrate, I heard someone singing the words of a song I was familiar with that warned children to run away from danger. I knew that my teacher was kind and friendly, so the association of her with danger, in the dream, left a strong impression. Much later, I considered that the danger was in my attachment and identification with the physical body which is unattractive and subject to disintegration, not the person herself.

In my early childhood, I spent a lot of time in local woods and parks. I was always attracted to the peace and quiet of outdoor spaces. I liked to go for walks or bicycle rides with friends or even alone, when no friend was available. I quite often spent time on my own playing under the trees and normally I did not feel afraid like some other children. One time, when I was about 12, I attempted to make a small tree hut out of branches and leaves. The idea arose spontaneously and I wanted to know what it was like living in the forest.

Parents Are Like Brahma Gods

As a child, I was blessed to have loving parents and a stable family environment. Both my parents were kind and generous people. They shared their time and skills and made continuous sacrifices for their family, friends, students and to the wider society. As teachers, they gave up a lot of personal time to help students with schoolwork and had a genuine concern for their well-being. They offered emotional support and practical help and even organised weekend parties, which was very unusual in those days.



Ajahn Kalyano (in his father's arms) with his mother and siblings.

Buddhist teachings liken parents to Brahma gods who provide their children with the first taste of unconditional love. Watching my parents sacrifice for their family, students and wider society, I grew up gaining many inspiring lessons that stuck in my mind for years. I learnt from them that helping other people is a valuable part of life. It enriches the quality of life of both the giver and receiver. It generates happiness.

I was born in my parents' house, not in a hospital, and the family home was attached to a large school boarding house with about 50 student residents. I grew up watching both my parents care for the education, health and well-being of the students under their responsibility. I had the added advantage of having lots of friends amongst the students and access to a huge building to play in, during holidays. I saw my parents act as the temporary parents for each student. I saw them continuously giving time and energy to people outside of their family.

My parents were also generous with their friends of all ages. I regularly accompanied them to visit friends with disabilities and those who were getting older. I remember my first reactions to visiting family friends who were in hospital. I did not find hospitals as pleasant or welcoming places as they are today, but I gritted my teeth and followed my parents when they made visits. I learnt the importance of cultivating friendship and compassion in daily life from my parents; and it showed me that not only can you enjoy life as an individual or family, but you can also enjoy life taking the time to help others. I was brought up in an environment where I often witnessed many natural and spontaneous acts of sacrifice, kindness and compassion from my parents to others. Because they were teachers, I saw them giving advice, information and teachings to their students on different levels and began to realise that compassion in action

can include telling somebody something that is important to their well-being, that they do not necessarily wish to hear. I slowly observed how the practice of generosity and service to the community needs to be guided by intelligence, but when done skillfully brings positive results.

First Meeting With Luang Por Chah

At about 16, I was seeking answers to questions on the nature of true happiness and considering how to live a good life as a human being. I wanted to know what are the causes for peace of mind and lasting happiness. I read a little about most of the well-known world religions, but when I discovered the words of the Buddha, I was immediately impressed with the profound wisdom and clarity of his teachings. I found that the Buddha's words could answer every question I had. His explanations and practical instructions on how to live a skilful life, and how to use and develop meditation to train the mind always inspired confidence in me. The Buddha's teachings pointed out what obstacles to expect in the practice and gave skilful means to overcome them. They also explained what kind of benefits arise from the practice. The more I read, the more confidence I gained.

The clear wisdom of the Buddha had won me over by the age of sixteen, but I still had doubts because I assumed that as an ancient teaching, people might no longer be seriously following or putting the Buddha's instructions into practice in the world. I thought that the teachings were respected only in academic circles. And that the actual practice of Buddhism and the cultivation of the Noble Eightfold Path for the realisation of the end of suffering was already extinct from the modern world - in the same way as some species of plants or animals have disappeared. Observing different aspects of my own lifestyle and the society and culture that surrounded

me, I just assumed that no one put these teachings into serious practice anymore. At first, I was disheartened because I thought I did not have the knowledge and understanding to practise these teachings by myself; and I did not know where I could go to find a proper teacher.

By chance in 1978, I saw the BBC documentary “*The Mindful Way*” when I was on sick leave from school. For some reason on that day, I had the urge to turn on the television and it was my good fortune that I was able to see Luang Por Chah and his monks living, practising and teaching in the jungle of Thailand. I heard his teachings translated into English and felt inspired and uplifted, observing and hearing about the life and practice of the monks. Some of my doubts about the Buddhist path and how it should be cultivated in the modern world were removed immediately. Nothing else that I had encountered so far in my life had the same uplifting effect on me as seeing Luang Por Chah and the monks in the forest.

Like the sun coming up in the morning to dispel the darkness of night, it dawned on me that Buddhism was still alive and being practised in the world, even though it was not immediately apparent to me where this could be done in the UK. It was clear to me that in parts of Asia there were still people with strong faith in the teachings. They were prepared to renounce their normal life of working and raising a family, to become monks and nuns; and to practise in a way that was true to the Buddha’s original intention. The Thai Forest Tradition provided a clear and direct link back to the way people cultivated the Dhamma in the time of the Buddha, emphasising the cultivation of ethical conduct, meditation and liberating wisdom to free one from suffering. For me it was reassuring to see with my own eyes that Buddhist monks still lived and practised in the world and passed the teachings on to lay Buddhists too. It seemed that those lay

people who had strong faith and took refuge sincerely in the Sangha, made their growth in Dhamma their highest priority in life and over material development.

Where Is The Wisdom?

The combination of reading Buddhist books, hearing Luang Por Chah talk about letting go, and experiencing my own disappointment with the normal goals, cultural views and ideals gave me the feeling that I was living in the wrong place. My world view and the ideas about life that I grew up with led me to see that the purpose of life is to go to school, get a high school education so that you can go on to further education; and eventually find a job or build a career, earn money, have relationships and maybe raise a family. The normal view of life I encountered everywhere seemed to be based on attaining, achieving and trying to be 'somebody' but without the realisation of how easily it contributed to mental states of greed and clinging followed by the despair of separation and ultimately death. I could not see myself finding peace or happiness pursuing that way of life. It felt to me that without any deeper understanding, my life was meaningless or as if living in a spiritual desert. Encountering the Buddha's teachings offered a glimmer of hope, like a slight crack of light appearing in a place of complete darkness.

When I was very young, I attended a Christian church with my family, but as I grew older, everyone in my family stopped attending the church quite naturally. It was partly because we moved house further away from the church and partly because we all found other things to do. Really, it was a sign that nobody in the family was interested. This was one reason that led me to explore the teachings of other religions. Buddhist teachings became the most satisfying and reliable explanation of reality; and how to go beyond the sufferings of life that I was beginning to notice.











The Rewards of Virtue

[Ānanda:]

"Bhante, what is the purpose and benefit of wholesome virtuous behaviour?"

[The Buddha:]

"Ānanda, the purpose and benefit of wholesome virtuous behaviour is non-regret."

"The purpose and benefit of non-regret is joy."

"The purpose and benefit of joy is rapture."

"The purpose and benefit of rapture is tranquility."

"The purpose and benefit of tranquility is pleasure."

"The purpose and benefit of pleasure is concentration."

"The purpose and benefit of concentration is the knowledge and vision of things as they really are."

"The purpose and benefit of the knowledge and vision of things as they really are is disenchantment and dispassion."

"The purpose and benefit of disenchantment and dispassion is the knowledge and vision of liberation."

Aṅguttara Nikāya 10.1

2

Understanding Wrong From Right

Early Lessons

In my teenage years, I began asking myself questions about ethics. I tried to understand what actions are right and wrong, who decides what is good and bad in life, and what is the nature of true happiness. Both at school and outside, I encountered students who bullied others, told lies, stole or got addicted to drugs and this led me to ask myself about the correct way to live as a human being and consider that our actions do have consequences. I was bullied a couple of times and I could see that there were different ways to respond. I could be patient and try to shrug it off, or I could be firm and risk a physical altercation with the perpetrator. I noticed that occasionally I lost my temper when someone treated me or my friends unfairly and it made me want to redress the situation. I never initiated violence against another student, but if I was bullied and words failed, I was willing to defend myself. In fact, on the very first day I attended school, I was sent home because an older child bullied me. He wanted to show me my place as a newcomer to the school. He pushed me out of the way as I was drinking from the communal water fountain. I became angry and spat the water in my mouth back at the older boy. The teacher was familiar with the older boy and preferred to listen to his explanation of events rather than mine. I was sent home as a punishment.

Most of my early school life was actually very peaceful and pleasant. I focused on my studies but living in inner London meant that I was exposed to the aggression of other children regularly. Occasionally, another boy might hit or attack me. Sometimes I defended myself by hitting them back. As I grew older though, I thought about these incidents and decided I did not like responding to violence with violence. As I grew bigger physically, I was aware that I could use my body to hurt another child. I did not like that idea. I preferred to use my energy to do good or useful things. I gradually changed my view as I grew older. Increasingly, I preferred to talk my way out of any problem or dispute with other children; and if that failed, I preferred to just walk away. I formed a clear aspiration that I would not want to use violence, even in self-defence. However, living in the inner city meant that this resolve was tested often, as simply walking along the road could expose me to threats from other children. I understood that if I reacted with violence each time that someone else attacked or bullied me, it would become an ingrained habitual reaction. I did not like losing self-control so often or so easily. Over time, I learnt that a non-violent response would usually work when I was threatened by other children and I naturally inclined that way.

The occasional incidents of violence or intimidation I was exposed to, were brief. But, they made me think about the role of aggression and violence in life; and consider what is the best way to treat other human beings. I preferred to solve disputes through friendly negotiation rather than force. By the time I was 12, I made a clear decision that however much violence or provocation I encountered, I would never respond with violence under any circumstances.

An End To All Aggression

The last time I used aggression against another person was when I was subjected to an unprovoked attack, twice in the same day, by a gang of four boys who were strangers to me. The first time they attacked me out of the blue, and I consciously tolerated them. I had no wish to engage in violence. Later the same day, for no reason they attacked me a second time. I felt such a strong sense of injustice that I grabbed the ringleader, and disarmed him. The whole gang ran away and left me alone. Later I found out that the gang leader had gone to hospital with a slightly injured back; and I felt unhappy with myself for being the cause of that. His mother tried to deceive the school principal by claiming that I was a bully. There were no witnesses on my side to back up my story. Fortunately, the school principal must have believed my description of events and ended his investigation. I remembered pondering the incident and observed for the first time, how a mother's love can lead her to lie on her child's behalf, even at the expense of the well-being of another mother's son.

I felt sick when I considered the negative consequences that arise out of violent acts. From that time onwards, I became determined never to act aggressively again, whatever the provocation. I endeavoured to solve any problem or dispute with another person in a non-violent way. Because of this resolution, whenever I was threatened or involved in a dispute, on subsequent occasions, I always considered how to resolve it in a peaceful way, whether through skilful and appropriate communication, seeking help, avoiding the person, running away, or whatever was needed in the situation. It was not because I was physically weak, or afraid, or that I did not feel anger, but I disliked violence itself more than the fear that arose or the sense of injustice. I felt strongly that no goal is of true value if it has to be achieved through violent means. I did not even want to use

violence to defend myself against others. I never wanted to use physical force against another person or animal.

Throughout my teenage years, I frequently encountered situations where young men were physically aggressive to each other. My resolve to avoid violence was tested over and over again as I encountered such situations at school, on the street or at social events. I stuck to my resolution and I always felt that it was the right thing to do. By determining to pursue a path of non-violence, I found that other skilful qualities began to develop in me. I naturally inclined towards friendliness and compassion. I preferred to use my intelligence to solve problems, help others or protect myself or others in different ways. Normally, I did not have any strong anger or resentment towards other people, even if they were aggressive towards me. I did not wish to indulge what anger did arise in my mind. Sometimes other young people threatened or attacked me or the people I was with, but I tried to talk to them and change their attitude if I could. I never wanted to respond with physical violence or even seek revenge even if someone hurt me. I preferred to let things go and move on.

When I was 16, one group of my friends split into two factions for very trivial reasons. This resulted in me being perceived as an enemy by one of the groups because of my association with the youths from the other group they did not like. For two years, the disgruntled faction threatened and insulted me whenever they encountered me. I never responded with aggressive speech or conduct. I was already reading Buddhist books and I instinctively knew that if I was patient with the problem, it would not escalate. Eventually, after two years, I met the group who disliked me, by chance. They told me that they no longer hated me and had moved on. I did not harbour any hatred for them in the first place, so I simply carried on as usual and, smiling to myself, wondered what all the fuss had been about.

As a teenager, I still experienced occasional mental states of anger, but I always tried to let them go rather than indulge in negative thinking. The more I studied the Buddha's words on *kamma* and the value of training in virtuous conduct, the more I consciously cultivated restraint in my speech and actions. It seemed to me that not indulging in anger and experiencing freedom from remorse was the natural way to happiness. My developing practice of compassion and cultivation of an attitude of non-violence towards other beings was tested when my parents bought me a fishing rod when I was 13. I went fishing once or twice and quite liked sitting quietly in the countryside next to a pond or river. Before I had actually caught a fish, I justified the activity as a way to obtain my own food without bothering other people. I did not think that I was bothering the fish. The first time I caught a fish however, I was unable to kill it and felt nauseous and sad at the foolishness of my action. After that I considered things more deeply and concluded that there was no point continuing with fishing as I knew I was much happier leaving fish to themselves and I knew the fish would be happier too.

Later on, my father bought an air rifle and encouraged me to shoot the rabbits and birds that disturbed his vegetable patch. After having shot at some birds and then killed a young rabbit, I felt so ashamed and disappointed with myself that I did not want to pick up the gun again. I decided to give up harming animals as well as people. Thinking more about how we harm and exploit so many animals for food I concluded that I did not want to eat meat or fish anymore; and I did not want to encourage other people to harm animals on my behalf. Even though I liked the taste of meat and fish, I gave up eating it because I did not want to encourage the suffering of other beings by supporting the commercial meat industry. I became a vegetarian, but I was not angry with other people who ate

meat. I preferred to encourage people to think about the cruelty involved in the production of meat, poultry and fish and eat more vegetarian food rather than just criticise them.

By the age of sixteen, I had no doubt that all beings, human and animal, wish to live without suffering and that all beings fear pain. I did not wish to intentionally inflict pain on other sentient beings. I saw animals and humans as the same in this respect. When I stopped eating meat, it caused a stir amongst my family and friends, but I never asked anyone else to follow me, or even give me special treatment. I did not make a problem out of it by protesting for animal rights or criticising other people who ate meat products. Later on, some of my friends wanted me to join their animal rights protests, but I preferred to keep to myself as I was already learning about Buddhism, meditating and keeping the five precepts.

True Knowledge Ends Suffering

At high school, I put effort into my studies, but I also had strong doubts about how useful the academic knowledge I was gaining would be in my life. I inclined towards a more spiritual life, but because I was not yet sure what kind of life that would be, I went along with the education my parents provided for me and I appreciated all their support. Superficially, I went along with the normal cultural expectations and values of society, even though I was not completely happy within myself. I made sure I completed all my studies, but I did not feel that I fitted in to other people's expectations of what I was planning to do. I could not picture myself finishing a degree and pursuing any normal career path or settling down and starting my own family, but I did not yet know how I could pursue the spiritual life. For many years I viewed myself as biding my time and learning patience until the alternative way of life I was seeking came to light.

My studies at school went well and my teachers wanted me to take the entrance exam for Oxford and Cambridge University, but by that time I felt really tired of studying subjects that I knew would be of little use to me in the future. I did not see myself following the career paths my teachers suggested. When I refused to apply to enter the top universities, my teachers came to my home and pleaded with me to change my mind. I was sure I wanted to pursue a spiritual path, but in the end, I applied to and was accepted by Bristol University, with the understanding that I would defer my education for a year. I felt the urge to travel and find out new things so I worked to earn money to fund myself. Everyone else wanted me to go straight to university, but I was happy to delay it because I was sure that even if I gained a university degree, I would never use it. I was interested in learning more about Buddhism and meditation and developing the spiritual side of life rather than pursuing a career or earning money. But I still did not have a Dhamma teacher or mentor. So I decided to go along with things until I found a teacher that I had faith in, to follow.

Undertaking The Five Precepts - Abandoning Intoxicants

My undertaking to keep the first precept helped me prepare for my decision to train with the fifth precept to give up alcohol and recreational drugs. I begun meditating at the age of seventeen. As I became more committed to the Buddhist path, I realised that I needed to take my personal conduct more seriously. I knew that it was essential for me to develop virtuous conduct as a basis for cultivating inner peace and clarity in meditation. As I began to meditate regularly, I observed the relationship between my external conduct and state of mind. I knew I had to train my speech and actions to be harmless towards myself and others, just as I had to train my mind in calm and insight meditation. As I meditated more, I saw the inevitable suffering

when I relived memories of unskilful things that I had said, done under the influence of intoxicants; and that motivated me to be more disciplined and restrained.

Once I was meditating regularly in my life, I found that it had such a revolutionary effect on my attitudes and lifestyle that I quite naturally began to shy away from all forms of intoxicants. The use of alcohol was commonplace amongst my family, friends and peers; and different types of recreational drugs were easy to come by. At first, I often followed along when others drank or took drugs. But I did not like losing my sense of clarity or ability to make good choices in different situations. Reflecting on the changes in my own behaviour, when I was even slightly intoxicated, gave me a personal insight into the dangers and drawbacks from the use of intoxicants. I saw how clouded my mind; and how foolishly I could behave under the influence of intoxicants. I also saw so much long-term suffering in the lives of other people around me arising directly or indirectly from alcohol and drug use. In the end, I overcame any doubt about the need to abandon intoxicants. As I grew older, I became increasingly aware of the way alcohol and drug use caused so many long-term health and personal problems in society.

I observed how intelligent and successful student friends were expelled from school for drug use; and how their behaviour pattern often continued into their further education and the workplace. A small number of my friends dropped out of school, and later, university. Some even experienced different kinds of mental illness such as psychosis or depression exaggerated by drug abuse. I knew young people who died from overdoses, alcohol poisoning or serious road accidents because they were driving while intoxicated. I lost count of the number of alcohol-fuelled arguments and violent incidents I witnessed throughout my youth. Looking at my own life and the lives of those around

me, the case for avoiding intoxicants seemed more and more convincing by the time I reached the end of my teenage years. A small number of my friends gave me a hard time when I gave up drinking alcohol, but later on when I became a monk, they admitted to me that it was a good decision. One or two were even inspired to follow me and quit taking drinks and drugs too.

Honesty

Through regular meditation, it was natural that I reached the point where I decided to undertake the five precepts as a normal part of my life. I could see that acting aggressively or selfishly only led to suffering and regret later. I saw that the disadvantages of taking intoxicants far outweighed any benefits or pleasure. I naturally shied away from stealing or damaging other people's property even though I still had a few acquaintances who did not respect other people's property. As a child, I had stolen a few small items on a couple of occasions. I did not like the uncomfortable feeling of regret or the fear of being caught that arose in my mind. I found that people who chose to be honest were inspiring, especially in situations when they could have been dishonest or selfish. When I was 16, I took my savings to school to buy an electric guitar from another student and during the course of the day, I carelessly misplaced the money. Before I went home, another student asked the class if anyone had lost some cash and when I told him the exact amount that I had lost, he knew it was mine and kindly returned the money to me. To this day, I still remember how impressed I was with that student's honesty, when it would have been easy for him to keep the money for himself.

During my youth, I always felt good when I saw people display honesty and kindness in their actions. Normally, I was not tempted to steal from others, but I remember in my first year at

university, there was an occasion when walking along a corridor in the student library I found a five pound note on the floor. Although I tried to search around for the owner, I was so busy with my studies that when I could not find anyone, I put the money in my pocket rather than handing it in to the library staff. Later that same day, I purchased a food item in a local shop and used the five pound note. The shopkeeper gave me change for a one pound note rather than for a five pound note; and called me a liar and a thief, when I protested his mistake. He was very aggressive and threatened to call the police, but I looked on the incident as a teaching and instantly knew it was the result of the unwholesome *kamma* I had made by keeping money that belonged to someone else. I let it go. I should have tried harder to find the original owner of the money or at least not kept the money or try to use it. A good lesson in instant *kamma*.

Relationships and Celibacy

I always thought that keeping the third precept was essential for a stable and happy relationship. For almost all the time that I was a layman, I was single, it was not hard for me to keep the third precept. Like any other young man, I had sexual desire and yearn for an intimate relationship, but as my teenage years progressed, I began thinking more about becoming a monk. I was aware that forming an intimate bond with a partner would make it harder for me to leave the lay life. I flirted back when girls flirted with me, but I shied away from a steady relationship. One night when I was 17, my friend and I both met the same girl for the first time and both of us were attracted to her. My friend was quicker than me to introduce himself and when they formed a relationship; I was happy for them both. But the girl appeared interested in me and when she talked to me, I could see the suffering in my friend's jealousy, so I determined to keep my distance.

During my time at university, I became close to one of the female students, but I kept recollecting my resolve to become a monk to stop myself from forming an intimate relationship with her. One night, towards the end of my time at university she got very drunk at a party and I had to walk her home. She was so tired and drunk that I ended up physically carrying her into her apartment. I laid her down on her bed, but she grabbed me and pulling off her clothes she wrapped her naked body around me; and told me that she loved me the most in the whole world. I had already spent time as an *Anagārikā* at Wat Pah Nanachat in 1983 and had no doubt about my decision to return to Thailand and become a monk after I had finished university. I maintained my restraint as my friend attempted to seduce me and gently placed her back on the bed and wished her good night. I left the apartment quickly and walked ten kilometres to my home in the early hours of the morning in the freezing rain. At one point I began to cry as I walked because I was thinking how hard the practice of celibacy was, but I reminded myself that it should be easier to be celibate, living in the jungle far away from the people I knew. Throughout my last summer in England as a layman, I had a sense of foreboding that if I did not move to the monastery quickly, I would end up in a relationship and might never get the chance to be a monk again. The sense of urgency to get to the monastery became stronger as the summer months wore on.

When I returned from my first trip to Wat Nong Pah Pong and Wat Pah Nanachat in October 1983, and was preparing to finish up my studies and get rid of all my possessions before returning to Thailand to become a monk, events seemed to propel me back towards the girlfriend of my old school friend who I had known since I was 17. She began contacting me and talking to me much more than before, because she was no longer happy in her relationship. Several times she took me by surprise at social

events and tried flirting with me and even tried to be physically intimate with me. She knew I liked her and she made it clear that she liked me. Her advances tested my resolve as did those of the other female students at university. Luckily, I had already determined to return to Thailand and become a monk with Luang Por Chah, so I made myself ignore the girl as much as possible. Just a few days before I flew to Thailand, the band I had been in since my school days played a farewell gig for her 21st birthday party. At one point in the early hours of the morning, she grabbed me and made it clear that she wanted to be with me. I had to use all my energy and resolve to drag myself away from her while remembering that I would soon be back in the monastery. Not long after I reached Thailand, the girl sent me a letter saying that she had left her boyfriend and because she was officially single, she asked when I was returning to London. Again, it took all my resolve to let her go, and I did not answer the letter.

Learning Right Speech

When I began meditating regularly after I left high school, I read the Buddha's words explaining the cultivation of the Noble Eightfold Path and realised that I would have to work harder on improving the qualities of right speech in my daily life. I could not remember lying to anyone in my youth as there was no real need, but I assume I did and I certainly swore and insulted others on occasions when I was annoyed. Sometimes I could be cynical and say negative things too easily. As I studied Buddhism and practised more mindfulness, I set myself a goal to change my speech habits for the better.

One of the first good experiences I had in meditation was a strong feeling of gratitude and appreciation towards parents, teachers and those who had helped me in my life. As I became more mindful, my understanding of many aspects of life

matured and I realised how much help I had received from other people, since the day of my birth. After finishing my first ever meditation on mindfulness of breathing in my bedroom, I felt so overwhelmed with gratitude to my parents as memories of their sacrifices flooded into my mind, that I went to find my mother and thanked her for everything that she and my father had ever done for me. My mother looked stunned and asked me what I was talking about. I explained that I felt that I had taken my parents for granted all these years and wanted to make sure they knew that I really appreciated everything they had ever done for me. My mother smiled but asked me if there was anything wrong because this was such an unusual subject for me to bring up.

As my understanding of the way to cultivate the Dhamma slowly improved, I became more aware of how unskilful speech patterns begin as thoughts, and harm one's own mind as well as that of those people who hear the words when they are spoken. As I became more mindful of the quality of my mental intentions, my actions and speech improved. I understood that expressing anger, jealousy and conceit through speech and actions only results in regret and mental agitation. I did not have much reason to lie in my life anyway, and I disliked malicious and divisive speech, but I could swear and say plenty of negative, meaningless or arrogant things. I did not like to argue. Generally if someone did not agree with me or dislike me for some reason, I usually ignored them rather than engage in argument or any form of verbal conflict. I found the Buddha's encouragement to stay silent if you do not have anything kind or beneficial to say, a very helpful guideline. If I lost my self-control and spoke rudely or unkindly to someone, it always came up afterwards in my meditation as a feeling of regret or self-criticism. This made me more mindful and aware of the consequences of any harmful speech.

Change In Lifestyle

As my lifestyle and habits slowly changed through the practice of Dhamma, I attended fewer parties, went out with friends who were drinking, less and less. I stopped attending football matches, played less music and so on. Naturally I drifted away from some of my friends, but the benefits I found from my practice of Dhamma made up for that. I found little need to use harsh or abusive speech in my life and through meditation I became more self-controlled. Some of my friends noticed the changes in my behaviour and liked it; others thought I had become boring or anti-social. I had enough peace in my mind and happiness from reading the words of the Buddha; and learning how to put them into practice that I did not mind the negative opinions about Buddhism, from my parents, teachers or friends. I had little aversion for others and felt it was a pity that they simply did not understand how beneficial the teachings of the Buddha are for people.

Growing up, I never felt comfortable asking my parents for money. This was partly because I realised how hard they worked, and how much they sacrificed for their children. I also did not want to follow my own desires and let them be a cause for me to bother other people. My parents gave me money for many things, provided me with everything I needed and were always ready to give their children more if we asked, but I did not want to take advantage of their love.

We spent most of our holiday time together as a family because my parents were teachers and we often stayed in a cottage in North Wales. My parents were quite adventurous. Every year, they took us on holidays to other parts of the UK and overseas which gave me the chance to see and learn a little about the rest of the world first hand. From the age of fourteen, I began

taking casual jobs to pay for anything I needed rather than ask my parents to pay. I began buying clothes in charity shops and garage sales; and considered that cheap clothes would cover my back as well as any new clothes and there were plenty of bargains around. I played music in a band and casual work funded my purchases of guitars and amplifiers. When I travelled overseas with friends, I was determined to pay my own way as well.

Meditation On The Job

One of the first things I learnt from meditation was the importance of keeping my mind in the present moment. I found this helped me in some of the repetitive casual jobs I took on to raise money. I had one summer job, in a Swiss clock factory, drilling holes into pieces of metal for eight hours a day, to make parts for barometers and clocks. I observed how my mind craved distraction from the repetitiveness of the task, but I also realised that I could train myself to practise mindfulness with the movements of the body and focus on completing the task before me. My first reaction to the work was boredom and that was followed by aversion, but I worked out that the more I complained to myself or wanted the day's work to end, the more I suffered. I noticed how any strong desire made my mind seek escape from the present moment into fantasy and imagination. The more mindful I was and the more I paid attention to the job, and kept my mind focused on the present moment, the less agitated I felt and time passed quicker.

Another year I had a job washing pots and dishes in the large underground kitchens of the London Council. By then I was a bit older and more experienced in looking after my mind, and that also helped me deal with the challenges of interacting with the large variety of people who worked in the kitchens. Some people seemed like saints and others were bullies who tried to

take advantage of me. I practised mindfulness of my speech to minimise conflicts with other workers, and tried to let go of my angry reactions in certain situations where I was treated unfairly. Internally, I trained myself to watch my wandering mind through the monotony of the manual work. I realised that when we want something in return, such as money, we are willing to put up with poor work conditions and our own mental discontent. I realised how much of our life is governed by greed of one sort or another.

When I meditated more earnestly as part of my daily routine in lay life, I noticed small changes in my attitudes. I slowly gained increased clarity and a different view of sensual desire and my normal attachment to sensual pleasures. Whenever I experienced rapture and joy in meditation or from listening to Dhamma, I compared the feeling of happiness with the more mundane experience of joy and happiness that I gained from sensually stimulating activity such as playing and listening to music, playing sport, socialising or from sexual activity. I slowly realised that the more normal type of happiness I experienced through the senses was entirely dependent on the physical body and its sense contact with external objects and that inevitably, such sense pleasure is temporary and completely unreliable.

Music was one of my passions, but I noticed how I was always searching for new musical experiences which led me to purchase or borrow more and more music tapes and records and for more and more opportunities to play music with friends. I noticed how I was never content with the things I already had and always wanted something new or different. This applied to music, clothes or whatever. Sport and sexual desire were equally obsessive. One thing I observed about meditation and Dhamma practice, in general, was that it was largely free of the

need for any external object and required you to turn attention inwards and cultivate skilful states of mind. When the mind was in a wholesome state and mindful, I could watch sensual desire arising but did not have to follow it or indulge it. Cultivating Dhamma eventually led to a feeling of contentment and the understanding that the happiness experienced was independent of external objects. I found it required more effort to experience joy and rapture from meditation, but when I did, it was deeper, lasted longer and was more satisfying. I constantly reminded myself that the happy mind that naturally supported further examination of the true nature of experience was not an end in itself.

Some friends told me that my practice of Buddhism made me a boring person. They thought I was turning away from them and society because I had an overly negative view of the world. The reality for me was the opposite, but I did not argue or become annoyed with other people because I knew why they saw things the way they did. I could still experience pleasure from music, sport or companionship with others, but I needed it less and was less addicted to sensual pleasure. I had found a new and ultimately better source of pleasure in the Dhamma itself. Over time, I also made new friends in the Dhamma. I could still enjoy many pleasures available to me, but I felt more free from any strong clinging to them. I even found that I could be happy for other people who experienced pleasure, without always having to experience it myself.

As I meditated more, I considered the things that brought me pleasure and happiness and realised that they came at a price. The mind becomes obsessed with the objects of sense pleasure and easily forgets many other important aspects of life. I could still enjoy playing music, or competing in sport, but the happiness

from it could not compare to that which came from meditation. It did not improve my intelligence or understanding of Truth. Curiously, as I let go of the strongest clinging and craving to sensual happiness, I began to experience joy in new situations. I could be happy for both sides competing in sport and be happy for the winner, whoever they were. I remember experiencing enjoyment when sports teams from other countries won unexpectedly in a competition, even though I had no previous connection with those people or countries. I experienced happiness for others who had success in the things they did even if there was no immediate benefit to me. Meditation made me much more sensitive to other people's happiness and suffering.

From High School Into The World

When I left school, I worked in a record shop in Soho, in the centre of London, to earn money to travel overseas. Even though I was already considering myself a Buddhist, I planned to visit Africa as I thought the experience might help me get some different perspectives on my own life and understand my cultural conditioning better. I worked in the shop for six months and also played live music with my friends during that time. Working in the centre of London exposed me to the two extremes present in society. Each day I encountered homeless and vulnerable people sleeping in the doorways of the shop and surrounding streets, while at the same time I served people with money in the shop. There were occasions when I served millionaires or celebrities. I gradually became familiar with some of the local homeless people, drug addicts, criminals, prostitutes, police officers and also the regular customers from all backgrounds.

My experience made me appreciate the good fortune I had in my life. I also observed how fragile some people's status and well-being can be; and how quickly their lives can change and go downhill so easily when they made poor choices. One of my customers from the Middle East was fantastically wealthy and every few weeks, he came to the shop and asked me to choose all the latest hit records for him to take back home to his kids and he rewarded me with a good tip afterwards. Other people stole records from the shop or tried to pass off stolen credit cards and then ran off when I checked on the validity of the card. Each time that happened, the bank sent me a reward of fifty pounds, which went into my travel fund.

I gave money to some of the regular homeless guys on the street outside the shop, but as time went on, I changed the gifts from money to hot food and drinks when I could not stop them using the money to buy drink or drugs. They scolded me for that, but I learnt to endure their insults because I knew I was giving them something more useful. Sometimes in the winter, the homeless guys dropped dead on the street and people just walked by the corpse rather than give up their time to go and get help. As I read the Buddha's words for the first time and contemplated the teaching that *kamma* as intentional action, I observed that people all around me made good and bad *kamma* and received the fruits of their actions each day, in the centre of the city.

As I prepared to leave the UK and travel through Europe, the Middle East and Africa, I felt more and more certain that I wanted to pursue a spiritual life as I felt increasingly tired of the materialism and selfishness that people got trapped into everywhere I looked. I already had a clear picture of what I did not want from my life and what I thought would not bring me or anyone happiness, but I had not yet found the living teacher or the way forward in my pursuit of inner happiness.





I do not envision
any one other quality by which
un arisen skilful qualities arise,
and arisen skilful qualities
go to growth and proliferation,
like right view.
When a person has right view,
un arisen skilful qualities,
and arisen skilful qualities
go to growth and proliferation.

Aṅguttara Nikāya 1.307 (2)

3

Reaching A Decision In Africa

At A Crossroads

After I finished high school, I applied to study history at the university, but had little enthusiasm to go there. I felt like I was treading water and waiting for something to happen, so I paused my studies and travelled for a while as I looked for somewhere to pursue the spiritual life. The number of people following the Buddhist path was a tiny minority of people in society as the religion was still on the fringes of society. In central London, it was easy to find Hare Krishna practitioners, but the Buddhist teachers were not so obvious. Most of my friends were not very spiritual and tended towards politics or social action if they had ambitions to do something for the greater good. I joined them on marches campaigning against racism or nuclear weapons. But, these were nothing compared with the wisdom of the Buddha and the teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path as a way of life. As I worked and played music with friends, I gathered my thoughts together. And when the time came I did not find it hard to leave my family and friends behind, to go travelling. I could only see the pursuit of a spiritual path as offering any glimmer of light or positivity for the future, but I did not know exactly how or where I would accomplish it.



Meeting A *Devadūta* On A Bus

By April 1980, I had enough funds to travel and I set off with a friend travelling southwards through Europe, to the Middle East and Africa. I thought moving out of my comfort zone and exposing myself to different people and cultures might help me understand myself better. We got a cheap bus so that we could move through northern Europe quickly and surprisingly, the time on the bus gave me a really good insight into how to cultivate daily meditation in a disciplined way.

There was one passenger on the bus who meditated several times a day. Each time the bus stopped his friends would go off to buy food or walk around, but the man looked for a quiet spot at the foot of a tree or on some grass and meditated for as long as he could until the bus was ready to move. The meditator's discipline was impeccable. He did not appear to move for the duration of his time meditating; and I observed that he always had a serene look on his face while he sat. When his friends returned, they gave him food and drink. He chatted with them pleasantly, but appeared to be intent on training himself in meditation and mindfulness. I observed that no one made him meditate, he clearly wanted to do it for himself; and he had a pleasant and composed presence. Up until then, my own meditation practice was unreliable and I had never observed anyone else so disciplined in their practice. The fellow traveller provided me with a good example to emulate.

Life Is Uncertain

Travelling into Africa felt like entering a whole new world and it triggered a heightened awareness of the uncertainties of life. The poverty and lack of economic development was always apparent, but so was the resilience, kindness and generosity of many people we met. In every country we travelled through, we met kind and friendly people who mostly had little material

wealth, but at the same time displayed great generosity of heart. I remember the saying that when a child is born in Africa, it is brought up by the whole village. I observed the way people helped and cared for each other over and over again. I encountered many of the basic spiritual qualities I was learning from Buddhism in the societies we travelled through. Even though none of the people we met were Buddhist, I observed the universal nature of the truths about suffering and its origins that the Buddha pointed to. In times of hardship people really rely on the qualities of patience, endurance and sacrifice, and often that is nurtured by their religious faith. In London, I also met many kind and generous people too, but I could see the danger in blind attachment to material wealth; and how the pursuit of spiritual happiness is often relegated to second place in people's lives.

The other more ugly side of humanity was also apparent in our travels when we encountered civil war or talked to refugees fleeing from different forms of tyranny and aggression. Because of our short 'Buddhist' haircuts, some people were suspicious of us and thought we might actually be mercenaries or even spies. Some people responded to poverty and weak government by displaying great courage and resilience, but others let their fears guide them and became more selfish and competitive.

In many situations, I was shown kindness and helped by people who did not have any reason or obligation to help me. Many people I met were less educated and had less money and less knowledge of the world than me. Sometimes, they were under different kinds of pressure, but they also displayed much more practical wisdom and knowledge of how to deal with the challenges of life. That was a lesson that really stuck in my mind. I observed that there is such a thing as real goodness and wisdom in life, independent of material wealth and privilege

and can even exist in people's hearts even in the most dire circumstances. I was learning that one's experience of happiness and suffering really begins with where your heart is at. People offered us rides, shared their food and accommodation, gave us useful information and shared entertaining stories, without asking for anything in return. It was easy to feel gratitude and appreciation.

No Money. Just Like A Monk

In Cairo, I had my money and passport stolen by a street gang. Although the experience was unpleasant, it was simultaneously liberating as I had no choice but to let go of everything - including my plans. Once my money and documents were gone, I immediately thought about the life of a monk, as for a while I had no certainty where the next meal would come from. I suddenly understood the Buddhas' teachings of the uncertainties of life as seen in the unpredictable worldly winds of gain and loss that blow us around. One moment I was enjoying travelling through a new and interesting country, the next I was penniless and being thrown out of my accommodation with nowhere to go.

I relied on the Buddha's words over and over again to give me some wisdom and strength. When you have nothing left, you appreciate the truth of the Buddha's words even more. I recollected the *Maṅgala Sutta* that it is a blessing to associate with wise people and to avoid foolish people and so I started looking for the good in people around me. I walked along the streets of Cairo and eventually found a kind hotel owner who believed my story and let me stay for free until I had some money sent over from home. The British consul looked like he did not believe anything I told him but he still agreed to issue me a new passport after waiting for two months of background checks and police reports.

My extended stay in Egypt waiting for a new passport and funds meant that I travelled around the country to more places than I had originally intended, and that I made new friends with locals and fellow travellers who I might not have met. Staying longer than you intended in a place makes you learn certain things about yourself and the people you are with. I learnt that everything is uncertain. When I started reading Luang Por Chah's teachings later, I felt like I was in familiar territory. I also proved to myself that when you look for the good in people then sooner or later you can find it; and even if you encounter the bad along the way, you can learn to be patient, or avoid it and protect yourself.

In other African countries, I met kind strangers who educated me about their culture and society. They warned me of dangers, gave me free accommodation and even taught me how to cook. Christians showed me kindness, Muslims fed me and Hindus shared their perspective on Buddhism with me. People from various tribes with their different beliefs shared all kinds of useful information with me during my travels. When I hitchhiked into Uganda, where there was a civil war, people warned me which places to avoid and gave advice on the best ways to stay safe. The only time in my life that I spent a night in a prison cell was not because I was arrested, but because the local police in one part of Uganda, were so worried for my safety that they gave me a free jail cell for the night to keep me under cover from the crossfire generated by their battle with insurgents. On the way to the capital Kampala, I wanted to hitch a ride with a truck delivering petrol, but the driver told me in honesty that although he wanted to give me a lift, it was too dangerous and he pointed out where I could find a cheap local bus. The next day as I drove along the rural road, I saw the petrol tanker burnt out by the side of the road, but I was unable to find out what happened to the cautious driver.

Friends I made along the way told me that the people of Uganda were good people. The land was fertile and the scenery beautiful. I wanted to see if it was true; and everything I had been told proved correct. Even though there was animosity between ethnic groups, I only encountered friendliness, generosity and much joy displayed by people who were going through extremely difficult times. By the time I reached the capital Kampala, I was thinking of what I could do to offer help to the country in some way. I thought that I could teach English or volunteer for an NGO and help with a development project. However, as I was considering these options, my practice of meditation and study of the Buddhist teachings made me realise that whatever help I might offer would be influenced by my own ignorance and mental defilements, and not necessarily be coming from a place of wisdom and understanding.

One of the few foreigners I met in Kampala asked me if I wanted to help the local people and I readily agreed. He offered me work that he said was well paid. It sounded interesting but when I found out that the work involved importing guns to sell to both sides in the civil war, the proposition rang alarm bells and seemed to prove the point that I needed to find my own wisdom before I could be of genuine help to others. The whole experience was rather disappointing as the man had described himself as someone helping the country, but it reinforced the need to consider carefully before trying to help others. I could see the potential for an inexperienced person or immoral person to do more harm than good. I was not convinced that I was wise enough to help myself, let alone other people in a skilful way and so my thoughts returned to the spiritual life and becoming a monk. The longer I travelled, the clearer it appeared to me that to truly help others, I must first understand and improve my own mind, and gain some wisdom. One must learn how to benefit oneself before one can truly benefit others.



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For such a long time
I've been cheated, tricked,
and deceived by this mind.
For what I have been grasping
is only form, feeling, perception,
(mental) formations and consciousness.

Majjhima Nikāya 75

4

University - A Blessing In Disguise

Meditation Brings Happiness And Understanding

Once I had decided to commit myself to a spiritual path, I returned to London quickly. I was clear in my understanding that to be of true benefit to others, I needed to develop my own inner qualities. I discussed my aspirations with my sister, Naomi, who agreed with my thinking that to truly help others one has to improve oneself. I had returned from Africa, more aware that human life is bound up with suffering. I also had a greater appreciation of how fortunate I had been in my life and in particular, the potential that training in Buddhist meditation offered me. I continued with my plan to attend university and to continue looking for a spiritual teacher who could guide me in the Buddhist path. Having travelled to Africa, I was now open to the possibility of travelling to Asia in search of a teacher; and felt that I would find a teacher there who would inspire enough faith and confidence in me to commit to the monk's life. I had encountered some meditation teachers in my travels through Europe and even in Africa, but none of them seemed right. I was still treading water before swimming for the far shore of *Nibbāna*.

I had little enthusiasm left for academic study but was happily surprised on the first day at university, when I found out there was a Buddhist meditation group that met regularly in the university. I joined immediately and to my surprise, the sessions were well attended. Buddhism was still very much a fringe teaching, but the twice weekly meditation meetings were attended by up to forty people. Later when friends asked me what I enjoyed most about my time at university, I replied that it was the time I spent reading Buddhist books and meditating. My true goal throughout my time at university was not to obtain a degree in history, but to progress in my meditation practice and learn more about the teachings of the Buddha. My ambitions were modest and my initial goal was to be able to sit still and meditate for a whole hour watching my breath and examining the impermanent nature of thoughts and sensations. I found more enjoyment sitting with painful legs and a distracted mind than I did studying and discussing my course work with tutors. I did not quit my studies. I continued learning and relied on my patience. I saw the degree course as a way to train myself in mindfulness and investigation in a similar way to when I had worked at casual jobs or drilled holes in pieces of metal earlier in my life. I saw my future as a renunciant, not in studying or pursuing a career out in the world, so I did not mind putting up temporarily with studying for a degree in history.

I found participation in the meditation group rewarding as I was taught the basic method of *ānāpānasati* or mindfulness of breathing. I experienced so much pain in my legs, each time I meditated, that I found it helpful and inspiring to sit together with other meditators. The teacher was only slightly more experienced than the rest of us, but I found his advice good enough. I was grateful for his leadership and experience. I made use of the teacher's knowledge, and I continued meditating and learning from the Buddhist texts in my own time. I persisted to

adapt my lifestyle to support my meditation practice. I slept on the floor on a reed mat that I brought back from Uganda and got up each dawn to meditate. In the winter when dawn was later, I got up before the dawn. Getting up early in the morning was a good cure for the worst of my laziness and I found the mornings quiet and peaceful to meditate when no one was around. I indulged in less late nights because I enjoyed getting up early for meditation and I changed my eating habits from three meals a day to two.

I really struggled with sitting meditation. I experienced so much pain in my knees, legs and back that I rarely experienced any deep states of peace. I was determined to keep training and improving my posture so I took up yoga and other exercises to stretch my limbs and improve my ability to sit for longer periods. I always sat cross-legged when doing my assignments and college work so that my legs would get used to the posture. I kept the thought in mind that one day, I would be a monk and my university studies were mental preparation for the future. I saw the value in learning how to learn, even if the historical subject matter was a constant reminder of the adverse consequences of human behaviour when under the influence of the mental defilements. Even though I experienced endless pain in my limbs, I enjoyed meditation because by improving my mindfulness, I learnt so much about myself. The self-knowledge seemed more meaningful and beneficial to me than the academic knowledge I gained from my university studies. I found it funny that a friend of mine was able to sit comfortably in full lotus posture to do her studies and she could even walk up and down a staircase happily while sitting in the full lotus posture while I was struggling to sit cross legged for more than a few minutes. She had no interest in the Buddhist teachings or meditation and I used to think that life is unfair because I wanted to meditate but my legs hurt so much. It taught me to see clearly

that meditation is primarily about cultivating mindfulness and insight and to understand that if the experience is painful, I would just have to be patient with that.

As I read the words of the Buddha and meditated daily, I kept experiencing feelings of disenchantment with the world. Each evening after we finished studies, my friends wanted to go out and enjoy themselves drinking, taking drugs, dancing and partying, but I had less and less enthusiasm for that. Sometimes I went along with my friends, but I often felt my body was with my friends while my mind was not. I kept thinking that so much of human behaviour is meaningless and without real benefit to anyone. I could not really enjoy those social activities and later realised this was the beginning of the experience of *Nibbidā*. The mind becomes weary seeing the impermanent nature of existence and tired of sensual indulgence. Insight into the true nature of phenomena, however brief, leads you to turn away from obsession with the things of the world and seek the happiness of a liberated mind.

On a few occasions, when I was with a group of friends in a bar or at someone's house, my mind became really calm; and I experienced a strong feeling that everyone was completely unaware that they were rushing towards their death, and they had no way of stopping it. I had a strong sense of my own heedlessness and a feeling that if I did not pursue the spiritual path of Dhamma, my time and opportunity would eventually run out. I consciously practised sense restraint and frugality, learning to live on one pound a day to save money. I was saving to travel to Asia, as soon as I had decided on where to go. I cooked for myself, wore secondhand clothes and other items and walked or cycled everywhere. I had enough money from casual work to keep myself going so I never asked my parents for extra money.

Of course, I still experienced plenty of craving and attachment in my life, but I felt less and less interested in having a relationship, acquiring money, buying things and seeking out endless sense pleasures or following ambition for success in the world. Some of my friends thought I might be gay because I kept avoiding committing to any relationships with girls, but it was not because I liked men. I did not want to have intimate sexual relationships with girls because I knew it would make it more difficult for me to become a monk. I did not want to get close to someone and then hurt them by breaking up later. Many years later, one of my friends told me that at sixteen, I had warned him that once he had experienced the pleasure of sexual intercourse, he would be hooked for life, so he better be ready for that. He said that at that age no one else in our circle of friends talked like that and because it was such an unusual thing to hear, he never forgot it.

I found most of my happiness and contentment came from putting effort into meditation and being mindful of my speech and conduct. Even though my mind was not always peaceful, I was content to be making the effort to train in the Buddhist path. Whatever effort I made, however small, made me happy. I did voluntary work on an urban farm in the city centre which gave deprived kids the chance to find out how to raise animals and grow vegetables and flowers. I increasingly found doing things for other people more enjoyable than looking for ways to enjoy myself. I got kicked as I milked the goats, and sometimes had to chase the pigs or donkeys down the high street when they escaped from the farm, into the busy city traffic. I was a happy volunteer. I intentionally looked for ways to be kind to friends and acquaintances, doing favours and giving gifts to people when I could. Meanwhile I completed my course work for the university diligently, but to be honest I did not put my heart into it.

My continuous interest in meditation brought me to listen to a visiting meditation teacher at the university who had previously been a monk in Thailand. Only a small group of people turned up to listen to his talk; and I was the only one who showed any serious interest in meditation. Because of this, I had the chance to ask him as many questions as I wanted. At the end of our discussion, he encouraged me to go to Thailand and find a good meditation teacher. He had previously been a monk with Luang Por Buddhadasa, for a short period of time. I thought that I would head to Thailand as soon as there was an opportunity. I knew I needed to find a teacher and so I kept Luang Por Buddhadasa's name at the back of my mind.





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Should one find a man
who points faults and who reproves,
let him follow such a wise and sagacious person
as one would a guide to hidden treasure.

It is always better,
and never worse,
to cultivate such an association.

Dhammapada 76

5

Finding The Teacher

Early Roots in Thailand

I travelled to Thailand in the summer break between my second and third year of university. I landed in Bangkok and booked into a cheap hotel in Patpong, one of the red-light districts of Bangkok. I did not even realise what kind of area I was staying in as I was only interested in finding a place to meditate. I started my search for a meditation teacher in completely the wrong end of town and found myself surrounded by frivolity and sensual indulgence. I saw the funny side of my situation immediately, but fortunately as I was walking along the street outside the hotel on the very first day, I saw a small sign stuck to a lamppost that advertised meditation classes in English. They were held at Wat Boworniwet, one of the largest and oldest royal temples in Bangkok. I went straight to the Wat that day and joined the daily meditation classes with Venerable Brian who was a resident Australian monk. I subsequently visited the monastery for meditation classes every afternoon and had my faith boosted by a brief encounter with Somdet Nyanasamvara who was the Abbot of the monastery, and later became the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand. He kindly stopped to speak to me as I walked to the meditation hall and inspired me when he smiled. He spoke a few words of English in praise of cultivating meditation.

In the meditation classes, I was taught the methods of sitting and walking meditation. I had never previously received proper instruction on how to practise walking meditation and quickly realised how helpful an addition it was to my cultivation of mindfulness. Venerable Brian taught me to recite the meditation word '*Buddho*' in the way of the Thai Forest Masters. The very first time I tried the technique I went straight into a state of stillness that brought me a great feeling of happiness and lightness to both mind and body. He asked me to walk mindfully for 45 minutes, but I was so absorbed in my recitation of '*Buddho*' that I lost all sense of time and after an hour of non-stop walking meditation he had to tap me on the shoulder and remind me to stop. I had so much joy and rapture arising at that time that my body felt completely at ease and seemed to be floating rather than walking. All the feelings of tiredness and discomfort from the heat disappeared and I felt like I could continue walking meditation indefinitely.

Every day, I experienced such deep feelings of peace and rapture, after the combined sessions of sitting and walking meditation, that I did not want to get on a bus back to the hotel. I preferred to walk through the crowded streets of Bangkok silently reciting '*Buddho*' to myself. Even though I walked along the sidewalk, which was full of food stalls and people, and surrounded by traffic, noise and pollution, my mindfulness had improved so much that I had little interest in the sights and sounds and other sense impressions. I laughed when I considered that my first experience of maintaining a state of *samādhī* from walking meditation took place on the busy streets of Bangkok.

I was propositioned by young women every night while I remained at the hotel and sometimes, they even broke into my room and tried to jump into bed with me. When I told them

that I was not interested in having a girlfriend because I was going to become a monk, they looked horrified and quickly disappeared. Unconventionally, I used my time in the hotel in Patpong to meditate; and I actually experienced some deep states of *samādhī*. The continuity of mindfulness that arose from walking meditation lasted a long time; and carried over into my sitting meditation just as the Buddha had described when he explained the benefits of walking meditation. When I sat meditating on the floor of my hotel, I found I could sit for longer periods without moving than I had ever done when back in England, as my mind let go of its habitual concern with feelings of pain. I had nothing bothering me. On some occasions my mind was so concentrated that all sensations in my body disappeared; and I simply experienced the peaceful, still and radiant mind. These experiences gave me confidence to seek out a teacher for further training.

While I was participating in the meditation sessions at Wat Bowornivet, I met another English man who had returned from staying with Luang Por Chah. It was another stroke of good fortune because he told me how to get to Wat Pah Nanachat and he encouraged me to begin my training to become a monk there because many of the monks spoke English and they could help me to meet Luang Por Chah. After a couple of weeks practising meditation at Wat Bowornivet, I headed by bus to Ubon and was happy to leave behind the hotel room in Patpong.

Finding My Way In The Dark

I travelled to Ubon on a cheap bus, but not knowing the Thai language I was not sure where to go from the bus station. Two local policemen talked to me in broken English as I walked across the bridge over the Mun River and they patiently worked out where I needed to go. Surprisingly, one of them kindly

offered me a lift on his motorcycle. It was quite a detour for him to take me all the way to Wat Pah Nanachat and I felt blessed by his kindness. Having thanked the angelic policeman, I left him at the front gate of the monastery, just at dusk when the last light of the day was rapidly disappearing. I walked around the closed gate, as there was no wall in those days, and slowly moved in, to the darkness of the forest. I had one small torch and the batteries promptly ran out. I then stumbled around in the dark, tripping over tree roots, bumping into tree trunks and quickly became completely lost.

In those days, there was no electricity in the monastery and therefore no lights anywhere. Eventually, I saw a dim light about one hundred metres away through the forest and so I headed in a straight line towards it and endured further bumps, ant bites and other difficulties to reach the source of the light. Finally, I came to a little wooden *kuti* (hut) and after calling out, and waiting for some time, a tiny Thai novice monk called Samanera Phut came down the steps holding a kerosene lantern and beckoned with his finger for me to follow him. He could not have been older than 14 years old. He was totally silent but clearly had a kind heart, because after he saw me stumbling around in the dark, he led me to the Abbot's *kuti* via a proper path. I think he realised that I probably would never get there by myself.

Ajahn Pasanno, the Abbot, came down the stairs to greet me and I offered him some flowers and other gifts. He kindly chatted to me by the light of a candle; and gave me permission to stay in the monastery, while explaining the details of the daily schedule and what I was expected to do while in the monastery. Next, he took me over to the laymen's accommodation which consisted of a simple mat and a pillow placed on the floor of the verandah above the kitchen. I was impressed with his kindness because

I knew he was the senior monk of the monastery, with many duties and responsibilities, and yet I saw him humbly preparing my bedding for me. Afterwards, I reflected on my first evening in the monastery and on Ajahn Pasanno's calm and composed demeanor as well as his kindness and friendliness; and decided that Luang Por Chah had trained his monks well. It was one of the best advertisements for the monastic life you could ask for.

Three Doubts

Having not lived in a monastery before, I had three main doubts about my own readiness to live the monk's life. I was not sure how well I would cope with keeping the eight precepts and living on one meal a day. I was not too worried about the kind of food that might be available, but I did not know how my body would be with this change of eating habits. My second doubt was whether I could manage to get up at 3:00am every morning. The third doubt concerned how well I would cope with the weekly all-night meditation vigils that were compulsory for all the residents. I was concerned about meditating through the night because I still experienced extreme pain in my legs when sitting, even for a short time.

Those three doubts were quickly put to rest after spending just three days in the monastery. I had already adjusted my lifestyle to arise early for meditation when I was at university, and I assumed I could make a further adjustment to arise at 3.00am. There were seven monks living in the monastery and I asked them how they coped with the early rising and the most common answer was that you just get used to it. I thought I would probably get used to eating one meal a day in the same way; and on the morning of the second day in the monastery I realised that I was neither too hungry or weak. I had gone without food for a day at a time when travelling in Africa and I

sensed that I would be okay to eat one meal a day on a regular basis. Others could do it so why not me? After the meal, you did not see or smell food again in the monastery, until the next day and no one talked about it. It was actually much easier to let go of concerns about food than I had anticipated.

By the end of the second day, I saw that I had made it out to the morning meetings on time and had survived on one meal a day and so my confidence grew. Seeing the other monks meditating and following the lifestyle I was encouraged to follow their example. Ajahn Pasanno was both an inspiring teacher who could explain the Buddhist teachings and the details of the monastic discipline very well. His personal conduct made him a good example to follow. I still had doubts about my ability to stay up all night meditating without sleep, but I was buoyed by the good experience I had with walking meditation and assumed that if I could not sit in meditation for the whole night then I could always walk.

The third day in the monastery coincided with the weekly lunar Observance Day. Throughout the day, the monastery gradually filled with lay practitioners who came to make offerings, keep the eight precepts, listen to teachings and meditate. Some came at the mealtime and stayed on for the rest of the day; others arrived during the afternoon and by the evening, a crowd of some sixty people had gathered at the hall. Most of the meditators were dressed in white and middle aged or even elderly.

At 7:00pm, we began an evening programme with sitting meditation, followed by chanting that was translated from Pali into Thai and took about 50 minutes to complete. For the first 40 minutes of the chanting, we were supposed to sit up on our toes in the traditional Thai posture of respect. To fulfil this requirement was excruciatingly painful for myself and many of

the westerners whose toes and muscles were not used to it. The monks sat on the raised seat at the side of the hall. Lay trainees like myself, sat at the back of the hall without any cushion. After the chanting, there was a Dhamma talk in Thai, which I did not understand, but I appreciated the respect everybody showed for the teachings; and the peaceful sound of the words. Afterwards we received an extra cup of sweet cocoa or coffee at about 9:30pm which seemed to be the most exciting moment of the night.

For the rest of the night, we were instructed to meditate in or around the hall and not go back to our *kutis* to sleep. This meant we would be meditating more or less continuously until the beginning of the morning chanting at 4:00am. By 9:30pm I was already experiencing extreme pain in my legs and could no longer sit on the thin grass mat which covered the concrete floor. There were no cushions or the foam meditation mats that we use these days available. The only option left open to me was to do walking meditation, which fortunately, I found brought me much peace, clarity and good energy. At 10:00pm I started walking because my legs were experiencing such excruciating pain in the sitting posture. I knew I had to stay up all night, so I spent the rest of the night slowly doing walking meditation, to and fro at the back of the hall. That was for almost 6 hours non-stop. I went for a toilet break at 3:45am and then prepared for the morning chanting session.

To walk for so long required continuous effort, but to my surprise I completed the session and gained confidence that if sitting meditation continued to be painfully unbearable, I could always do walking meditation. One thing that helped sustain me throughout the night was witnessing the local villagers who stuck with their meditation the whole night through. Some

got up for walking meditation like myself, but many sat still for hours at a time. I found out later that some of them had even come straight from work without a rest, just to participate in the chanting and meditation session through the night with the monks. The oldest members of the community were over sixty years of age, and some of them could sit up all night with only the briefest of breaks. When you see others put effort into their meditation practice it helps you to keep going through your own challenges. I realised that I was not the only one experiencing painful legs, a restless mind and recurring sleepiness.

Dedicating the whole night to cultivating the Dhamma made me realise the importance of the quality of strong faith in the Triple Gem, for the practice. It seemed even more valuable than simply having a strong, fit and healthy body. I felt that if the other monks and villagers could do it, then I would have to learn how to meditate all night long too. Whether it was the meditation or the chanting, the lay practitioners really put their heart into it. Their devotion to the Buddha, the monks and the practice was a great source of strength for them. In general, I found that the people of northeast Thailand are very respectful of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha; and I was impressed to see how they interacted with the monastic community. The faith of the people in that part of the world was second to none; and it was apparent how it energised their practice of Dhamma on every level. I had received a valuable lesson that I still keep in my mind today.

The experience of my first three days in the monastery helped me to decide that I probably had enough of the right qualities to stay on and train as a monk. I could not know for certain how long I might last in the robes, but I felt I could successfully follow the rules of discipline and cultivate the path of meditation as taught by Luang Por Chah. The very last doubt that stuck in

my mind on the morning after the all-night meditation, was whether I was strong enough to walk out of the monastery on alms round into the village after a night without sleep, and 24 hours without food. I had already followed the monks out on alms round on the previous mornings without any problems, apart from the pain I had to endure walking barefoot on the sharp gravel stones of the tracks around the village. The morning after the all-night meditation, I followed the monks around the village as they collected food; and returned to the monastery exhausted and experiencing a lot of pain in my feet; but I was still standing. As with so many aspects of the monastic training, I followed the example of the resident monks who never complained and displayed so much patient endurance with the challenges they faced.

When I arrived at the monastery gate after the alms round, I had an amazing experience when I realised that I had managed to complete every activity that had raised doubts in my mind. I felt that I really had no excuse not to try the monk's life now. I reflected that even though there were challenges, I was confident that I could physically and mentally cope with them. As I walked into the gate, of Wat Pah Nanachat that morning, I contemplated that I was ready to give up everything and train as a Buddhist monk. I was happy to dedicate my life to that goal. At the moment that I stepped through the threshold of the monastery gate, I experienced a deep feeling of joy and rapture that pervaded my entire body and mind. I had to pause for a moment. All the feelings of tiredness from the overnight meditation disappeared; and my mind was unusually bright and peaceful. I could not think of any reason to be concerned or anxious about my future. It seemed that to live as a monk for the rest of my life and practise Dhamma for the end of suffering was a real possibility.

The Joy Of Determining To Become A Monk

The rapturous state of mind lasted for several days. I had previously experienced rapture and joy arising strongly in meditation, but now it arose from the contemplation of spending my life as a renunciant; and reflecting on the benefits of the monastic life over the lay life. It made that day easily memorable as the day when I fully committed to training as a monk. I realised that I was capable of doing it; and then experienced the joy and the sense of release that came from making that decision.

I spent three months in the monastery as a white-robed *Anagārikā* until October 1983. I used my time to meditate, learn Buddhist chanting, study the texts and the monastic discipline and serve the community. I learnt how to bow, how to eat one meal a day mindfully and silently from a bowl, and how to live in the forest in a *kuti* without electricity or a toilet. During my first few days staying in a *kuti*, each time I walked through the door, I put my hand out to turn on the non-existent electric light switch. It was force of habit. I found that the life in the forest exposed many habitual ways of thinking and acting and some of them made me smile. I wanted to learn as much as I could about the monk's life so that the transition from lay life to living in a monastery would be easier.

In the rains retreat of 1983, the community at Wat Pah Nanachat was small and included only a few monks and novices and a couple of white-robed *Anagārikās*. One part of my training involved serving the Sangha. This included making the evening drink on the open fire in the kitchen, helping to offer food in the morning and accompanying the senior monk when he went outside the monastery for monastic business. I sometimes travelled with the senior monk and carried funds to pay for a local taxi or bus. Serving the monastic community

included many duties, but I realised that it brought me closer to the monks and helped me familiarise with many of the training rules and practices that were part of the monk's life. Serving Ajahn Pasanno and the monks also gave me the opportunity to visit other monasteries; and in particular to visit Luang Por Chah at Wat Nong Pah Pong.

Meeting The Real Luang Por Chah

To get to Wat Nong Pah Pong in those days, we walked through some villages and across the rice fields for about eight kilometres. When I visited Luang Por Chah I was unable to talk to him or the Thai monks. However, I could talk to Ajahn Pabakharo, the American monk who was in charge of the team of monks caring for Luang Por Chah. I sensed the peaceful energy emanating from Luang Por Chah and enjoyed meditating quietly when I was at his *kuti*. Everyone around him seemed to be alert, mindful and on their best behaviour. I regularly glimpsed how well the monks cared for their sick teacher and indeed any monk in the monastery who was sick. I observed how much close attention the monks gave to attending on Luang Por Chah and saw that it came from the qualities of reverence, respect and gratitude to the teacher. The monks practised mindfulness in their daily life, and this made them all the more skilled in the duties they undertook taking care of Luang Por Chah. In his presence, I recollected the BBC documentary I had seen a few years before. The peaceful atmosphere of the monastery and the devotion of the monks supported their mindful and restrained behaviour when they were around Luang Por Chah, at whatever time of day and night.

I made a determination to return to Ubon and become a monk as soon as I had finished my degree. Part of me wanted to stay on and not return to England, but I considered that it would be best for my peace of mind as a monk, if I first took leave

from my parents, family and friends; cleared up all my business; and gave away my possessions, before committing to the monastic training. Before I left the monastery in October, I told Ajahn Pasanno that I would return the following September to continue the training. He probably thought that I was just another meditator who imagined himself as a monk but would disappear from the monastery and never to be seen again.

Cultivating The Spiritual Perfections. Making Pizza.

During the final months of 1983 and the beginning of 1984, I visited Chithurst Buddhist Monastery in southern England whenever I could. I had not known about Luang Por Chah's new monastery before I went to Thailand, but once the monks at Wat Pah Nanachat gave me the address, it made me happy to know that I could go there and offer food, help out with the building work and meditate with the Sangha. I joined one of Luang Por Sumedho's meditation retreats and cooked food for the Sangha when I had the chance. I noticed the difference with Thailand and how few people took food to the monastery in those days. The monastery was only one and a half hours drive from my parents' house so occasionally, I borrowed my mother's car and leaving home at 5:00 am, reached the monastery in time for the morning work meeting. Sometimes I cooked pizza in the big oven for the twenty residents, using some of the skills I had gained working in commercial kitchens. I was happy to help in the kitchen and cook the meal for the community, and do the washing up afterwards. I also helped with building one of the first *kutis* in the forest. If I could not borrow a car, I went by train and then walked or hitched a ride to the monastery. Luang Por Sumedho always remembered me attending his teachings as the student called Daniel.

I had not realised there was a monastery in England before I went to Thailand, but the reason I did not train as a monk

there was because I had made a strong mental determination when I was at Wat Pah Nanachat; and when I was sitting with Luang Por Chah. I was committed to return to train with the Sangha under Luang Por Chah. It never seemed appropriate to change my plans. I was happy with the decision because I knew that living in Thailand would keep me far from many of the temptations of the lay life and be close to my teacher.

I realised my time left as a layman was short, so I became more disciplined in my meditation practice; and observing the five and occasionally eight precepts. I wanted to get rid of all my possessions before I left home, and leave no burdens for my family. This allowed me some fun giving things away which shocked my friends and family; and convinced them that I was serious about becoming a monk. I gave away my motorbike to a friend who found it hard to accept that I did not want any payment in return. I invited friends to take records and tapes from my huge record collection. Whatever I could not give to friends I gave to charity.

At university, my tutor asked me what I intended to do after I finished my degree and when I replied that I was going to train as a Buddhist monk in Thailand, his jaw dropped and he stood speechless as if I had told him I was terminally ill. When I shared my plans to the father of my close friend and housemate, he responded as if I was dead to the world already. Unfortunately, my other housemate had become addicted to heroin during our time at university and was suspended from the university even though he was a clever student. His life had gone downhill and out of compassion, I paid all his rent and bills for the last six months of my time in Bristol. When his parents found out and wanted to repay me, I told them that I was becoming a monk and had no use for the money. They also found it hard to understand my generosity.

Buddhism was considered such a minority religion in those days that most people could not fathom why I wanted to become a monk. My parents were disappointed but were hoping that I would ordain temporarily and change my mind at some point. Many friends were even critical of my decision and spoke to me as if I was throwing my life and education away. Some friends were simply shocked and others did not believe I would actually go through with it. I fully understood why no one supported me in my choice to return to Thailand, but was grateful that no one tried to stop me or make it difficult for me to travel. Actually, I was surprised how easy it was to separate from my friends, but I had been mentally preparing to become a monk for several years; and once I spent three months in the monastery and returned from Thailand, my mind was completely set on its goal. Although it was not easy to leave my family and friends behind, I felt that nothing could stop me.

At the beginning of September 1984, I volunteered to drive the monks from Chithurst Monastery to the newly acquired Amaravati Monastery on the day they officially moved into the new property. The English Sangha Trust had purchased the old school property that became Amaravati Monastery and as I had recently sold my electric guitar and amplifier for about one thousand pounds, I offered the money towards the purchase of the new monastery and made my last donation before becoming a monk. I stuffed the money into an envelope and put it into the donation box which was sitting on the floor of an empty room as it had only just been unloaded from a truck. I had given away all my possessions except a small amount of clothing and money to get me to Thailand. I paid respects to Luang Por Sumedho and the young Ajahn Sucitto; and a few days later I flew to Bangkok with my sister.





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Abandoning the dark way,
let the wise man cultivate the bright path.
Having gone from home to homelessness,
let him yearn for that delight in detachment,
so difficult to enjoy.
Giving up sensual pleasures,
with no attachment,
let the wise man
cleanse himself of defilements of the mind.

Dhammapada 87-88

6

Leaving Home For The Homeless Life

Saying Goodbye And Going Forth

My thoughts and feelings about my future were very different when I left for my second trip to Thailand, in September 1984, compared with my first trip there in 1983. My parents cried when I left home because they were not sure if they would ever see me again. Neither of them really understood what becoming a Buddhist monk meant, and what the lifestyle was like; but they did sense my strong commitment to the training, and that things would not be quite the same again. My sister bravely and kindly travelled to Thailand with me to give me some support and reassure the family about the place where I was going to live. I was calm and at ease with my decision to leave, but sad because I knew that I was leaving family and friends behind. Quite possibly I knew I would never return to England. There was a possibility I might never see anybody I knew ever again, and that I was unlikely to live in the places I was familiar with or participate in many of the activities I was used to. Fortunately, I had already spent three months in Wat Pah Nanachat, so I could visualise the life I was intending to lead in Thailand, and focused my mind on that, rather than on what I was leaving behind in England. In the days when air travel was expensive and limited, there were no phones or internet, I knew that it would be difficult to keep in close contact and everyone would have to get used to that.

I took my sister on a brief sightseeing tour in Thailand since she had travelled so far, and wherever we went people thought we were partners. When I told them we were brother and sister, and that she was sending me off to become a monk, the Thai people we met were really surprised but very happy for me. On her last day in the country, I took her to the old Bangkok International Airport at Don Muang and just before we separated at the departure gate, she became so overwhelmed by her emotions that her legs turned to jelly and she fell to the ground crying. I also felt emotional, but thought I should remain calm and strong, so I tried not to show it. Suddenly a huge crowd of people formed around us as they saw my sister sobbing uncontrollably. They wondered what was going on. Even the security guards came over to see what the commotion was as these two young foreigners clutched each other on the ground; as one of them cried her eyes out. We ended up surrounded by twenty or thirty people who seemed genuinely concerned for my sister as we hugged and said our farewells. After we separated, I headed off to the bus station to get an overnight bus to Ubon. Although I had been maintaining my calm up until that point, as soon as the bus pulled out of the depot, tears flowed down my cheeks and I continued to cry for several hours afterwards. I cried because I realised that it was the end of my lay life. One of the monks had previously told me that becoming a monk was like dying to the world and I understood what he meant. I knew in my heart that I was going to ordain as a monk for the rest of my life and was not sure that I would ever return to England again; or even see my family. It was like a part of me was dying inside.

Anagārikā Ordination

By the time the bus arrived in Ubon the next morning, I felt settled and completely happy to enter the monastery. I had let out all the emotions that arose from leaving home. Now I was free to continue cultivating the Dhamma and follow in the footsteps

of the Buddha. Ajahn Pasanno received me with a smile and said that he thought I would return. I had kept in touch with the monastery by sending letters with cash donations hidden in the envelopes and I had also been supporting a disadvantaged family I had met the year before. They had a son with only one leg. Ajahn Pasanno and the monks knew I had already trained as an *Anagārikā* the previous year and hearing that I had done all the groundwork for leaving the lay life, they quickly shaved my head, gave me the eight precepts and ordained me as a white-robed *Anagārikā*.

As an *Anagārikā*, I tried to make myself useful by assisting the community as I had done in the previous rains retreat of 1983. I put effort into learning the verses recited during the morning and evening chanting sessions and the meal blessings. My meditation practice became more settled now that I had no worries about the lay life and with no other business to distract me. I was thankful I had prepared myself for entry into the monastic life. I had decisively left the lay life and all my initial doubts about entering the monastery had been put to rest. Nevertheless, I faced many new challenges as I learned to live in the jungle, follow the training in Dhamma and Vinaya and adjust to monastic life full time. I was experiencing a little less pain in my legs by then as I had been meditating regularly for over four years, but as an *Anagārikā*, I had to sit on the floor for many hours a day without cushions or support. The pain level in my legs started to increase again each day, and I had no choice but to bear with it. The heat, humidity, hunger and mosquitoes taught me the value of patience from the first day in the jungle monastery; and tested me to see if I was really prepared to abandon *dosa* or ill-will. I quickly came to understand how much the mosquitoes were helping me to learn and cultivate the Dhamma on a daily basis and why Luang Por Chah called them “Ajahn Mosquito”.

Changing my lifestyle from living in urban England to the Thai jungle meant that I now faced daily encounters with biting ants, poisonous snakes, centipedes, scorpions, frogs, civet cats, water buffaloes, heat, and humidity, and in addition, meditators and travellers arriving from all over the world. I remember coming down from my *kuti* one morning being determined to walk to the meditation hall without losing my mindfulness and clear comprehension, only to be completely caught out when I almost tripped over an outstretched Russell's Viper laying on the path. I had not noticed the snake because I was so quickly lost in my thoughts. I avoided stepping on the snake's head with my bare foot, but only by a couple of centimetres. After recovering my composure, I scolded myself for being so unmindful. I determined to walk on towards the meditation hall with extra mindfulness and full awareness just like the monks in the time of the Buddha, only to completely miss a second Russell's Viper outstretched across the path in a similar position, about ten metres further along. I was disappointed to see how swiftly I had lost my mindfulness again after only a few steps and how I became lost in my daydreaming. I laughed at how easily my mind stopped paying attention even when the consequences were potentially lethal, and I thanked the pair of snakes who appeared to be there only to show me how poor my practice of mindfulness was as I walked on the path to the meditation hall. After that memorable morning, I decided that all the animals in the jungle were my friends and teachers, and was grateful to them for revealing to me how easily distracted I became when lost in my moods and imagination.

A big test of my patience and tolerance in the early days of monastic training arose when learning to live with other people in the community. I learnt to receive instructions and teachings from the monks and novices as well as learning to navigate the views, opinions, and moods of the other lay residents in the

monastery. I quickly came to realise that once living as an alms mendicant, others look at you as though you are public property. When they see that you belong to everyone, some think that you should be ready to listen to the opinions of everyone. Sometimes total strangers walked up to me and expressed their views and opinions about Buddhism or told me what I should be doing in my life in a way, that people do not normally talk to each other in other areas of society. Monastics are training themselves in restraint and cultivating mindful speech and action; and this includes cultivating patience and kindness towards other people, even when you disagree with them. One trains oneself to have enough awareness not to automatically argue or act on grudges; and replace old habits with the restraint of *sila* or virtuous conduct. Sometimes that is easy to achieve, sometimes not.

Every day, I spent some time working in the kitchen. Occasionally, I found that I was the sounding board for new visitors from overseas who sometimes blamed me personally for the kind of food that was offered in the monastery. They did not seem to acknowledge that it was all donated by kind and generous Buddhists; and criticised the food for being of low nutritional value or not organic enough or not suitable for their dietary requirements. Often the *Anagārikā* receives the negative comments people have about the monastery, the rules of training or the way the monastery is set up, even though the *Anagārikā* has the least influence on such decisions and events. I soon learnt that the kitchen is like the frontline of the monastery, in the battle, to manage mindfully and wisely, the influx of various views and opinions coming in from the rest of the world.

One day, a group of Christian missionaries caught me in the kitchen while I was making the evening drink for the community; and attempted to persuade me to leave the monastery with

them and return home to my Christian roots. They told me that I needed to go back to where they thought I ‘really’ belonged. I learnt to smile and listen and try not to get too involved with anyone who was not fully supportive of the monastic lifestyle and practice. I looked at the incident in a similar way to those times when I almost stepped on poisonous snakes and found that if I could keep my sense of humour and not take things too seriously, it was easier to let go and re-establish mindfulness and full awareness. The monastery kitchen was a melting pot for people’s ideas as well as their food. Even Buddhists could cling tightly to their ideals about the way the world, the monastery and their lives should be. The majority were very positive and supportive of our efforts to study and practise Dhamma, but a few were happy to inform me how they thought I should be practising differently and what I should believe in.

Apart from encountering the views and opinions of everyone else, I had to observe my own clinging to views and the sense of self; and appreciated how much Luang Por Chah’s teachings to monastics were focused on this. I was motivated to learn and train, but of course, my mind could still be caught up in its own petty grudges and complaints. I became used to a certain amount of quiet mumbling and grumbling in the back of my consciousness. I took this as normal and realised that I would not be able to cut off all my mental proliferation just like that. I quickly learnt why Luang Por Chah encouraged practitioners to rely on patient endurance as the best quality to burn off mental defilements.

I was given a rusty old iron bowl from the store and had to follow the monks out on daily almsround. My iron bowl had three holes in the bottom which had repeatedly been sealed with epoxy and other substances over the years, but it never

stayed sealed for long because I used the bowl to receive food and washed it every day, leading to a chemical reaction with the food which gradually dissolved the epoxy filling. Sometimes little packets of food items wrapped in banana leaves were offered on almsround and these leaked out juices which eventually worked its way out of the bottom of the bowl and dripped onto my less than pristine white robes. I considered that compared with the intense pain in my feet from walking on the gravel tracks, a few food stains on my white robes seemed like a small problem.

It was the end of the rainy season. The fields and monastery were flooded, the air was damp and humid. Almost from the first week in the monastery, I came down with strange fevers that could sap my energy for a few days at a time. They were debilitating and there seemed to be no real medicine available in the monastery other than rest, fasting and drinking plenty of water. Eventually, I caught dengue fever which did require medicine from the hospital and twice as much rest as what I called the ‘ordinary’ type of fever. The illness put me out on my back for about seven days. I could not eat and lay down on a straw mat on the wooden floor of my hut most of the day. On the first morning after I came down with fever, my fellow *Anagārikā* kindly brought me a bowl full of food from the kitchen. He was British with a sense of humour and when he placed the bowl on the floor next to me, I noticed three large, cooked cicadas on top of the food. I could not eat anything, let alone cicadas!

Crossing The Waters Of Suffering

Not long after I recovered from dengue fever, a request came for an *Anagārikā* to assist at Wat Keuan, the branch monastery on a peninsula at the Sirinthon Dam. This was a favourite place of practice with Luang Por Chah before he became too ill to visit. The senior monk needed an *Anagārikā* to help pilot the boat

that the monks depended on as a lifeline, to receive their daily food from the villages, on the shore of the reservoir and to offer any food or drinks to the three resident monks in the monastery. There was so little material support for the monastery that a resident *Anagārikā* would be really helpful to the community. I was asked to go and it seemed like a good chance for me to live in a large secluded forest and learn the Thai language. I had no experience with boat engines or canoes but assumed that if I practised mindfulness and was willing to learn then I might be of some use to the community.

On a normal day, no one visited the monastery. Once a week, a few lay people visited the monastery on the Observance Day to make offerings and receive the precepts from the monks. Each day, the three monks collected a small amount of alms food from the villages on the edge of the water, and returned to the forest by boat, without any lay visitors. I piloted the motorboat for the monks and under careful guidance of one local monk, collected edible mushrooms as we walked back through the forest from the boat landing. Occasionally, I collected fruit from the mango and banana trees planted by the nuns who formerly resided in the monastery. Luang Por Chah had asked the nuns to return to Wat Nong Pah Pong out of concern for their safety, as their vegetable garden had regularly been raided by elephants. Further, the monastery was so close to the border with Laos, it was considered a dangerous and lawless area with armed men roaming around. Before I left Wat Pah Nanachat, someone told me that I was going to a district that was like the wild west. I replied that the monastery was actually located in an easterly direction from Ubon so I should be fine.

The only stores in the monastery kitchen were some dried chilli and tinned fish, so being a vegetarian meant that I became very thin very quickly. I was more interested in training in

meditation, learning the Thai language and studying chanting than the quality of my diet, so the lack of vegetarian food did not bother me. Once in a while, some fruit or edible leaves were offered, and I got by. The low point of my stay in the monastery was the day when I cut up a watermelon into four pieces, one for each monastic including myself, but found that when the tray with the watermelon pieces arrived at the bottom of the line of monastics, there only seemed to be rind, juice and pips left for me. I poured the juice into my ball of sticky rice and just got on with my meal.

The remoteness of the monastery meant that there was little material support for the resident Sangha, but I felt that the peaceful ambience and the beauty of the large natural forest made up for the lack of mundane comforts. I started camping in the jungle using the traditional umbrella tent for the first time in my monastic life. The one personal possession worth anything that I had brought with me from the lay life was a small digital clock, but one day I returned to my umbrella tent after the meal and found that it was gone. I never knew whether it was a hunter or a monkey that took the clock, but I sensed it was a necessary teaching that I should renounce every last possession from the lay life. The loss of the clock was inconvenient because one of my duties was to ring the wake-up bell for the community at 3:00am every morning, and afterwards I had to guess the correct time to get up and walk one kilometre to the meditation hall. The meditation hall did have a clock, so I checked my arrival time each morning and then either waited or rushed to ring the bell depending on how accurately I had guessed the time. I remember one morning I was so anxious not to miss the 3:00am deadline to ring the bell that I arrived at the meditation hall at 1:00am.

One day, we received an invitation for the monks to eat in a house next to the boat landing on the mainland. Luang Por Chah's niece was getting married at the house and many senior monks from different branch monasteries were invited to eat a meal and give blessings. Luang Por Liem, Ajahn Anek and Ajahn Toon attended with a dozen other senior monks. I took the boat over to the house from the monastery and ended up sitting at the end of a long line of distinguished Dhamma teachers. When the monks chanted the auspicious verses of protection before the meal, I could only mouth along, because I had not had time to learn the chanting. The other monks chanted confidently and beautifully but no words emerged from my mouth and I felt ashamed. At that moment, I determined to memorise all the *Paritta* chants (verses of protection). I had plenty of time available in the forest, so I used it to commit the chants to memory, because I never wanted to sit in a blessing ceremony unable to chant again. By the time I took ordination as a novice monk I had memorised all of the chants.

On that auspicious occasion, I also had the chance to look after the visiting senior monks. After the ceremony, I took them across the reservoir in the boat to visit the monastery. Luang Por Liem was very kind to me and at one point after the resident monks had led everyone on a guided tour of the island, he sat down and told me in perfect English that I must make the effort to learn the Thai language and practice speaking it every day. His English pronunciation was perfect and for a second time that day, I was put to shame because I could not reply in Thai. This led me to make a second resolution that I must learn to speak the Thai language fluently so that I could communicate properly with my teachers.

It was the dry season. I continued to live simply and camp in the jungle for another month. Each day, I assisted the monks by driving the boat and looking after the simple but bare, monastery kitchen. I learnt Thai and memorised the chanting. I became accustomed to meeting wild animals such as wild pigs and monkeys. I relied on my faith in the Buddha and Luang Por Chah, combined with my youthful strength and endurance to get through the various physical hardships. Each day, I was bitten by ants and mosquitoes and lost possessions to the monkeys, but fortunately, I did not get malaria.



Dtao Dtum Hermitage in 2004.



“ “

Here, Ānanda,
having gone to the forest,
to the foot of a tree or to an empty hut,
a monk reflects thus:

“This is peaceful, this is sublime,
that is, the stilling of all formations,
the relinquishment of all acquisitions,
the destruction of craving, cessation,
Nibbāna.”

Anguttara Nikaya 10.60

7

Novice Ordination

A New Name

In December 1984, I received a message to return to Wat Pah Nanachat to prepare for my novice ordination (*Pabbajjā*). I had about one week left to measure, cut and sew a set of robes, and memorise the ordination chanting. In those days, there was very little good quality robe cloth available. As I was a junior member of the community, the monk in charge of the store gave me the poorest quality village cloth to sew into a novice's robe. The cloth was so coarse that it was difficult to sew properly, and it did not accept the natural dye that we made from the heartwood of the jackfruit tree. I had to add some chemical dye to the mix, which is always a risk as you can end up with some strange and unsightly colours if you get the mixture wrong. Sure enough, my new robe came out with an unusual golden orange hue, and it looked a different colour from the robes worn by the rest of the monks. Luang Por Chah was too ill to perform ordinations at that time, so my novice ordination was conducted by Luang Por Maha Amorn at Wat Nong Pah Pong on 21 December 1984. I put on my roughly sewn and uneven coloured novice's robe which did not look the best, but what the robe lacked was made up for by my happiness to receive the novice ordination and on that day, I was given the Pali name, *Kalyano*.



Ajahn Kalyano at Wat Marp Jan in 1993.

Finding The Beautiful Mind

The name *Kalyano* means one who is good or one who is beautiful in the Dhamma. The phrase beautiful in the Dhamma refers to the beautiful and attractive nature of wholesome (*kusala*) mental states. The Buddha taught us to cultivate wholesome mental states, abandon unwholesome mental states and purify our minds from the mental defilements rooted in greed, hatred and delusion. My new name gave me a daily reminder to cultivate the beautiful states of mind; but to achieve that, I needed to wade through some of the ugly mental states my conditioning brought up, and keep uprooting them.

Once I started wearing the ochre-coloured robes, I felt a surge of enthusiasm to study and practise the Dhamma-Vinaya for the goal of overcoming suffering. I had more self-confidence because I was now wearing robes of the same colour and design as those worn by the Buddha and his enlightened disciples. In fact, I did not wear my novice robes very well at first; and received the nick name “road sweeper” on alms round, because as I walked across the paddy fields and around the village, sometimes the back of my robe slipped down and without my realising, dragged along the ground as I walked. I still had the heavy iron bowl which I had used as an *Anagārikā* and it needed constant care and attention to stop it from leaking. I had memorised the auspicious *Paritta* chanting, the regular morning and evening reflections, and the mealtime blessings, so I felt more confident when I sat and chanted in front of lay people at the meal or during the *Puja* sessions. I noticed how many new monks and novices can feel self-conscious and awkward about receiving alms and sitting on a raised seat in front of the laity. I found that by being confident in my chanting helped steady my mind and removed any doubt about being unworthy of support from the lay devotees.

I continued to put effort into my practice of sitting and walking meditation as I had been instructed by Luang Por Liem and Ajahn Pasanno. I also began to keep some of the *dhutaṅga* or ascetic practices for forest dwellers. These are a group of thirteen ascetic practices taken on to improve one's effort in reducing and wearing away the mental defilements of greed, anger and delusion. I took up the forest dweller's practice and set up my umbrella tent on the ground at the foot of a tree near the *kuti* assigned to me. I determined not to use the *kuti* at all for the rest of the dry season. I was also resolute only to use the robes given to me on the day of my ordination; and to eat my daily meal from my alms bowl in one sitting only and not to take any other food items at other times. On the Observance Day, I undertook not to lie down for the whole night and only allowed myself to use the sitting and walking postures. Another of the ascetic practices is staying in a cemetery or cremation ground; and as the monastery itself was a cremation ground, we regularly participated in funeral ceremonies and open-air cremations for the villagers. I began sitting up next to the fire, through the night, whenever there was a cremation. I took on the practices out of faith in the Buddha; and following in the footsteps of Luang Por Chah.

After I moved into the jungle and began sleeping on the forest floor, I undertook a seven-day fast for the first time. I found that living in simplicity was quite helpful for observing how desires and attachments arise, as I habitually thought about seeking comfort; and distracting myself through indulgence in different sense objects and experiences. It was the end of the year; and I knew that previously in my lay life, I would spend time with family and friends enjoying parties, and overindulging in sensuality. Living in the forest, I focused my mind on letting go and practising contentment with having few possessions and distractions. I found that simplicity was a great teacher. The

way I remembered my family members back in England was through dedicating my efforts in the practice to them. I reflected on Luang Por Chah's teaching that the peace and well-being that arises from living the holy life gives rise to inner joy which is food for the heart. The joy that arises from the practice is for our benefit but also for the benefit of others. I dedicated any goodness arising from my practice to my parents and all other sentient beings.

As a novice, my mind was still unpredictable, as it was for everyone else. I tried to make consistent effort in sitting and walking meditation; and accepted that sometimes mindfulness would be strong, and sometimes weak. I realised the more I expected from the practice, the easier it was to be disappointed, so I tried to find contentment in making effort rather than judging my practice based on the results or expected results. I found the best time to meditate for me was usually between about 5.00pm and 7.00pm, when the day's meal had been fully digested and the body was light so I was not sleepy. At that time, I found it easiest for my mind to settle into a state of calm and meditation was usually enjoyable. As a novice monk, I had a duty to help prepare and serve the evening drink for the rest of the community at 5.00pm each day, which meant that I faced a choice between taking the evening drink of tea or coffee with the community, which I quite enjoyed, or returning to my umbrella tent to meditate and missing the drink. Some days it was not an easy choice, but my enthusiasm for developing meditation meant that more often than not, I missed the drink and returned to my camp under the trees to continue meditating.

Meditating later in the evening or at night was more challenging due to the heat, mosquitoes, and sleepiness. Late at night, I often reverted to walking meditation to counter the sleepiness, and was content doing so, until I reached the time I had

determined to rest. I often memorised verses of chanting when walking meditation in addition to reciting the meditation word ‘*Buddho*’. Before sleeping, I determined the time I planned to wake up and found that my mind would wake me up around the time I had agreed with myself, without having to rely on an alarm clock. I have never needed to use the alarm on my clock for the entire time I have lived the monastic life. I found that I had more energy for sitting meditation in the early morning; and so I often arose at 2:00am and went out to meditate in the main hall shortly afterwards. The air temperature was cool and the forest was quiet at that time.

On the Observance Days, I made my goal to sit for the whole night in one place without getting up. I still had to endure much pain in my legs, but slowly I increased the length of time I could sit in meditation without getting up from one hour, to two hours; to three hours and so on. I found that focusing on sitting without changing posture for longer periods improved my practice of patience, made my mindfulness and effort firmer, and I learnt how to examine and contemplate my moods and mental proliferation more closely. I found that the hindrances to *samādhi* sometimes dropped away and I experienced periods of stillness. My ability to be patient and endure through the various negative emotions and mental states that the practice of all-night sitting inevitably stimulated, improved. Sitting through the night was one of the most useful practices I undertook because the extended periods of time cultivating mindfulness helped me to see my thoughts, moods and feelings arise and pass away constantly; and I learnt how superficial and temporary mental states are by nature.

Meditating as a novice, there were many times when my mind was not very peaceful and besieged by sleepiness, aversion to pain, discomfort and craving for various pleasures. I then found

that putting forth determined effort over and over again slowly brought results. Listening to teachings from visiting senior monks was both inspiring and informative. The Dhamma teachings that they gave were directly relevant to the practice. I could relate to their stories and recollections of their own struggles with the mental defilements; and quickly appreciated why the Buddha encouraged noble friendship as an invaluable part of the practice. Luang Por Jun was one of Luang Por Chah's senior disciples who regularly visited us and recounted his own efforts in developing the sitter's practice. He told us how he was determined to tame his mind from its habitual laziness and dullness, and how he found determining to practice without lying down a skilful means to develop persistent energy. He reminded me that when you take on the practice of not lying down, you need to ground yourself in the qualities of self-control, composure, and goodwill for others, because when we push against our mental defilements, it is common for us to experience aversion and negative mental states which can lead us to break the precepts or act unskillfully. He shared that during one rains retreat he had determined to sit on a termite mound next to a tree that had spiky thorns growing out of it for three months. He did this to counter dullness and drowsiness, and said that if he was overcome by drowsiness and started to nod, his head would hit the thorns on the tree and wake him up.

As I adjusted to the routine in my first year, I used the monastic training rules to develop more mindfulness and restraint. They helped me find new levels of energy and renunciation that I had not experienced or known when practising as a layman. I realised that the development of mindfulness and insight slowly brings rewards as one weakens and let go of some of the mental defilements, and the mind becomes brighter. I noticed how my attitudes and perceptions were gradually maturing and I inclined more towards people and activities that supported the

practice. I found that making effort to go against the mental defilements made me feel exhausted too, but at least I knew that it was due to putting forth wholesome effort in the practice. I felt that the feelings of tiredness and frustration from training my mind were a necessary part of the practice I had to get used to. I did not try to blame anyone else for those feelings, but I did reflect on what was the middle way in putting forth effort and accepted that sometimes I got things wrong and tried too hard or too little.

Nimittas - A Blessing Or A Curse?

During the first year of my meditation at Wat Pah Nanachat, as an *Anagārikā* and then as a novice, I experienced lots of different visions or *nimittas*. In the beginning, whenever I closed my eyes to meditate, I experienced mental images and visions arising straight away, even though I aimed to establish mindfulness on the in-and-out breath. The visions included images of people, places and even brief scenes and interactions between different people. Some faces and places I recognised, but many I did not. I had no wish to experience such images, but they seemed to arise naturally as I was improving my mindfulness and letting go of the hindrances to meditation; and because I was eating and sleeping less than when I was a layman. Sometimes I spent an entire meditation session observing different images arising and passing away and there was little I could do to stop them. I continued to contemplate the impermanent nature of all visions and images. I could not stop them, but I could know them as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. When I reflected in this way, my mind did not make much out of them. It often took ages for my mind to calm down and only then I experienced some clarity and lucid awareness for a while without any visions disturbing me.

I had to learn patience as I experienced so many different images and visions, and most of them did not have any clear meaning

or make any sense in themselves. The majority of the visions seemed to come from old mental impressions of the lay life. They could be tiresome and distracting. I kept bringing to mind the teaching of Luang Por Chah that nothing is certain; and that one should cling to nothing. I took the teaching to heart; and spent much of my time merely observing the arising and passing away of visions, rather than reacting to them, trying to stop them, or analysing them for any deeper meaning. There were also vivid dreamlike images of people who I did not know, or places that I did not recognise. Some people were well-dressed and seemed to have some merit, some people were clearly in a state of suffering. Some people appeared acting in wholesome ways; some were breaking the precepts. I just watched the images arise and pass away. Even when sitting in meditation in the main hall as I prepared to chant a blessing before the meal, I found myself beset by visions whenever I closed my eyes. All I knew for sure was that, whatever is subject to arising is subject to cessation.

Slowly, during the second year in the monastery, the experience of constant visions began to fade, and I was able to concentrate on the breath more easily. Eventually, I reached a level of normality where I still had visions arise from time to time, in my meditation, especially when my mind was calm and bright, but they were no longer overwhelming or distracting. As my level of mindfulness and understanding improved, and the number of visions and images I experienced reduced, I found that my own insight into the transient nature of physical and mental phenomena strengthened. I could examine the Four Noble Truths and see them more clearly in my experience. If I saw a wholesome vision or image associated with the monastery, other monks or the Buddha, I observed how it was accompanied by a subtle pleasant feeling and stimulated other wholesome mental states. I noticed how even pleasant feelings can stimulate

craving. If I had a vision of a place or a person or some material thing that triggered craving, I observed its impermanence and started to notice how repeatedly giving in to craving leads it to harden into clinging and creates a sense of self. If the image was unwholesome, I tried to maintain mindfulness and contemplated what craving was triggered and looked for the insight to let it go.

Eventually, I reached a point where I experienced almost no visual images arising at all and after that, I only experienced visions when I was calm and initially entered *samādhī* or else when I was withdrawing from a state of *samādhī*. When I was calm and still, visions had no disturbing effect on my mind. One of the first clear images that arose out of a state of calm was of the senior monk Luang Por Panyananda. He was a well-known Dhamma teacher and visited the monastery occasionally. Just before the first time I met him; and before I knew what he looked like, I saw a clear image of him surrounded by a beautiful aura and he encouraged me to take ordination as a monk. When he actually arrived at the monastery, I quickly volunteered to assist in looking after him and continued to assist him each time he visited the monastery on subsequent occasions. I even helped him on one of his visits to Amaravati Monastery in England. He was very kind to the foreign students of Luang Por Chah and before I was able to speak Thai fluently, he encouraged me by speaking to me in English.

Luang Por Chah - A Fountain Of Inspiration

When I was training as a novice, I sometimes had the chance to visit and pay respects to Luang Por Chah. It was uplifting to be able to bow to him whilst I was wearing the ochre robes that had been handed down to us from the Buddha. Luang Por Chah was no longer teaching, but there was always such a bright, positive and peaceful atmosphere around him that everyone seemed a little bit more mindful in his presence. I noticed that being in

his presence also stimulated good conversations about Dhamma practice. It seemed like the radiance of Luang Por Chah's peaceful mind filled the whole monastery; and boosted our own level of mindfulness and insight. Most of us experienced a strong sense of gratitude and appreciation for his teachings; and it was expressed in the way the monastics conducted themselves. I found that with the qualities of faith and gratitude present, many of the monastic training rules that we followed became more meaningful.

Cultivating respect and reverence for the teacher; and developing patience in setting aside one's own views and opinions, to follow the guidance is a central part of the training for forest monks. I was learning many of the monastic training rules for the first time; and I found that the rules and practices were supportive in making me more mindful and aware of my speech and actions. Assisting the teacher, even from a distance, brought up wholesome states of mind such as respect and mindfulness with clear comprehension and helped me let go of unskillful mental states. Putting effort into the training helped me replace many of the unskillful states of mind that I experienced from my previous conditioning in the lay life, with wholesome mental states arising from faith, mindfulness, wisdom, and effort.

Visiting senior monks in other monasteries and receiving teachings was inspiring. In those days, when we travelled to another monastery, the junior monks and novices were required to sit in the back of an open truck. We usually travelled along the dusty roads of northeast Thailand, exposed to the sun, wind, rain and cold winter winds. Sometimes we visited poorer and undeveloped branch monasteries where the elderly Abbot might be frail and sick. Other times we visited brand new monasteries which consisted of just a few bamboo huts and a small open-sided hall with a grass roof where some more junior monks

had been invited to live and practice. As a novice, I became used to roughing it, sleeping on floors in open-sided sheds or under trees, going without refreshments, taking cold baths and foregoing rest as we travelled. The hardships of travelling often seemed worth it when we had the opportunity to pay respects or listen to Dhamma from an experienced senior monk. When we visited a teacher such as Luang Por Tate or Luang Por La, the fatigue from the journey evaporated as soon we heard them teach, even if language was still a barrier for me as a novice.

Each time we visited Luang Por Baen, we spent a night at his monastery in Sakhon Nakhon province. He gave us Dhamma teachings explaining, the ways of practice handed down to forest monks from the time of Luang Por Mun. He emphasised the importance of keeping the Vinaya, reminded us how to take care of our bowl and robes, and reflect on the way we used our requisites; develop wise reflection as we ate the daily meal with mindfulness and clear comprehension. He also instructed us on the importance of *ācariyavatta* or the practice of attending on the teacher. Luang Por Baen could talk at length on fundamental themes such as directing mindfulness to the body; and developing the perception of the unattractiveness of the body. It was inspiring to see how he led his community of monks in such a simple but dignified way. They had so much faith in him as a teacher that when the monks came together to clean up the monastery, he only needed to point his finger in the direction of a task that needed to be completed or some rubbish that needed tidying up, and an observant monk would get the job done, without either teacher or student having to discuss the matter or utter any words of explanation.

At the end of the rains, we travelled for *Kāthina* ceremonies in other branch monasteries; and at one new branch monastery, we were joined by Luang Por Chawp who was one of the

senior living disciples of Luang Por Mun and considered a fully Enlightened *Arahant*. We had the good fortune to offer him a foot massage as he kindly stayed talking to the monks, late into the night. He encouraged us to put all our efforts into meditation while we were young and healthy; and encouraged us not to be put off by the physical or mental hardships we encountered in the course of our life as monks. I only had a rudimentary understanding of the Thai language at that time, but I remember Luang Por Chawp pointing to his chest and telling us that the Buddha taught monks to know the true nature of this body and mind. He repeated to us that we must know just this much.

We also visited Luang Por Tate who had a serene presence, but a sharp and clever mind; and he quickly pointed out where a young monk was falling into wrong views about the practice. One monk told him that he was practising mindfulness directed to the mind itself and did not like contemplating the body, but Luang Por Tate quickly admonished him saying the realisation of the Four Noble Truths begins with contemplation of the body, and cannot happen without that. He encouraged us to give up our lives for the practice of the Dhamma and Vinaya.

The Jungle Is Also A Teacher

In February 1985, I was asked to return to help at Wat Keuan as the small number of resident monks were still struggling with the minimal material support they received from the generous but poor local villagers. It was the dry season which meant I was able to set up my umbrella tent in the depth of the jungle like before. This time I moved about one kilometre away from the main buildings into the remotest part of the monastery. The monastery was over 1,000 acres in size and contained many large old hardwood trees and a variety of larger and smaller wildlife.

At Wat Pah Nanachat, one of the main challenges had been to maintain mindfulness and compassion while living with and interacting with the residents and visitors who came from all over the world. At Wat Keuan however, the challenge was to maintain mindfulness and goodwill with the hardships arising out of the lack of material comfort; and the regular unpleasant encounters with wildlife.

Again, my duties included ringing the morning bell at 3:00am; and I needed to wake up at 2:00am and start walking to the meditation hall because I was camping so far away. I had kindly been given a small clock by Venerable Nyanaviro, my Malaysian novice friend, so I did not have to guess the time anymore. The monastery bell hung from a beam under the floor of the wooden meeting hall; and there happened to be a poisonous pit viper living in the vicinity. Every morning, I had to remember to keep an eye out for the snake while I rang the bell as she habitually sat coiled up watching me, just a few feet away. Sometimes she uncoiled herself and moved towards me just as I was ringing the bell. This resulted in a truncated version of the long and rhythmic series of strokes we used to strike the bell in the traditional way as I had to quickly back away from the bell because the snake was approaching. One time, I must have surprised her and she lunged at my bare feet as I was striking the bell, but luckily, she did not make contact. I thought that she was either an old associate who had come back from the past to give me a hard time; or else was similar to most of the monks and did not like being woken up so early in the morning. Either way, I formed a love-hate relationship with her.

Staying under my umbrella tent helped me develop more patient endurance with the simple living conditions, the creatures and the weather, as I slept on the floor of the forest. Sometimes I was soaked by a surprise thunderstorm which actually cooled

things down, because at that time of year the air temperature could be stiflingly hot. I was regularly bitten by ants and threatened by scorpions and centipedes. Several times, I woke up suddenly in the middle of the night as soldier ants swarmed out of their underground nest and attacked me. I joked with the other monks that they were teaching me not to sleep too much. I regularly encountered wild boar and the largest ones were fierce. On a few occasions, I encountered the leader of the pack who had huge tusks and stomped his hooves on the ground disapprovingly to show me who was boss. He never attacked me, but just threatened me before charging off.



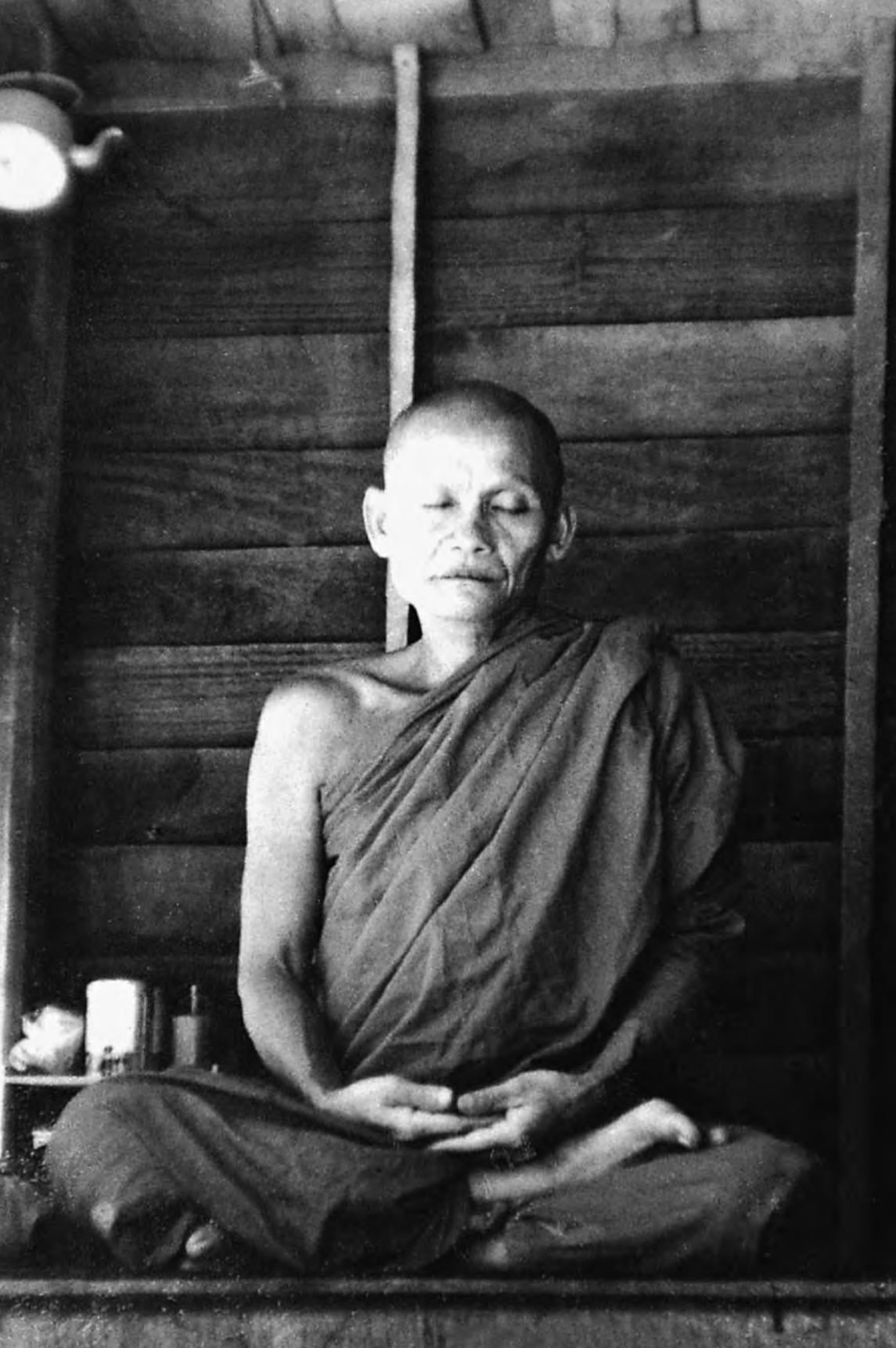
Under a giant forest tree at Dtao Dtum Hermitage in 2004, deep in the jungle, on the border of Thailand and Myanmar.

One of the two junior Thai monks in residence was afraid of ghosts, and the other was afraid of the wild boar. I was more irritated by the heat and the ants, so we all had some aversion to contemplate and let go. At one point, the monk who was afraid of wild boar was sent out to stay in an umbrella tent to test his resolve and make him face up to his fears. By coincidence, that night there was an unexpected thunderstorm and all the animals in the jungle were stirred up by the continuous thunder and lightning that filled the night sky until dawn. In such violent storms, you could not lie down and sleep. All you could do was meditate under your umbrella while minimising your exposure to the incoming rain. At about midnight, the entire herd of 30 to 40 wild boars were running around the jungle, in all directions, stirred up by the storm. My friend sat still, tense with fear and suddenly a wild pig ran in under his mosquito net and sat down next to him on his wet mat. The very thing the monk feared was now right next to him. He spent the next few hours paralysed with fear, sitting next to a wet and smelly wild pig. In the morning, the monk and the wild pig parted company without incident. The monk later explained to us how helpful it was to come face-to-face with the thing he feared most of all. We were happy for him because the wild pig had not harmed him; and the monk seemed to have gained some understanding of the temporary and deluding nature of his fears.

My duties as a novice in the monastery included looking after the kitchen due to absence of lay people helping. As there was so little food offered on the daily alms round, and there were no stores of food available in the kitchen, I could only look for fruit and vegetables from the surrounding fruit trees and old gardens of the monastery which had been neglected. I collected some bananas, mangoes and jack fruit when they were ripe, and offered them to the monks. My use of the Thai language

was improving, and I had begun translating some of Luang Por Chah's teachings into English. This included the story of the time he stayed temporarily in a deserted monastery; and had to let go of any sense of ownership of a mango tree when some villagers came through and asked him for permission to pick the ripe mangoes. Luang Por Chah contemplated the request and realised that wherever you create a sense of ownership or an attachment, it brings you suffering.

I came to understand this when I realised that even a monastery mango tree can bring you suffering if you cling to it with desire. When the mangoes on the trees in the central area of the monastery ripened, most of them were quickly taken by a pack of monkeys. I had planned to pick the mangoes to add to the daily meal offering for the community, but the monkeys forced me to let go of all my plans and expectations. A few mangoes remained and I thought that when they ripened, I would serve them with the meal; but not long afterwards a group of villagers passed through gathering fruit and leaves from the forest; and they picked the tree bare. In the end, I had watched dozens of mangoes ripen, but I had not been able to save a single one for the monks or myself. Before my frustration got the better of me, I contemplated that if you cling to one mango you suffer once and if you cling to dozens of mangoes, you suffer dozens of times. Luang Por Chah was right again.



“ “

“One who wishes to reach the Buddha-Dhamma
must firstly be one
who has faith or confidence as a foundation.

We must understand
the meaning of Buddha-Dhamma as follows:

“Buddha: the One-Who-Knows (*poo roo*),
the one who has purity, radiance
and peace in the heart.

“Dhamma:
the characteristics of purity, radiance and peace
which arise from morality, concentration and wisdom.

“Therefore one who is to reach the Buddha-Dhamma
is one who cultivates and
develops morality, concentration
and wisdom within themselves.”

Luang Por Chah
‘Fragments of a Teaching’ in ‘Food for the Heart’

8

Preparation For A Second Birth - *Bhikkhu* Ordination

Nesajjik'anga - Sitter's Practice

After five months at Wat Keuan, I was asked to return to Wat Pah Nanachat to join the annual rains retreat; and to prepare for my *Bhikkhu* ordination. When I returned to Wat Pah Nanachat, I took the opportunity to visit Luang Por Chah and give some assistance to the team caring for him. I was happy to give something back to the teacher with some small acts of service that novices could help with, such as washing his bedding, cleaning the moat around his *kuti* that prevented ants entering, and cleaning the veranda and garden area of his *kuti*. I felt more confident in helping the team that looked after him having spent many months living with Thai monks and learning the language more thoroughly. Even though I only performed menial tasks to support the monks, I reflected that I was still assisting the teacher and benefitting from his presence.

I returned to Wat Pah Nanachat after two weeks with Luang Por Chah, and entered the rains retreat as a novice monk. I determined to take up the practice of *nesajjik'anga* or what is more commonly known as the sitter's practice. I made a resolution not to lie down at any time. This is one of the thirteen

dhutaṅga practices and I did not set myself any time limit on the duration of my resolution. Whenever I wanted to rest, I rested in the sitting posture, either leaning against a post or a wall. Taking up sitter's practice meant that I experienced more pain in my back and neck, in addition to the pain I normally had in my legs, but I found it a useful way to bring up extra effort and energy in my meditation. It stopped me indulging in the desire for sleep. Sleeping in the sitting posture meant that I slept the minimum amount of time that my body required because I woke up so easily. As a novice and later as a monk, I felt that I was physically strong enough to do the practice; and at that time I did not have many duties or responsibilities that diverted my energy and attention away from my own practice. I kept up the sitter's practice until the beginning of my fourth rains retreat as a monk.

I also directed much of my effort into meditating through the night, and only resting in the day during my novice years and early years as a monk. I began staying up all night meditating twice a week, once with the community on the Observance Day and once on my own. I found it easier to stay up all night meditating when I was together with the community because I gained energy from the group of monks and lay people who meditated together. Meditating all night alone is more challenging. I did not let anyone know what I was doing as I was not looking for praise or recognition or any special treatment from other monks, simply because I was meditating through the night. I aimed to progress in the development of mindfulness and wisdom. I took the Buddha's teaching to heart that *khanti* or patient endurance is the supreme destroyer of defilement; and that cultivating right effort leads one to overcome the five hindrances that prevent the mind unifying in *samādhi*. I had faith that the stillness of mind I developed would become a basis for insight. I found that sitting and walking meditation for longer

periods of time was one of the best ways to cultivate endurance; and improve my ability to observe feelings, perceptions and mental states arising and passing away. I found that observing the impermanent conditions of my mind and body reduced the habit of identifying with mental states, sensations and feelings as self or belonging to self.

Not long after taking on the sitter's practice, I was bitten on my neck by a centipede. I had put a bowl wiping cloth on a bush to dry in the sun; and the centipede had crawled on to it for some warm sun too. When I picked the cloth up and put it on my shoulder, I did not see the centipede and it immediately bit my neck and injected its potent venom. For 48 hours, I suffered intense pain on the neck; and for the first night the pain was so intense, it stopped me sleeping. It seemed like a test to see if I was serious about keeping my resolution not to lie down. I sat up all night enduring the pain in agony; and either tried to put my mind on the part of the body that did not hurt or to recite verses of Dhamma to keep my mind occupied. I realised that some kinds of pain just have to be endured, however much you want to get rid of them. I considered that the pain was some kind of old *kamma* returning to me but did not hold a grudge against the centipede. Over the years, I was bitten a couple more times by centipedes during my time at Wat Pah Nanachat, but on these subsequent occasions, the centipedes only nipped my foot without injecting any venom. It was as if the old *kamma* was finished.

One of the priorities in my training was to avoid letting my mind dwell with ill-will or anger. The cultivation of *mettā* meditation became a central part of my daily meditation. I cultivated mindfulness of breathing as much as I could, but I aimed to use the mindfulness and composure I gained to preserve my goodwill for others at all times; and keep my mind in a state of

normality. If I lost my goodwill because I was experiencing pain or feeling tired, or if there was something or somebody that triggered dissatisfaction or anger in me, I aimed to abandon the aversion and re-establish goodwill as quickly as I could, rather than hold on to it. I was determined not to let any of the hindrances stay in my mind for long, whether it was drowsiness, sensual desire or anxiety about something. I did not wish to waste time arguing with other monks or lay practitioners over the Dhamma. So generally if someone else had a different opinion or view of things from me, I consciously tolerated their different view; and did not expend energy in disputes or arguments. I learnt to be patient and cultivate equanimity towards the heat, the mosquitoes and any lack of the things I liked. If I fell into aversion, I reflected that I had no reason to blame anybody or anything for any of the suffering I experienced. I reminded myself that if I was suffering it was because of my own lack of mindfulness and understanding.

Every day for a short period of time, I put effort into learning to read and write the Thai language and I began some rudimentary translations of Luang Por Chah's talks. As my ability to read Thai improved, I would pick a Dhamma talk, read it to myself in Thai to learn the correct pronunciation and then translated it into English. Even though my early translations were not good enough to be published, I found the work improved my proficiency in the Thai language; and gave me deeper insight into the Dhamma teachings of Luang Por Chah. I found that discovering Luang Por Chah's wisdom; his way of describing the truths of suffering and its cessation, was invaluable to my practice and conducive to learning the Thai language. His talks had such profound meaning that I really wanted to know what he was saying, and practise more deeply to understand the truths he was pointing to.

Luang Por Chah used language in unconventional ways which encouraged one to think more deeply about what he was saying. His use of stories, metaphors and analogies stimulated my reflection on the Dhamma. I tried to make learning the Thai and Pali language into a form of meditation; and aimed to develop mindfulness and clear comprehension as I studied. Eventually, I found that as my understanding of the Thai language, and my own practice of virtue, concentration and wisdom deepened, I listened to Luang Por Chah's teachings with my heart, as much as my head. Sometimes I entered into *samādhi* as I listened to his talks quite spontaneously; and occasionally, I had profound insights that were the cause to abandon a particular source of suffering from my mind. This occurred partly because of my growing confidence in Luang Por Chah's own realisation; and partly because of his great skill in explaining profound truths effectively.

In July 1985, I entered the 3-month rains retreat as a novice, but I was preparing for my *upasampadā*, the procedure for admitting me into the Sangha as a monk. It is traditional for monks and novices to take on certain additional practices at the beginning of the retreat which increase their efforts in meditation; and I decided that in addition to the sitter's practice, I would only eat the food I collected in my bowl on alms round in the local village. Undertaking this practice meant that I did not accept any food offered in the monastery, after alms round. Novices always walk at the end of the line of monks as they enter the village to collect food each morning, which meant that often I received only plain sticky rice in my bowl. Sticky rice was the main staple food in the diet of the villagers. The senior monks received more cooked foods or fruit, but at the end of the line, it was rare for me to receive a piece of fruit, a cup cake or perhaps a small fish. No vegetarian food was offered in those days, so if

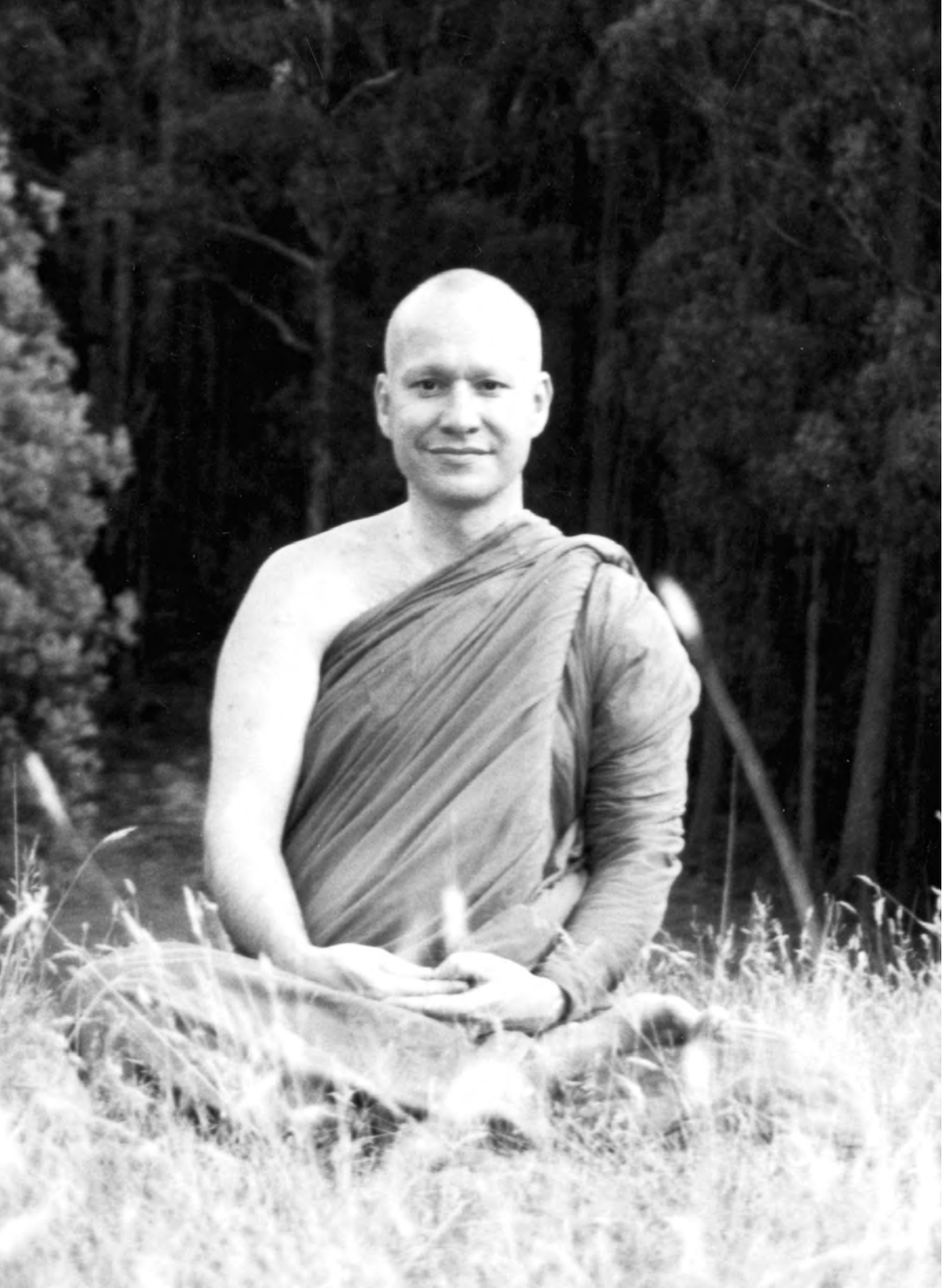
I did receive any cooked food, it was invariably made with meat or fish. I practised cultivating my own *dāna-pāramī* and gave away such food to other monks. Nevertheless, I was very happy to undertake this practice and it brought up strong feelings of gratitude and appreciation for the lay people who supported us. They were poor but extremely kind and generous, and had amazingly strong faith in the Triple Gem.

At the end of the morning alms round, each monastic ended up with a bowl full of rice and on a ‘good’ day I had perhaps one or two additional small food items. I found that the food I received was always enough to keep me going for the day. The simple diet did expose different forms of craving for food; and gave me plenty of work teaching myself to let go of expectations, comparisons with other monks and whatever else my imagination threw up each morning. I had to keep observing and letting go, otherwise I suffered. I developed the reflection on the repulsiveness of food that Luang Por Chah emphasised for monastics in training; and considered how all the food one eats ends up in the stomach mixed with digestive juices anyway. I took the contemplation further and considered how food is made up of the four elements of earth, water, fire and air, in an effort to counter my desires and cravings for different tastes; and familiar types of food that so easily took over my mind.

During alms round, I observed the moods of elation triggered by receiving any additional or unexpected food offerings; and the tendency towards despair when I had to eat another meal of plain rice. I even found that when regularly eating meals of just plain rice, I even formed preferences over the different types of rice offered from each household. I became slightly attached to the particular types of rice offered. My mind latched on to how warm or cold the rice offered was and how hard or soft it was.

It became clear to me that unrestrained craving and wanting really has no limits and no real end, unless one tames it through mindfulness, clear comprehension and insight into the three universal characteristics. I aimed to maintain the quality of equanimity and keep my mind in a state of normality, whatever offerings I received. I always tried to cultivate gratitude to the donors of the food. If more monks joined the line ahead of me on a particular day, it usually meant less food for me. So I also had to prepare my mind with goodwill and forgiveness to counter any negativity or jealousy towards those monks higher up the line who unwittingly received food that otherwise might have come to my bowl. Where one stood in the line of monks was determined by the date of ordination, not by other more personal reasons. I reminded myself not to blame any other monks for simply walking in front of me on alms round.

I became skinnier through the rains retreat, but I was still young, healthy and strong and so it did not bother me. The training was helping me to see my mental defilements and learn the Dhamma in a very direct way. I continued with the sitter's practice, ate the food I collected from alms round; and put energy into cultivating mindfulness the best that I could. It became apparent that when I had more mindfulness, I could reflect on the Dhamma, see suffering and its cause more clearly and follow it through to cessation.



In the early days at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery, 2001.

Rebirth - *Bhikkhu* Ordination

I was happy to serve the community in whatever way I could as I waited for my ordination date. I did not find that service distracted from the training of the heart. As the rains retreat progressed, it became necessary for administrative reasons, to receive ordination as a monk because my visa was running out and I had to be a monk to make my next application. The senior monk, Ajahn Pasanno, knew that my birthday was on the first day of October, so he asked me if I wanted to ordain on my birthday and it was agreed. During my time as a novice, my iron bowl had continued to deteriorate, so a kind family from Ubon generously sponsored a new stainless-steel bowl for my ordination; and the nuns at Wat Nong Pah Pong crocheted a woollen cover for it.

My novice robe, made from the coarsest grade of cloth had been deteriorating in quality throughout the previous months, and I was required to sew more and more patches over new holes in the cloth that appeared almost daily. One afternoon, I was sitting on the concrete edge of the meditation hall patching my robe when I noticed two little eyes looking at me from just above the edge of the concrete. I leaned forward to see who they belonged to. A huge cobra stuck its head up a few inches from my nose, with a look of questioning my audacity. It looked rather annoyed that I dared to look at it so closely. After all, I was in its territory! The cobra waved its head around threateningly for a while before heading off to chase frogs; and I smiled to myself that in simply patching my robe, I had risked my life. The Sangha took pity on me watching how I patched my robe over and over again. They agreed that I should receive some good quality robe material from the store to cut and sew my new set of monk's robes. There was a price to pay. Once I finished sewing a new set of robes for myself, I was asked to help the other novices and *Anagārikās* cut, sew and dye their new robes, too. However, it was a good way to develop friendship with my fellow novices.

Making natural dye from the heartwood of the jackfruit tree to dye new white cotton robes is a labour-intensive and time-consuming process filled with risk. First, the candidates for ordination sit down for hours chopping the light brown-coloured jackfruit tree wood into small chips, and afterwards they are boiled continuously in a huge wok to release their colour and other astringent chemicals into the water. As the water evaporates, the colour of the dye becomes more and more concentrated. If many novices ordain together, a lot of dye is needed and it requires many days of hard work. There is also the risk that if the water is boiled dry, the dye is burnt and ruined; and then the only option is to repeat the process all over again, starting from scratch. This had happened to many inexperienced monks and novices over the years, and not only does one's dye gets lost but one's pride is burnt as well.

One volunteer is required, at all times, to stoke the fire and watch over the water level to ensure it did not boil dry. We took turns over three days and nights to chop wood, tend to the fire, and boil down the amount of water until we had enough concentrated dye to colour three sets of white cotton robes. A further cause for anxiety is that if anything goes wrong in the process, and the dye colour is weak or out of the norm, everyone in the monastery will know about it. You only own one set of robes and, everyone sees you wearing your robes each day. We managed to obtain a suitable light brown colour from our efforts to dye the robes and ended up with only a few small blemishes on the cloth. The whole process could be stressful for some because when a candidate suffered the fate of burning his dye or the robe cloth did not accept the dye fully; and his robe became uneven in colour or even multi-coloured, it drew critical comments from the preceptor during the ordination ceremony; and chuckles from the other monks. Dyeing the robes was exhausting and frustrating, but you could say it was a good learning experience.

One poor monk became so fed up being bitten by mosquitoes, over the many hours he was chopping the jackfruit wood into chips, that he lost his temper; and let off steam by taking aim with his hand axe at a mosquito sitting on his foot. The monk ended up in hospital with a badly wounded foot and was firmly rebuked by the other monks for giving in to his aggression and lapse of mindfulness. Fortunately, the mosquito got away.

The senior monks decided I should ordain with two other novices, Venerable Vissudhi and Venerable Issaro. The procedure for entering the Sangha as a monk is looked upon as similar to a second birth. The candidate is reborn as a Buddhist monk. We had entered the rains retreat as novices; and received our ordination during the rains retreat, but our preceptor told us that the rains retreat would still count as our first as a monk. Monks count their age or the length of time they have spent in the robes by the number of rains retreats they have completed. When they sit together, they sit according to seniority in terms of how many rains retreats they have. If two monks have completed the same number of rains retreats, they look at the date and the time of each monk's ordination to determine who is senior. Seniority can even be determined down to the minute. The junior monk always bows to the senior and sits in line after them. It is a very simple system which brings harmony and ease to the running of the monks' community.

I was born in London, England on 1st October 1962, and then born a second time on 1st of October 1985 at Wat Nong Pah Pong monastery in Ubon. This time I was born as a *Bhikkhu* or Buddhist monk and my preceptor, teacher and the Sangha were my new family. None of my lay family members were able to attend the *upasampadā* (ordination) ceremony which took place at Wat Nong Pah Pong in the afternoon. Luang Por Maha Amorn (Phra Mongkolkittitada) was the preceptor standing in

for Luang Por Chah who was too ill to carry out the duty. A few local Buddhists came along to act as our Dhamma family and they offered each candidate a new stainless steel alms bowl which we accepted with appreciation.

The other candidates and I were fairly emotional as the ordination was a final confirmation that we had left the home life; and completely given ourselves to the Triple Gem and the uncertainties of training and living as monks. I was confident in the Truth of the Buddha's words and his Enlightenment; and in the wisdom and compassion of Luang Por Chah. I was surrounded by the Sangha, supported by kind and faithful lay Buddhists; but still, my heart experienced strong emotions welling up. I was letting go of my past as a lay person and setting my mind on life as a monk; and the practice for awakening. I was emotional because I was letting go, in such a profound way, and because I was taking refuge in the Triple Gem. Yet, I was very happy to be a monk.

Amoebic Dysentery - The Fiercest Teacher

The rains retreat continued for a few more weeks. I continued with the practices of not lying down; and only eating the food I received in my bowl from alms round in the village. Within a week of the ordination, some old *kamma* ripened for myself and a novice from New Zealand when we contracted amoebic dysentery from the village food we were eating each day. There was an outbreak of amoebic dysentery in the local village of Bung Wai and about one hundred people were infected. Because the symptoms were so severe, four of the villagers died, including one old man who stood outside the last house on our alms round each day until his death. There was much sadness in the village and it felt like someone was testing me to see if I really wanted to be a monk.

I estimated that the symptoms of the disease were so severe that it made me more ill than I had ever been before in my life. Both of us suffered extremely painful headaches, high fever, severe stomach cramps and uncontrollable diarrhoea and vomiting. The first night I became ill, I had gone to sleep feeling normal and woke up at midnight feeling like I was dying. The pain and fever were so intense it felt like the equivalent of a bomb going off inside my head and body; and I had no idea what was wrong with me! Suddenly, my body was gripped by the most intense pain and it reminded me of the uncertainties of life like a stern teacher who suddenly rebukes you without warning. I did not sleep a single wink and by morning, the uncontrollable diarrhoea had begun. I was too weak to walk and just hoped that someone might notice I was missing from alms round and look for me at my *kuti*. The Thai name for amoebic dysentery translates as the disease that squeezes and twists your gut. It certainly felt like that.

I had no previous experience of dysentery; and did not know what had caused the intense pain and fever. I could not even drink the smallest quantity of water without it coming out the other end of my body as diarrhoea. My only strategy was to hang on through each hour. I had a bucket next to me because I did not have the energy to walk to the toilet, which was about one hundred metres away; nor even to walk down the *kuti* stairs to go to the toilet in the jungle. It was the first time in my life that I seriously considered the possibility that I might die from an illness. This made me use all my remaining energy to maintain mindfulness throughout my waking hours. I did not have the strength to seek out or even call for help and so I waited inside my hut until the other monks realised I was missing, and came looking for me.

One of the senior monks came round to check on my condition when he heard how grave the symptoms were. He reminded me of Luang Por Chah's well-known teaching on the uncertainty of life. He told me that I only had two options left: either I would get better or I would die. Each monk who visited me encouraged me to maintain mindfulness and equanimity with the conditions as everything is uncertain. They were all very kind, but I was in little doubt that there was a real possibility of death. When I heard that the old man from the village who had offered us food the day before, had suddenly become ill and died from dysentery; and that other villagers were also dying from it, I was really made aware of the uncertainty of my own situation. The illness was a powerful lesson for contemplating the impermanence of life; and forced me to observe and investigate the mental suffering that comes from identification with the body and feelings as self; and to see the strength of my craving and attachment for life itself.

We were given some medicine, but the illness persisted for a few days without improvement. People were getting worried and it was eventually decided to send both myself and the other novice to Ubon hospital for diagnosis and treatment. We spent about a week on a saline drip recovering in hospital, and every day, lay devotees from Bung Wai village and from the city made the journey to visit us. As I had experienced so often over the years in Thailand, the lay devotees were like an extended Dhamma family whose kindness and support made the hardships of the illness I was suffering easier to bear.

I contemplated that Luang Por Chah's goodness and people's respect for him drew them to support his students too. Most of the people were poor with little money to spend on transport or food, but they took turns to visit us and check each day, if

we were ready for solid food and asked about our needs. The warm-heartedness of the laity was genuine and sincere, even though I could only communicate with them in simple Thai. I could not say much, but I did my best to speak the few words of Thai that I knew and expressed my gratitude. My time in hospital became the first time I had ever chanted a blessing for the laity on my own as I wanted to show my appreciation for the warmth and help we received. I chuckled when I noted that even a sick monk cannot get out of the job of learning the chanting and giving blessings.

It took me several weeks to regain my strength after leaving hospital. I noticed how the gradual return of physical energy not only brought with it a rush of joy and rapture as the wholesome energy of *samādhī* returned, it also brought a return of craving and wanting. My mind was ready to use the body to serve the practice of Dhamma, but the mental defilements want to use my body to serve craving and attachment. I noticed how easily I could set aside memories of the serious illness I had just endured, and focus on doing new things in my life. I was cultivating mindfulness and awareness in the present moment, and aiming to develop skilful mental qualities and abandon unskilful mental qualities. It often seemed like an internal battle.

Unfortunately, the illness never fully left me during the years I spent in north-east Thailand and returned to me quite intensely on a number of other occasions. Up until I caught the dysentery, my digestive system had been fairly strong and I had little illness; but from the time the I first contracted dysentery onwards, I was subject to regular bouts of food poisoning, diarrhoea and stomach cramps throughout the time I lived in north-east Thailand. These symptoms continued until I reached a point, after five years, that I actually thought I would never properly

recover and experience normal digestion again. Experiencing constant diarrhoea, nausea and physical weakness gave me many opportunities to contemplate the suffering of the human body, as the symptoms wore me out at times; and also made me spend plenty of time cleaning up toilets too.

In between the dysentery and food poisoning, I continued my personal practice of meditation and kept up the sitter's practice. Twice a week, I stayed up all night meditating and took Luang Por Chah's teachings more and more to heart as my ability with the Thai language improved. I understood his reflections better and the truths that he was pointing to. Luang Por Sumedho visited us in November that year. I found it inspiring to see his stamina, and the effort and sacrifice he displayed in teaching others whilst maintaining his own meditation practice. He sat up straight as a rock throughout the night on the Observance Days; and gave Dhamma teachings in English and Thai. He sacrificed most of his free time to teach the monks and laity; and still made it out to every group meditation meeting. His wide-ranging experience from practising as a monk in Thailand and England gave him much wisdom to share with us. His teachings helped me understand better how to use the monastic training to deepen my meditation and contemplate the Four Noble Truths.

Learning How To Care For Luang Por Chah

In March 1986, I did my first two-week shift as part of a team of monks caring for Luang Por Chah at his nursing *kuti* at Wat Nong Pah Pong. This was the first of many shifts that I joined over the next five years; and it made me happy to express my gratitude and serve my teacher, in this way. Monks volunteered themselves for the job of attending to Luang Por Chah by joining the fortnightly recitation of the *Pāṭimokkha* (the monks'

rules of discipline) at Wat Nong Pah Pong. At the end of the meeting, Luang Por Liem chose four monks for the day shift and another four for the night shift, out of all the monks present on that day. Each group was a mix of new monks and more experienced senior monks. For 24 hours a day, Luang Por Chah always had a group of four monks caring for him. It was easier for me to join the team of carers because my ability to speak Thai was improving. I could receive instructions, discuss any problems that arose with the other monks and even converse with the nurse from the city hospital who was assigned to stay with Luang Por Chah every night. I looked on the chance to serve Luang Por Chah as an honour, and a cause for happiness.

Attending on Luang Por Chah was a rare learning opportunity for me, on many levels. The environment at Luang Por Chah's *kuti* was peaceful and conducive to training in mindfulness and cultivating the Dhamma. The work made me improve my knowledge of the Thai language because I did not want to make mistakes or misunderstand any of the instructions from the senior Thai monks. And I even gained some medical knowledge. The practice of caring brought out the best in both the monastics and laity who looked after Luang Por Chah. Everyone had so much faith, they were therefore always willing to push themselves a little further and give a little more than usual. I never met anyone who thought they were doing Luang Por Chah a favour as each monk felt it was their own good fortune to spend time with the teacher; and saw him as the one who provided them with the opportunity to train and make good *kamma*.

When caring for him, there were some quiet times, particularly at night, when he was resting and there were no activities to be engaged in; and during those times, it was possible to sit and

meditate next to him. We always had to be on guard and ready for any emergency, such as when he had an extreme coughing fit or there was a change in his blood pressure or heart rate, but normally in the quiet times, I could meditate near him and generally, I used the time with him to improve the quality of my mindfulness, while attending to my duties. Being in the presence of the teacher improved my all-around awareness and brought up the skilful qualities of *hiri ottappa* or a sense of shame and fear of wrongdoing. These qualities watch over the mind to prevent one from indulging in unskilful mental states or acting on them. It was difficult to dwell in negativity, lust or strong delusions when near the teacher.

My practice of mindfulness and the effort in abandoning unskilful mental states always seemed to improve in the presence of the teacher. I became increasingly aware of Luang Por Chah's peaceful *citta* (mind) that pervaded the whole monastery. It was difficult to put into words, but I felt it was a privilege to be with him and practise in his presence. On the one hand, I felt physically tired when living with him. On the other hand, my mind brightened and my improved mindfulness brought me a better understanding of the practice.





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If we don't allow our heart to cling to
that happiness or that suffering,
it will reach the stream that flows to *Nibbāna*,
characterised by peace and self control.

Luang Por Chah

9

Patience When You Encounter Suffering

Dhamma From Simplicity

In April 1986, I was sent to stay with Ajahn Khun at Wat Nah Poh which was a simple, secluded and undeveloped forest monastery near the Laotian border. Even though the monastery is only an hour's drive from Wat Pah Nanachat today; in those days, the journey involved catching a ride on a couple of different local trucks, and when there was no truck available, you had to walk many kilometres along dirt roads, through the forest. The day I was sent there, I had to walk the last five kilometres to the monastery; and never having been there before, I was not even sure I was heading in the correct direction. During the walk, a summer thunderstorm blew in with strong winds and heavy rain combined with thunder and lightning. I had my monk's umbrella with me and clung on to it the best I could, but the wind was so strong it snapped the handle; and the whole umbrella disintegrated in my hands.

Ajahn Khun was standing in the central area and looked at me with curiosity when I walked up the track into the monastery. I was a skinny western monk looking bedraggled with soaking wet robes, carrying a tangled mass of rods, cloth and string that once was a monk's umbrella and was damaged beyond repair.

He smiled a knowing smile that came from experience, as most forest monks have endured similar situations in their lives. He kindly suggested that the monks would help me make a new umbrella. The 16 year-old resident novice walked up and gave me his opinion on the events, as he would do every day for the next year. He declared that as my arrival coincided with such a powerful thunderstorm, it must be significant in some way. He never elaborated why. His name was Soon, which means emptiness.

The local villagers at Nah Poh were extremely poor, but rich in their faith and devotion to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. They attended the monastery every week on the Observance Day when they listened to teachings, chanted reflections and practised sitting and walking meditation, throughout the night. They offered their skills and labour to help with any monastery construction projects, even if they could not offer much in the way of funds. The monastery was located four kilometres away from the village, along a sandy track that wove its way through a beautiful forest containing many large hardwood trees. There was no electricity or running water in the monastery; and ox carts slowly lumbered along the sandy tracks through the forest next to the monastery. The monastery was so poor that the monks lacked many of the basic requisites we took for granted in other better-supported monasteries. Life at Wat Nah Poh had the air of a different era when life was slower and simpler.

I found living with Ajahn Khun conducive for my meditation and training in mindfulness because the forest was quiet and secluded with few visitors. The minimal accommodation, the sparse living conditions and lack of material requisites were due to the poverty and remoteness of the district, but this contributed to the lack of distractions at the monastery. I continued with the sitter's practice I had begun the year before; and at night I

rested leaning against the wall of the simple wooden *kuti* I was assigned. The resident community at Wat Nah Poh consisted of two monks, two novices and two white-robed nuns. Another monk arrived shortly after me, so suddenly, we had a community of four monks. According to the Vinaya discipline, this meant that we needed a monk to recite the *Pāṭimokkha* rules for the community every fortnight. The *Pāṭimokkha* lists the main 227 training rules of Buddhist monks and Luang Por Chah emphasised its central role in our training. If there are four or more monks living together in the same boundary or monastery, they must come together every two weeks on the *Uposatha* Day, to listen to one of the monks recite the rules. Usually, the monk would have memorised the rules and chants by heart without reading them, while a second monk checks for any mistakes. The recitation takes about 45 minutes to complete, but the time taken can vary from monk to monk.

Within a week of arriving at the monastery, Ajahn Khun asked me to begin memorising the rules of the *Pāṭimokkha*, and prepare myself to fulfil the duty of reciting them for the community. I already had the intention to commit the rules to memory, but suddenly there was pressure on me and an urgency to memorise them as quickly as possible. I was not fully ready when the first *Uposatha* Day arrived, because I had only been learning for ten days. There was not enough time for me to commit every rule to memory. Each day, I spent almost all my waking hours, walking up and down on my meditation path, memorising the rules and chanting them out loud. It gave me a good excuse to send the inquisitive Novice Emptiness away. Ajahn Khun wandered past my *kuti*, from time to time, to observe my progress.

After two more weeks, we reached the next *Uposatha* Day, and Ajahn Khun gave me no choice but to get up on the high

seat and recite the training rules for the community. From then on, I had to chant the *Pāṭimokkha* every two weeks for the next year. I actually found memorising Pali chanting a useful mental training, as it helped me to develop mindfulness, effort and concentration, and it improved my memory. At the same time as memorising the rule in the Pali language, I reviewed the details of each rule which helped me to gain greater clarity and understanding of the practice of the rules in daily life. Reciting the *Pāṭimokkha* also provides an invaluable service to the Sangha. Until I had fully memorised the whole list of rules, I had a clear goal to work on every day. I recited the rules as I walked on the long alms round to and from the village, and I stayed up late at night memorising and chanting the rules out loud. The Thai monks and novice encouraged me by insisting that I was generating such good *kamma* that my parents would be assured a heavenly rebirth once I had memorised and chanted all the rules.

Death of a Dhamma Friend

I had not been with Ajahn Khun for very long when in May, we received the news from Wat Pah Nanachat that Venerable Nyanaviro, the young Malaysian monk who sat next to me at Wat Pah Nanachat, and was a good friend, had died. The news was a surprise as he had been strong and healthy when I left Wat Pah Nanachat, only a few weeks before. When Ajahn Khun walked up to me as I was sweeping the leaves one afternoon and let me know that my friend had died, he noticed the look of surprise on my face and reminded me that death is a normal part of life; and that even young and healthy foreign monks can die just like anyone else. Later, we were told that Venerable Nyanaviro had contracted cerebral malaria at the island monastery, Wat Keuan, where I had spent so much time. The thought that I risked catching cerebral malaria whenever I was resident there did cross my mind, but I did not dwell on it.

I had made friends with Venerable Nyanaviro since our time as *anagārikas*. He had kindly asked his family to assist me when I had to travel to Penang to renew my visa for Thailand. We sat next to each other and continued to be friends as novices and then as junior monks. His death was tragic and heartbreaking for his family. I made the journey back to Wat Pah Nanachat from Ajahn Khun's monastery to join in the funeral chanting and help prepare for the cremation.

It was a hot summer. The coffin, which was not refrigerated, had been placed in the main hall in front of the shrine. The smell of the dead body began to leak out from the coffin. Luang Por Jun kindly stayed at Wat Pah Nanachat to oversee the funeral preparations and give support to the community. As the smell was getting stronger every day, he decided that we should open the coffin and wrap the corpse in clear plastic to try and contain the smell. Only myself and one other monk volunteered to get close to our friend's rapidly deteriorating body; and we carefully lifted the body up and wrapped it in clear plastic to try and reduce the smell seeping out into the hall. In fact, the body had degenerated so far by that time, that it was bloated and there were already maggots inside. It was another stark teaching on impermanence and not-self.

On the day of the funeral, Luang Por Jun and Luang Por Liem led the Sangha in funeral chanting and gave teachings to the hundreds of monks and lay people who had gathered. The gathering of so many monks and laity to honour the young monk, who had died so tragically, was touching, and gave everyone a feeling of warmth and support from the wider community. It was a sad time. I sat up all night with some of the monks meditating and contemplating impermanence next to the funeral pyre. The next day, we collected the ashes so that they could be returned to Venerable Nyanaviro's family. It was a sobering lesson in the uncertainty and fragility of life.

Returning to Wat Nah Poh, I continued my training for almost one more year. Ajahn Khun was a peaceful, restrained and mindful monk who set a good example in the monastery. He encouraged me to develop mindfulness and clear comprehension evenly in all postures; use the framework of the Four Noble Truths to contemplate the nature of suffering; and gain insight into how to abandon the craving and clinging that are its cause. He regularly stayed up late, at night, to lead the Sangha in meditation. On the nights when I stayed on in the meditation hall, to continue sitting and walking meditation through the night, he sometimes surprised me by walking into the hall unexpectedly, in the early hours of the morning, and seemed to be keeping an eye on me. He taught us to use mindfulness of breathing as a way to bring up steady and continuous mindfulness; and bring the mind to stillness, and then to use the stillness to observe the impermanent nature of body and mind; before we contemplate the ownerless nature of the five aggregates. He was always nagging the monks and novices to keep cultivating mindfulness, and not to waste time with too much socialising or sleeping.

The lack of material support for the monastery due to the poverty of the villagers had a direct impact on the small community of monks. It taught us to expect little and use the few resources we had available, frugally. At the beginning of the rains retreat, I was given a cheap torch with two batteries to use, but because no more batteries were offered throughout the entire three months rains retreat, I had to make the original two batteries last until the *Kathina* ceremony, more than three months later when the next offering of batteries arrived. There were a lot of snakes, centipedes and scorpions in the monastery, and I became used to walking in semi-darkness and spreading thoughts of goodwill as I walked, to compensate for the lack of a torchlight.

One night, I returned to my *kuti* in the dark, without using the torch, and when I sat down on my mat, I unwittingly squashed a scorpion. It reacted instantly by stinging me at the top of my leg and the excruciating pain that followed took over 24 hours to subside. On another occasion, I returned to my *kuti* after the evening meditation session to find a poisonous green snake sitting in the middle of the floor with the jaws of a dead gecko embedded in its body. I noticed that my few personal possessions were strewn around the floor and realised that while I was away meditating in the hall, a terrible battle had raged on in my *kuti* before the snake was finally victorious over the fiercely defensive gecko. The snake was stuck with the jaws of the dead gecko embedded in its side; and the only way out of the problem was for it to slowly swallow and digest the gecko. I am sure the snake wanted to leave my hut as soon as it saw me, but it was unable to slither away and had to spend the night, a few feet away from me, trying to swallow the large lizard. I watched the snake as I fell asleep leaning against the wall, and it watched me. We both had no choice but to awkwardly accept our situation. When I woke up a few hours later, the snake was still trying to swallow the gecko. It was not until the middle of the next day, that I could carefully sweep it out of the *kuti* and help it return to the jungle.

During the retreat, I received a parcel from my family and it contained a bar of dark chocolate, one of the medicines we are allowed to consume after noon. It was the only time I was offered chocolate, the whole year I was in the monastery. I considered whether I should keep it for myself or share it with the other monastics. I resolved to practise *dāna-pāramī* and shared it. There was normally no tea, coffee or sugar available at the monastery, but one day the nuns made a hot drink from herbs picked in the forest. I thought it would be the right time to share the chocolate and gave a few pieces each to the

monks and nuns. I was surprised to see that no one seemed too interested as chocolate was not such a popular item in north-east Thailand and it made me doubt the wisdom of my generosity. The two novices put their chocolate pieces into their hot drink and watched them disintegrate and disappear like an animated teaching on emptiness. At first, I thought I had wasted the chocolate, but as I contemplated my attachment to my cultural perceptions and desire for material things, I realised it was a really useful teaching and allowed my mind to just let it all go.

After the rains retreat, it was the custom to visit nearby branch monasteries for their *Kathina* ceremonies and that often involved a walk of ten or fifteen kilometres to the nearest monastery; or at least to where we could catch a lift in a local truck. There was no monastery vehicle in those days. As soon as we arrived at the monastery holding the *Kathina* ceremony, it was customary for the monks to stay up all night, listening to Dhamma talks and meditating, before the *Kathina* cloth was offered in the morning. After the meal offering, we began the walk back to our own monastery. It toughened us up. When Ajahn Khun's monastery was offered some funds by people from the city, during the day of the *Kathina* ceremony, the monks and novices looked at each other with a sigh because we knew that more funds meant more work for the monks. Ajahn Khun wanted to begin constructing a permanent meditation hall. The monks had to assist the lay volunteers and contractors working on the hall, until the money ran out.

All the money offered was used to purchase bags of cement, but there was not enough money left to buy sand and gravel to mix with the cement to make concrete. The monks were asked to take a pushcart out to a rocky part of the forest and transport several cart loads of rocks back to the monastery.

The rocks collected were large and we used a sledgehammer to break them into smaller pieces of gravel to be mixed with sand and cement to make concrete. For several days in succession, I used a sledgehammer to break up the larger rocks rather like a prisoner in a labour camp, but I was happy to help because there really was little choice in the situation. Unfortunately, at one point my arms began to become tired, and I lost control of the swing of my hammer and landed it on my big toe. The whole toenail flew off into the forest leaving me with a bloody, painful and unprotected toe.

I immediately considered that I was receiving the result of some old negative *kamma* and did not get angry. Later on, I considered the incident in my meditation and had an insight that the *kamma* was connected to the fish I had foolishly caught as a boy and attempted to kill by hitting it with a rock. Not long after losing my toenail, I suffered from a skin allergy that made my skin feel so itchy I could not sleep at night and it seemed to be linked to the same past *kamma* with the fish. My skin started turning yellow and the itching was so bad that it felt like my body was on fire. I had to walk many kilometres to see the nearest doctor who told me that my blood was of poor quality and after giving me some supplements, instructed me to start eating meat and fish to boost my protein intake. I thanked the doctor but did not change my diet as I really wanted to teach myself a lesson for previously killing a fish.

While my toe was recovering, the monastery ordered a truckload of sand from the town. The track into the monastery was so soft and muddy that it was impassable to heavy vehicles; and the truck tipped over, spilling its load about five hundred metres away from the monastery. The monks and nuns had to go out with pushcarts and retrieve the sand by hand. It turned out that

we still did not have enough sand to mix all the concrete, so it was decided to collect natural sand from a nearby riverbank. The only way to get the villagers to help with collecting sand was to wait for the Observance Day when they came to the monastery. When the day came, the monks and villagers went out to the river together, and worked all day in the sun. After a day of carrying sand up from the riverbank and tipping it into a truck until it was full, we then stayed up all night listening to Dhamma teaching and meditating.

Generally, the monks were harmonious and supported each other in the practice. During the rains retreat, we were joined by a new monk who was a former member of a local gang. He was hoping to change his conduct for the better. He had a huge scar across his forehead from an old machete wound and everyone was wary of him. In fact, trying as a monk brought out the best side of the man. He got on well with everyone. Despite his tough exterior, he had many fears. One morning, as he took the lid off his alms bowl to prepare it for alms round in the village, a huge toad jumped out. It was the rainy season and the monastery had become infested with toads. The monk screamed out in fear, as he had a phobia for toads and he ran off into the forest, disappearing for about 5 minutes before he composed himself, and sheepishly returned, much to the amusement of Novice Emptiness. This prompted Ajahn Khun to order us to round up as many of the invading toads as we could, but only Novice Emptiness and myself were willing to do the task. We spent the day collecting toads in buckets and eventually they were exiled into the deeper jungle a few kilometres away.

Cellulitis - Another Uncompromising Teacher

After the *Kāṭhina* ceremony at our own monastery, I travelled with Novice Emptiness to join the ceremony at Wat Keuan because the resident monks needed help in organising the

event and I had lived with them before. I did not realise before I travelled that I already had cellulitis in my left leg; and as soon as I arrived at the island monastery, I immediately offered assistance with the preparations for the event. I helped escort senior monks up and down the hill, from the boat landing to the meditation hall; and as I did this my leg began to swell up and became excruciatingly painful. I managed to cope with the pain, throughout the overnight programme, but by the time the all- night Dhamma teaching concluded, I found that I was no longer able to walk. We delayed our return to Wat Nah Poh and after all the visitors had left the monastery, I barely managed to hobble over to one of the broken-down huts, near the kitchen formerly occupied by the nuns, and slumped down, unable to walk.

I ended up spending an additional month at the island monastery recovering from the cellulitis, but my good fortune in the midst of the latest round of suffering was that Novice Emptiness proved to be an admirable friend. One of the resident monks tried to treat the swollen leg with local herbal remedies for the first few days, but that proved ineffective and slowly a large, infected wound opened up on the shin; and finally reached the bone. The wound became septic and began oozing pus. Eventually, the senior monk contacted a doctor's clinic, at the hydroelectric power plant on the mainland, because my leg's condition was deteriorating so quickly. From then on, I travelled daily to the clinic to receive treatment for cleaning up the wound and neutralising the infection. Novice Emptiness pushed me in a cart downhill, a distance of one kilometre through the jungle, to the boat landing. He then helped me paddle across the reservoir to the boat landing on the opposite shore where the doctor's assistant met us in a truck and took us to the clinic. After the treatment, we made the return trip which required Novice Emptiness to push me up the hill as I sat on the cart. I

was grateful for his heroic assistance each day, which continued for almost one month.

On our first meeting, the doctor told me that I was lucky because had I left my leg unattended much longer, it would have become gangrenous; and I could have even lost it altogether. The doctor's methods to clean up the wound were simple and straightforward. Without using any local anaesthetic, he took a scalpel and began scraping pus and infected flesh from the infected area which went right through to the bone. He caught me by surprise. The method was extremely painful, so the first time he put the scalpel in to the area of infected flesh, I cried out in pain. Novice Emptiness immediately rebuked me for my lack of equanimity; and explained to me that I needed to make my mindfulness firmer so that I could detach my mind from the pain. He reminded me that all painful feelings are not-self. I could not argue with his wisdom. It was like having a teenage Luang Por Chah next to me, giving me a guided meditation on the non-self nature of pain, while I was in surgery.

From that day on, I used patience and mindfulness to manage my response to the pain and refused to utter a sound, even though the daily process of cleaning the wound was intensely painful. I went to the clinic each day for a month; and had numerous opportunities to cultivate mindfulness and insight as I contemplated my body as merely a body composed of elements without an owner, and feelings as merely feelings without an owner. My time with the doctor and on my own, immobile in the *kuti*, turned out to be an unexpectedly intense meditation retreat and a real boost to my cultivation of the Dhamma, albeit a painful one.

I was extremely grateful to have such a mature 16 year-old novice looking after me during that difficult time. Occasionally, his youthful desire for fun got the better of him. Sometimes

when he pushed the cart with me on it down the hill to the boat landing, he let it pick up speed and then released his grip on the handle and ran after the uncontrolled cart whooping with delight, while I had to endure the bumps and knocks. I could not deny him his fun, even if it was at my expense, because on the return trip, he had to expend a lot of energy to push me uphill, in the heat of the day. On one occasion, we encountered the leader of the pack of wild boars who snorted and stamped his feet in front of us. Luckily, at the last minute, he turned and galloped away. Seeing him turn and run, we decided that he was really full of hot air, but continued to remain heedful.

On another occasion, Novice Emptiness was enjoying a good run down the hill towards the boat landing when, as we picked up speed, he suddenly flung the cart sideways into the thick jungle. I was thrown out of the front of the cart, against a tree and was left on the ground. I was about to tell him that he had finally gone too far with his pranks when he pointed his finger towards the path, and shouted for me to look carefully before scolding him. Coiled up in the middle of the path was a massive king cobra with its head dancing from side to side in anger. It was primed and ready to attack us, but I had not seen it because I sat with my head facing the other direction. Instead of scolding Novice Emptiness, I praised his quick thinking and after the shocked snake had calmed down, we had a good laugh about our close call with disaster, while we watched it slither away.

Five weeks later than planned, I was able to walk again and we finally returned by truck and on foot to Wat Nah Poh. It was afternoon chores time when we arrived. Ajahn Khun received me kindly, and enquired about my leg; while in the next breath he scolded Novice Emptiness for disappearing for so long, without his permission. He instructed the novice to put down his bowl and bag, and start hauling water with the other monks, before he even had time to rest and unpack from the journey.

This was the style of the teachers in north-east Thailand who were very direct with junior monks and novices. We used to say that the style was what you might call: scold first, talk later. Ajahn Khun knew that the novice would have treated our unexpected stay in another monastery as an adventure holiday; and might well have picked up some new habits of indulgence, so he wanted to get him back in line as quickly as possible. Novice Emptiness slowly walked off to join the work team with a look on his face that seemed to say that the party was over.

During the dry season, I moved into the jungle at the back of the monastery and stayed in my umbrella tent as I had done in the dry season of previous years. The air temperature felt freezing at night, because of the chill factor from the constant cold winds coming down from Laos. So, I collected straw from the paddy fields to make a warm base to sit on and rested leaning on a tree. I resumed the practice of only eating the food I collected in my bowl on alms round, which was challenging because of the poverty of the villagers, but still manageable. No one knew I was a vegetarian and I had to accept that I would not eat much of the food I received. One morning a village woman with great faith and whose son was a monk at Wat Pah Nanachat, came out to offer me a set of barbecued frogs on skewers. The locals considered the food a treat; and I appreciated her kindness because I knew she was really poor. I went back to my spot in the jungle and was followed by a village dog ever hopeful to eat my leftover rice. That day, I was the one who ate plain rice and the happy dog got to eat the barbecued frogs.

I continued to train with Ajahn Khun, for a couple more months, until April 1987 when I was called back to Wat Pah Nanachat for the funeral service of an old English gentleman who had passed away from cancer. He had come to live close

by to the monastery to meditate and prepare for his death. On the day I departed from the monastery, I bowed and paid my respects to Ajahn Khun and asked forgiveness in the traditional manner. He encouraged me to keep meditating; and cultivating the mindfulness and wisdom to abandon attachment. He encouraged me to keep putting effort into developing states of *samādhi*, but at the same time, he reminded me to develop wisdom through paying close attention to the three universal characteristics of existence.

Ajahn Khun reminded me to contemplate the uncertainty of all phenomena, regardless of the states of stillness that I experienced in meditation, visions and any experiences of deep rapture and bliss. He taught me to see the impermanent and non-self nature of these conditions, rather than cling to them with a sense of self-identity or believe them to be attainments. He warned me that if one stops cultivating wisdom, then one can become stuck in the practice; and can even develop the defilements of insight; rather than true knowledge and insight that cuts off craving and mental defilements. He brought up the case of one well-known student of Luang Por Chah who had attained states of deep *jhāna*, but had not gone on to develop wisdom through cultivating insight. That monk thought he was enlightened already and this had become a stumbling block in his practice. I considered Ajahn Khun's words of wisdom and felt that they were a truly noble expression of compassion.

‘*Bhāvana*’ Means Cultivation Of Calm And Insight

One new activity I took up at Wat Pah Nanachat, was helping the senior monks with their work translating Luang Por Chah's teachings into English; and at the same time, I began improving my own translations as an offering to the community. When there was an opportunity, I went over to Wat Nong Pah Pong to

help look after Luang Por Chah. If it was possible, I volunteered for a double shift which meant living with him for a month at a time. At Wat Pah Nanachat, I felt more confident in my meditation practice; and assisted the Sangha in whatever duties I was capable of, such as administration and small tasks using my Thai language skills.

In my own training, I continued to refrain from lying down and built myself a small sloping bamboo backrest to lean on when I rested at night. I had been refraining from lying down for a couple of years by that time; and still found the practice kept me focused on developing mindfulness and not indulging in sleep. During the rains retreat, the community followed a daily schedule that included morning meetings from 3:30am to 5:00am, 3 hours of group meditation from 1:00pm to 4:00pm in the afternoon, followed by a break; and then another group meeting from 7:00pm until 9:00pm. I found the routine quite helpful to bring up energy in my meditation and observed that the longer I sat without changing posture, generally the stronger my mindfulness became. I decided to begin the programme of sitting meditation at 1:00pm, but rather than change posture and get up for the walking meditation period at 2:00pm, I continued to sit in meditation, throughout the afternoon and early evening, until 8.00pm when evening chanting began.

Undertaking to sit non-stop for 7 hours was a natural development of many years practicing mindfulness of breathing. When I began meditating at 17, I could only sit for a maximum of 3 minutes at a time because my legs were so painful. I did not see that increasing the length of time I could sit in meditation, without moving as a goal in itself; but found that the patient effort required when sitting for longer periods improved my mindfulness and clear comprehension and helped me let go of

the hindrances more effectively. Improving the level of patient effort I applied to my meditation helped me to develop deeper states of *samādhi*; and in turn a clearer insight into impermanence of body and mind.

The new practice of sitting longer, during the day, also complemented the all-night sitting I did once a week, when I also began to spend the whole night sitting meditation without moving or getting up. These were practices based partly on endurance, but what encouraged me to continue was that I found that the factors of *samādhi* arose more strongly; and my mind became brighter and more peaceful. In my experience, the longer I sat meditating without moving, the deeper the state of stillness; and the firmer the experience of equanimity I would achieve. I went through periods of intense pain, but then the pain also disappeared for periods of time. I experienced physical weariness periodically, but sometimes I found that the weariness also disappeared. My mind fell into drowsiness from time to time and then the drowsiness would disappear.

In general, the longer I sat in meditation, the stronger my mindfulness and equanimity became, and the clearer I saw the five hindrances as impermanent mental phenomena that can be abandoned. Repeatedly observing mental states arising and ceasing, and knowing painful feelings as merely feelings arising and ceasing, made me braver in the practice. I had no choice other than to face up to and contemplate any aversion and attachment to pain I experienced; and separate the mind from it using both mindfulness and insight. Little by little insight grew, and whether I experienced sleepiness or boredom, lust or anxiety, I observed these mental states as merely states of mind that arise and cease, according to causes and conditions.

Mettā Nourishes The Practice

I realised with clarity over time, that when you put forth effort to go against the flow of mental defilements, it is easy to become irritated with other people or oneself; or to react negatively to any obstructive conditions. Every day, I continued to include time in my meditation for the development of *mettā* or loving kindness directed to myself and the members of the resident community, to counter such negative habits of mind. I still set the standard for myself that every evening, I must be able to sit down and clear my mind of any aversion to other people before moving on to my main meditation of mindfulness of breathing. Outside of my meditation, I consciously cultivated the attitudes of goodwill and compassion; and mostly channeled such good intentions into helping the community; practising tolerance with the people around me. If I found myself falling into strong aversion for another person, I sought out solitude and contemplated until I let go of the aversion as quickly as possible. I always aimed to develop equanimity and maintain a normal state of mind, with an attitude of loving kindness and patience in whatever I was doing, because I knew how easily irritation and aversion can be triggered. If I could not seek out solitude then I had to learn to control my temper in my speech and conduct; and not take out any irritation I experience on others. I reflected on the teaching that generally, you have to forgive others, a little more often than you would like.

Living in a community with monks drawn from so many different backgrounds and cultures, it was not surprising that there were occasionally misunderstandings or disagreements when people held different views and opinions. People can be passionate about their views on meditation or the correct way to approach the monastic training; and sometimes this leads to personal suffering or disharmony between individuals. I wanted

to make sure I was not holding on to views and opinions so tightly that they caused my thinking to be biased; or cause conflict with other monastics or lay visitors. I cultivated friendliness and tolerance even to those who held different opinions on the practice or had different preferences from me. If I saw faults in others, I tried to look back at myself and see if I had those same faults. I put effort into cultivating right speech; and preferred to say little if I had nothing useful to say. I followed the lead of senior monks in learning how to avoid creating a problem when other people's views differed from my own; and I learned not to judge their behaviour too quickly. I focused on the good in others; and if I came across any unskilful conduct, I tried not to dwell on it in my mind. I found it helpful to ask myself if I still spoke or acted in those same unskilful ways that I had observed in others; and I set my mind on changing my behaviour, rather than always focusing critically on others or complaining about other people's faults.

Sexual Desire - The Flame In The Matchhead

Every monk has to face strong sexual desire, from time to time; and also, its younger sibling of sensual desire or craving pleasure through sense experience. The monastic life exposes the fact that sensual desire is deeply rooted in our conditioning; and a recurring obstacle to the development of *samādhī* and wisdom. Living in the jungle in Thailand brought with it the benefits of seclusion. When I arrived, I did not know anyone locally which helped minimise the opportunity for socialising with females or creating strong attachments that could stimulate sexual attraction. But I still had to learn to restrain my eyes and imagination when in contact with the public. From my first day in the robes, I consciously minimised my contact with female visitors to the monastery. As a layman, I had managed to avoid having sexual relations with anyone, even though I had some

close female friends and experienced some close calls, throughout my youth. In the monastery, I began practising sense restraint and contemplating the unattractiveness of the body and the repulsiveness of food, every day. I learned to be on my guard for situations or people that might trigger sensual desire. The Thai monks compared the danger of sexual attraction to the potential for fire contained in the head of a match. Whenever the match is struck correctly, fire will emerge and burn things up. Senior monks warned us of the danger from sensuality and sexual desire, all the time.

One morning, not long after I returned to Wat Pah Nanachat from Ajahn Khun's monastery, a large group of young foreign school teachers who were travelling around Thailand walked into the monastery eating hall, just before the meal. I was sitting in meditation with the other monks, and opened my eyes as the group came into the hall and sat down right in front of the monks. One of the female teachers closely resembled a former girlfriend of mine. My heart froze for a moment as I thought it really was my former girlfriend coming to visit me. I was not sure whether to run for cover or face the music, but fortunately as my eyes focused, I realised that it was a case of mistaken identity. I had a good laugh at myself. The panic caused by the welling up of strong emotions subsided quickly, but it was a good lesson on how strong emotions can spring up at any time, if the conditions are right.

On another occasion, a young Thai woman staying in the monastery wanted to talk to me because I could speak some Thai. She kept seeking out opportunities whenever I was in the public area of the monastery. Eventually, she grew tired of my failure to engage in anything more than a brief conversation and began seeking out and talking to another monk. Generally,

I tried to avoid such encounters to minimise the risk to my practice, but even when I successfully kept to myself, I still had to deal with my own imagination; and that is where contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body became a good friend. All my teachers advised me to continue that practice on a daily basis. It is one of the four protective meditations; and over time, I came to trust in its role in preventing lust from arising, and keeping the mind out of trouble. I studied the skeleton we had hanging up in the meditation hall and I practised visualising the thirty-two parts of the body. I followed Luang Por Chah's instructions and looked at the wrinkled skin on the feet and hands of the grannies as I walked for alms through the village and practised averting my eyes from the gaze of any young females and generally ignoring them. I was not the teacher so there was little need for me to engage with the laity at all, and I could carry on with my contemplation in peace.

Learning From The Teacher - Luang Por Chah

Over the next ten months, I moved between Wat Pah Nanachat and Wat Nong Pah Pong, as I spent much of my time as part of the team of monks attending to Luang Por Chah, whose health continued to deteriorate. I also spent some time assisting Luang Por Liem at Wat Nong Pah Pong, out of gratitude for all the work he was doing to look after Luang Por Chah, and the monastery. I observed how much effort he put into his own practice and how thorough and dedicated he was in the way he served Luang Por Chah, and ran the monastery. He hardly rested. Luang Por Chah had given Luang Por Liem the responsibility of leading the monks and nuns at the monastery; and I learned much as I observed how he maintained his mindfulness and equanimity, in the face of many challenging situations; and how he used his wisdom to solve a range of problems. He had a thankless task to be responsible for the care



Ajahn Kalyano with Ajahn Chah at
the nursing *kuti* in Wat Nong Pah Pong 1991.

of Luang Por Chah; and the running of the monastery. Other senior disciples of Luang Por Chah were quick to criticise him if anything went wrong. Luang Por Liem constantly provided skilful leadership and installed a sense of harmony into the large group of monks; and always seemed to maintain a cool head, whatever the situation. In spite of his heavy burden of responsibility, and the pressure from all the monastic and lay disciples of Luang Por Chah, he maintained an even temper, with a peaceful and composed conduct through it all.

Remaining close to Luang Por Chah, during his illness, taught me many things about how we are suffering because of attachment and the value of letting go. The energy coming from him was always very powerful and peaceful that pervaded the whole monastery. It seemed to contradict the image of his weakened physical body which was painfully degenerating, day by day. He was so much physically weaker than any of us, and yet seemed to keep going because of his well-trained mind, great endurance and insight into emptiness. Observing Luang Por Chah helped me question my own mind, on those occasions when I thought that I was too tired to continue meditating or complete some tasks I had been assigned. Luang Por Chah was weak in body, but used his skill in *samādhi*, and his experience of non-attachment to cope with and transcend the constant pain and discomfort of his ageing body.

Recollecting Luang Por Chah was part of the practice of *Saṅghānussati* meditation which inspired me. However, I had to contemplate the danger of attaching to him as my teacher. He was slowly dying before my very eyes; and if I did not accept the reality of impermanence, I would suffer. I had to accept that the teacher would soon be gone; and that his teachings and the example of how he practiced would be what continued. I also

had to negotiate other people's attachment to Luang Por Chah which occasionally stimulated extreme emotional reactions in the monks, and lay people close to him. Strong attachment to the teacher led some students to express their firmly held views and opinions about what was and what was not correct for the care of the teacher; and I witnessed the occasional argument over the best or proper methods to use.

As time went on, I became gradually more involved in the day-to-day decision-making and discussions around different aspects of Luang Por Chah's care. I noticed how people's strong faith in the teacher made them determined to do the best job in caring for him. Occasionally, their strong faith obstructed them from seeing or accepting other people's point of view, when we discussed the appropriate course of action in different situations. Differences of opinion on the best way to care for Luang Por Chah could lead to strong disagreements, but Luang Por Liem normally had the last word in such situations. I learnt not to get into heated arguments with other monks and preferred to listen and make suggestions rather than force my views on anyone. I always made caring for Luang Por Chah the focus of my attention when I was with him. Some monks were protective of their role in caring for Luang Por Chah. A few were competitive and followed their conceit and views; but most monks were quiet, respectful, generous in sharing information and easy to work with. They simply provided the best care they could for their teacher. I practised restraint in my speech and conduct, during my time at his *kuti*; and when things were quiet and there were no activities, I sat to one side and meditated.

Sometimes it seemed as if Luang Por Chah was consciously helping the monks around him to improve their practice of mindfulness and clear comprehension. When I massaged his

arms, he often pulled against me to show that he still had some muscle control; and perhaps to let me know that he was aware of me. As I became more experienced in caring for him, I was asked to offer the liquid food prepared by the nuns for him each morning. We used a large syringe with a rubber end that was gently placed inside his mouth. The monk offering his food had to wait patiently until Luang Por Chah swallowed. He could not be forced or hurried. We massaged his neck muscles to ease the process of swallowing food and sometimes, when he was unable to swallow or uninterested to eat, we could only give him the smallest of meals. I never experienced any resistance from Luang Por Chah when I offered him food, although it was clear, on some days that he did not wish to eat very much. If any monk tried to force Luang Por Chah to eat thinking they knew what was best for him, he might not cooperate and would not swallow the food. In an extreme instance, Luang Por Chah refused to cooperate with one senior monk who was perhaps too heavy-handed. He hit the monk's hands away with his own so hard that the syringe containing the liquid food was sent flying across the room. That senior monk became so unsettled that he refused to continue offering food; and left his nursing shift early. We found out later that the monk had been breaking some of the monastic training rules; and wondered if Luang Por Chah knew and was unwilling to cooperate with him.

Luang Por Chah had many different illnesses concurrently, but his chronic lung disease was the one which had a huge impact on the quality of his life, in his later years. He experienced phlegm and mucus blocking his windpipe constantly which resulted in violent coughing fits, but he did not have the strength or control of his muscles to help himself, during those moments. Day and night, we had to be on alert for the first sign of coughing as there was a real possibility that he could choke and stop breathing or fall out of bed. When he began coughing, his entire body

moved and he could not support himself. Each time, the monks had to stop whatever they were doing and rushed to his aid. Sometimes, he accidentally knocked over his urine bottle. We always changed his bed sheets, as soon as they were soiled, even if it meant repeating the task, several times a day.

At times when two monks were distracted in their own conversation or having a quiet disagreement about something, or when a monk was falling asleep, it seemed like a timely cough from Luang Por Chah brought each monk back to the present moment. A cough from Luang Por Chah cut through unmindful conversations and the stories and fantasies of each monk's mind when they were lost in their own thoughts. Luang Por Chah coughed many times a day, but many of us believed that some of those coughs were deliberate, and used as a simple method for making the monks around him pay attention to what they were doing; and bring up mindfulness. Even if the coughs were all generated naturally by his illness, they served to bring everyone's attention back to the duty of caring for the teacher, which was natural because of each monk's love and respect for Luang Por Chah.

Every day, monks and lay devotees visited Luang Por Chah to pay respects and express their faith and gratitude. Some visitors prostrated in front of him and then sat quietly meditating outside his *kuti*, on the lawn. Other visitors chanted and some enquired about Luang Por Chah's condition from the attendant monks. Many practitioners described how they entered much deeper states of stillness when they meditated in close proximity to Luang Por Chah. Other visitors were obviously experiencing pain or suffering in their own lives; and sat to one side crying softly or wishing for a blessing from the teacher. Sometimes after sitting near Luang Por Chah for a while, they seemed to find some temporary relief or resolution to their problem, without a word being said; and departed looking calmer and

more relaxed. Occasionally, the facial expression of a visitor changed from a frown to a smile, after some time spent sitting in the presence of the teacher. Whether it was just one or two individuals visiting him or an entire busload of several hundred faithful devotees, everyone seemed to appreciate the calm and peaceful atmosphere surrounding Luang Por Chah.

Even animals were attracted by the kindness and compassion emanating from Luang Por Chah. One day, a huge tortoise came slowly walking from the forest and sat motionless outside the window facing him, for a few hours, while the monks went about their business. Another day, a cobra came to slither up to the veranda and coil up next to the window as if on guard. Many birds and parrots came to live at the *kuti* for periods of time; and stayed close to the monks while refusing to let any of the lay visitors touch them. The monks were keen to protect Luang Por Chah from ants, mosquitoes and flies; and for ten years, every insect that entered his room was carefully trapped and released outside with the minimum of force. Some monks were so skilled that they could catch a fly or a mosquito in their bare hands and release it outside, without harming it.

On one occasion, a local woman who had a reputation for wanting a western man for a husband, came to Luang Por Chah's *kuti* and requested to meet me. At the time, I was sitting in meditation on the floor inside the room next to Luang Por Chah; and was easily visible from the windows which were all around the room. Twice, she was told by monks who met her outside, to go to the window and ask to speak to me, but she told them that when she stood outside the window and looked in, she could not see me. Eventually, she went away assuming I was not present and that the monks were mistaken. Later, nobody could explain how this had happened, but the monks thought that Luang Por Chah had somehow helped me avoid a person who may have come to the monastery for the wrong reasons.

Family Bonds

In November 1988, my parents and brother visited Thailand. I was happy that they agreed to stay at Wat Pah Nanachat and were willing to put up with the simple monastic accommodation. I knew that if they stayed in the monastery, it would be the best way to introduce them to Buddhist monasticism and the teachings. We put my father and brother in a monk's *kuti* in the jungle and although I was concerned that they would be uncomfortable, I was happy that they could observe our daily activities and experience firsthand, how we lived in the jungle. My mother stayed on her own in a *kuti* in the women's section. Each day, I visited her dwelling to chase away the mice and geckos; and change the water in the moat surrounding the *kuti* which acted as a barrier against the ants and termites. My family had to put up with thin mattresses, cold showers, mosquitoes, ants, spicy food and the heat, but they did not complain.

I took them to visit Luang Por Chah and my parents commented on how well trained the monks were; and what an impressive job they were doing as they cared for him. Like so many people, they found the mindfulness, restraint and compassion displayed by the monks inspiring, and knew that it was the result of having a good teacher. They were not yet fully aware of all aspects of the Buddha's teachings, but they appreciated that Luang Por Chah was a special teacher. It was their good fortune to have met him. They received teachings from Luang Por Liem which I translated; and from Ajahn Pasanno who they had met previously when he visited Amaravati Monastery in the UK. Like so many of the family members of the western monks, my family was touched by the level of hospitality and warmth shown to them by the Thai lay devotees. People did their best to make them comfortable and offer them the best food, the best seats and the best accommodation wherever we took them.

We travelled to Bangkok and Chiang Mai together, and it was a good opportunity for my family to see that in Thailand, Buddhism is a mainstream religion and monks have a highly respected and central role to play in the society. Whenever we travelled out of the monastery, they observed that wherever we went, the Thai people we encountered constantly asked me why I had become a monk; and wanted me to tell them about my Dhamma practice. Although my parents were not Buddhists, they were moved by the level of reverence and respect shown to me and other monks. In Bangkok, Khun Vanee Lumsum kindly took care of them and arranged visits for us to a number of important monasteries and also the Grand Palace. My mother was impressed when a soldier guarding the palace brought out a chair and umbrella for protection against the sun and offered them straight to me, rather than to her. I shared them with her later, but she noticed how automatically people took care of monks wherever we went.

My family's visit was a chance for me to show them firsthand how I was living, both in the jungle and outside. They were able to put aside many of their doubts about my well-being. At that time, I chose not to inform them of any previous accidents I had; and did not tell them about the worst of my bad health experiences in my first few years, as a monk. I certainly did not mention the fact that the monk who sat next to me had died of malaria the year before. When they left Thailand, they were really impressed and much more at ease with how I was living and practising as a monk. My mother confided in me that a few of my friends had marital problems, drink problems and unfortunately one of them had committed suicide. It seemed to dawn on her that I could be doing something much worse.



“ “

Then Venerable Ānanda went up to the Buddha,
bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him:
“Sir, good friends, companions, and associates
are half of the spiritual life.”

“Not so, Ānanda! Not so, Ānanda!
Good friends, companions, and associates
are the whole of the spiritual life.

A mendicant
with good friends, companions, and associates
can expect to develop and cultivate
the Noble Eightfold Path.”

Upaḍḍhasutta
(*Samyukta Nikāya* 45.2)

Kalyāṇamitta - Dhamma Friends

Sangha Family

Spending long periods of time with Luang Por Chah gave me the opportunity to meet many monks from his Sangha; and also senior monks and meditation teachers from monasteries further afield. Both monks and lay Buddhists travelled from all over Thailand and abroad, to visit and pay respects to him. I often had the chance to meet senior monks and talk about Dhamma practice, when they visited his *kuti*. I made friends with Ajahn Piak, Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Dtun, who visited Luang Por Chah regularly and were already considered wise and peaceful monks, even though they were still quite young. They sent their students to help serve Luang Por Chah; and those monks encouraged me to spend time with their teacher, Ajahn Piak, because of his recognised skills in meditation and his direct knowledge of the mind. Eventually in April 1988, I requested permission from Ajahn Pasanno to spend time practising under the guidance of Ajahn Piak at his monastery, located on a piece of swampland near the old Bangkok International Airport.



Ajahn Somchai, Ajahn Piak, Ajahn Kanok, Ajahn Chah,
Ajahn Kalyano, Ajahn Anan, Ajahn Revat, Ajahn Tong
at Ajahn Chah's nursing *kuti* in 1991.



How Do You Enter *Samādhi* With Jumbo Jets Flying Overhead?

In May 1988, I travelled from Wat Pah Nanachat to Wat Fah Krahm, located in marshland near the airport on the northern edge of Bangkok. Ajahn Piak, the senior monk at Wat Fah Krahm, had only been a monk for thirteen years but had a good reputation for his skill with *samādhi* and his understanding of Luang Por Chah's teachings. He was good friends with Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Dtun who had previously lived with him in Wat Fah Krahm, when the land was first offered to Luang Por Chah. However, by 1988, Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Dtun had moved to Rayong province to begin Wat Marp Jan. I was the first foreign monk to spend the rains retreat under the guidance of Ajahn Piak, so it was a new experience for all of us.

When I arrived at the monastery, there were only a couple of monks living with Ajahn Piak. I had plenty of opportunities to discuss the Dhamma with him. He explained to me how to cultivate the qualities needed to progress in meditation; and how to overcome different obstacles. He emphasised the cultivation of mindfulness, clear comprehension and equanimity, in all postures. In those days, the monastery was quiet and undeveloped with almost no daily visitors. Although it was located next to vacant swampland, on the edge of the city, it still retained an atmosphere of seclusion and tranquility, despite being so close to houses and factories. There was a good feeling of harmony and dedication to the practice in the monastery which was in large part due to Ajahn Piak's warm and peaceful presence; and also, the faith and sincerity of the monks. Living with Ajahn Piak confirmed to me that cultivating the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path; following in the footsteps of the Buddha and letting go of mental defilements should be the focus

of my practice. This goal was more important than finding the perfect place or conditions for the practice. The monastery was right on the flight path to Bangkok International Airport; and I had no choice but to learn how to let go of any irritation arising from hearing the constant sounds of jet engines, day and night. I learnt to focus my awareness on my own mind; one time, I even found that experiencing such disturbance was actually a really useful training in letting go. There was no point holding on to irritation and aversion, directed at the sound of jet engines when there was nothing I could do about it.

Ajahn Piak provided a good example of how to maintain mindfulness and contemplate the impermanence of sights, sounds and smells that came in from the nearby urban areas. Not only did we hear the sounds of aeroplanes overhead, but also the sounds of traffic and music from nearby roads. Every afternoon as we swept leaves, we had to maintain mindfulness as we encountered the food smells wafting in from the nearby street vendors. On the second day in the monastery, I commented to Ajahn Piak that the level of sense impingement in the monastery was much higher than monks normally experience in other forest monasteries. His response was that he practised contemplating the impermanent nature of sense objects and kept his attention directed inwards towards his mind, rather than letting it wander out to the objects of the senses. He said he practised maintaining mindfulness and letting go of mental defilements following the instructions of Luang Por Chah. He made it sound very easy.

Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Dtun visited Wat Fah Krahm regularly, so I became friendly with them. We regularly discussed Dhamma practice together. When Ajahn Piak and Ajahn Anan heard that I had kept to the ascetic practice of not lying down for the past

four years, they encouraged me to give up that practice and suggested that my energy level and strength of mindfulness would improve as a result. They advised that if I observed not lying down on selective nights, such as during the lunar half-moon and full moon Observance Days, rather than every night, my mindfulness would improve; and I would experience deeper states of *samādhi* more frequently. They thought that if I gained better quality rest for my body, I would be physically stronger and able to maintain more consistent mindfulness in all postures. Just before the rains retreat, after almost four years of not lying down, I finally allowed myself to sleep at night lying down on a mat. I found that Ajahn Piak's prediction about my meditation practice actually came true. My meditation did improve. Ajahn Piak continued to encourage me to sleep little and meditate all night sometimes, but he also reminded me to rest enough when I needed to, so that my body was stronger and healthier. While I lived in his monastery, I still spent much of the nighttime meditating because the air temperature was cooler, and the monastery was more peaceful at night. The mosquitoes that swarmed, out of the swamps at night, were however challenging, and they became good teachers.

The *Arahant* In The City

Ajahn Piak explained the importance of maintaining one's practice, even in challenging situations. He talked about different teachers who were good examples to follow. He mentioned Chao Khun Nor Dhammavitakko, from Wat Thep Sirin in Bangkok, who had also been praised by Luang Por Chah. He was known in the circle of monks as the *Arahant* in the city, because he was reputed to have practised and realised the cessation of suffering in the middle of Bangkok. Ajahn Piak took me to visit Ajahn Maha Umpun who was one of Chao Khun Nor's few direct disciples; and he still lived at the same

city monastery. We listened to his inspiring words of guidance on how to cultivate sense restraint, mindfulness and insight meditation when living in a large, busy monastery surrounded by buildings, cars and people. It was encouraging to hear how a monk, with determination and self-discipline, can still meditate and follow the training rules in such a challenging environment.

Ajahn Maha Umpun described how his teacher, Chao Khun Nor Dhammavitakko, upheld the monastic discipline strictly, meditated many hours a day and eventually achieved the experience of full awakening, in the middle of Bangkok. Chao Khun Nor Dhammavitakko slept in a coffin to remind himself of the impermanence of life. He taught the monks that he had only had good experiences, arising from his recollection of death as a meditation. Chao Khun Nor Dhammavitakko never missed a group meditation meeting in the monastery, throughout his entire monk's life except on the day he died. He said if you are focused on training yourself for *Nibbāna* you would not allow yourself to get distracted by the various monastic ceremonies, teaching programmes and different forms of engagement with lay society that can pull monks away from training the mind. Ajahn Maha Umpun reminded us that it is possible to progress in the cultivation of the Noble Eightfold Path; and liberate your mind from the influence of the mental defilements, wherever you are. I returned to Ajahn Piak's monastery together with the other monks, having received some simple but effective teachings that I still use today.

Asubha - Meditation On Unattractiveness Of The Body

Living at Ajahn Piak's monastery brought up a few minor challenges. At night, there were so many mosquitoes in the air that you could not stand still without getting bitten. They even land on you during walking meditation. Cobras and king cobras lived in holes under the buildings; and they regularly crossed paths

with the monks, helping us to remain alert and mindful. One night, a civet cat deposited the large, smelly and maggot-filled corpse of a snake on the veranda of my *kuti*. It seemed like a gift from heaven, as Ajahn Piak was teaching me to contemplate the unattractiveness of the body, using the ten-corpse meditations. I was meditating on these themes in a more determined way than before. Throughout my time under Ajahn Piak's guidance, I developed the perception of the unattractiveness of the body, on a daily basis, until I became very familiar with seeing myself and others as corpses and particularly as skeletons. I found this practice especially helpful because I encountered more people daily than I had previously, at other monasteries and many of them were young women. We went into the large adjoining housing estate on alms round, every morning, and most of the people putting food in our bowls were females of all ages. Some of them engaged in brief conversations with the monks; and some got to know me as we met daily. I was experiencing deeper and steadier states of calm in my meditation, so I turned to contemplate the unattractiveness of the body all the time. Following Luang Por Chah's encouragement, I practised visualising myself and others as skeletons.

Ajahn Piak trusted me enough to talk openly about his own meditation practice. It gave some insight into the development of *Sammā samādhi* or correct *samādhi* according to the Noble Eightfold Path. Occasionally, he let me know about the practice of other monks; and their level of understanding and skill in meditation if he thought it was appropriate. Ajahn Piak had developed deep states of stillness and psychic powers from an early age; and because he was still a fairly junior monk and relatively unknown as a meditation teacher, it was easier for me to ask him direct questions, and I received some very direct answers. I am also grateful that he encouraged me to respect and learn from other well-practised meditation teachers, living in

different parts of Thailand. He introduced me to some wise and compassionate teachers that I had never heard of before; and revealed what a rich and varied tradition of meditation monks Thailand has. We visited monks outside the Luang Por Chah lineage such as Luang Por Boodah, Luang Por Buddhadasa, Luang Pu Doo, Luang Por Jia, Luang Por Puth and Somdet Prayuth Payutto who only lived one kilometre away from Wat Fah Krahm. I got to hear about the lives and practice of many well-practised and wise monks.

Before the rains retreat, I accompanied Ajahn Piak to visit Wat Suan Or, a small forest monastery, under his guidance in Chonburi. Situated on a quiet forested hill, surrounded by sugarcane fields, the monastery was quite suitable for developing meditation. We stayed there for a week; and he left me behind when he returned to Bangkok. Ajahn Piak gave me a chance to improve my meditation in a quieter monastery, but he did return to visit regularly over the following weeks. There was a small group of dedicated monks in residence; and each time, Ajahn Piak returned to visit, we had a good opportunity to discuss the Dhamma and meditate together.

Ajahn Piak encouraged me to continue cultivating mindfulness of breathing; and when my mind was calm and steady, to contemplate the unattractiveness of the body. He encouraged me to become familiar with putting attention on each of the thirty-two parts of the body, visualise them and mentally separate them out from each other, to break down the habitual identification with the body, as a solid self. The practice was like mentally disassembling the component parts of an automobile; and then putting all the parts back together again. Pulling apart the body and putting it back together in my mind was aimed at changing my false perceptions; and reducing attachment to the view of the body as a solid self or belonging to a self.

When mindfulness is clear, and one's investigation penetrates the Truth, one sees the body as a collection of physical elements that are without an owner. I contemplated each body part repeatedly, to see its unattractiveness and impermanence, until the sense of my body, being a single solid person or being under the ownership of a self, disappeared. Ajahn Piak taught me in line with the *Maha Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, as taught by the Buddha, but added his own dimension of practical experience. I found this quite a challenging mental exercise, that I could only carry out effectively when I was calm and concentrated. In the long run, it has been a rewarding practice and brought me to know deeper levels of the qualities of dispassion and detachment.

This way of meditating was a method for developing strong mindfulness directed to the body, cultivating the perception of the unattractiveness of the body as well as for contemplating the three universal characteristics of existence: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and the non-self nature of phenomena. Occasionally, when my mind was still, visions of my body without its covering of skin arose; or else a vision of individual parts of the body, might arise quite naturally and spontaneously. At those times, my mind was at its brightest and a cool feeling of dispassion arose that pervaded my five aggregates for a long time.

I settled in to my practice at the new monastery for about a month, thinking I would spend the rains retreat there. The day before the rains retreat began, Ajahn Piak visited and told me I would be returning to enter the rains retreat under his guidance at Wat Fah Krahm. This unexpected move from one monastery to another was a common feature of the monk's life, in those days; and was seen as part of the training of a forest monk who takes dependence on his teacher. I had full respect for Ajahn Piak's wisdom and confidence in his decision making,

so I did not complain when he only gave me an hour to pack my belongings and prepare myself for travel. Moving without prior warning was always a good way to test my ability to let go of plans and attachments; and accept the way things are.

Back at Wat Fah Krahm, there were about seven monks, resident for the rains retreat; and we were all keen to study the monastic training rules; and cultivate the path of calm and insight meditation. We participated in morning and evening *Puja*, and meditation meetings; and stayed up all night meditating together on the Observance Days. After the evening meetings, Ajahn Piak sometimes let the monks come up to his *kuti* and give him a foot massage; and ask questions or discuss different topics of the Dhamma with him. Some nights when I felt tired, I joined the group of monks at his *kuti* as a way to stop me from going to sleep too early, but most nights I stayed alone and continued cultivating mindfulness. I walked meditation, dodging the mosquito swarms until 11 o'clock or even midnight. My usual aim was to overcome the mental hindrances which tended to swing between sensual desire, ill will and sleepiness. I found that I could focus on the breath at my heart; and cultivate the object of *mettā*, to quell any anger or irritation I was experiencing much more frequently than when I first ordained as a monk. I also made great progress in letting go of drowsiness; and sometimes experienced states of deep and lucid awareness, even in the middle of the night. Sensual desire was always the hardest hindrance to abandon; and I continued to recollect the impermanence of sense objects and contemplate my bones as a regular meditation object.

Samādhi Alone Cannot Stop You Disrobing

One day, the senior monk, from a new branch monastery, travelled down from Ubon to visit Ajahn Piak. This monk was considered to be well-developed in his practice of meditation,

with a peaceful and bright mind. The visiting monk meditated together with the community; and talked with Ajahn Piak who confirmed that he indeed had skill in attaining states of *samādhī*. Not long after this, we received the news that the monk had disrobed after falling in love with a female lay disciple. This event led to an interesting discussion on how it is possible for a monk who regularly attains the happiness of deep states of *samādhī*, to still seek an intimate relationship with a female student, and end up leaving the monk's life. Ajahn Piak emphasised the importance of using states of stillness, as a basis for cultivating wisdom, through focusing on the perceptions of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self, in one's experience of physical and mental phenomena. He also reminded us the importance of cultivating the perception of the unattractiveness of the body constantly. It was also clear to many of us, that even if you develop deep states of *samādhī*, you have to ground yourself in the monastic training rules; the practice of sense restraint; and continuously reflect on the Four Noble Truths and the three universal characteristics of existence to develop insight. *Samādhī* alone cannot liberate us from greed, anger and delusion.

States of calm and stillness have to be cultivated together with the other factors of the Noble Eightfold Path. The mindfulness and calm we cultivate, through our meditation, has to be used as a vehicle for developing insight into the Four Noble Truths. One has to develop clear knowledge; and vision of the true nature of phenomena which gives rise to disenchantment and dispassion; and allows one to abandon the craving and attachment that are the cause of suffering. *Samādhī* alone can only suppress the mental defilements temporarily, and if no wisdom is developed in conjunction with other factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, the defilements of lust and sensual desire will always return and take over the mind.

During the rains retreat at Wat Fah Krahm, the physical conditions in the monastery deteriorated, as the heavy monsoon rains continued, and flood water slowly made its way down from the northern provinces, towards Bangkok. The high level of rainfall meant that flood waters, moving through the swamps, flowed into the monastery until the land was filled to a level where there was waist-high dirty flood water everywhere. Sometimes we used wooden boats to go out on alms round. The mosquito population thrived. Everyone had to cultivate patient endurance with the exposure to skin diseases and inevitable inconveniences. Cobras swam past as we washed our alms bowls, after the meal. A mother cat and her three kittens stranded on a plank of wood floated past one day; and were adopted by one of the monks whose *kuti* had become a little island in the flood waters. On one occasion, my friend went to take a shower in the middle of the day, and entered the small bathroom under his *kuti*. I was walking meditation next door and suddenly hearing screams, I saw the bathroom door flung open and out came a monk running in one direction and a huge cobra slithering in the other. The snake had tried to seek refuge from the heat and the flood waters, in the bathroom, but luckily the monk had noticed him at the last minute. Both seemed equally shocked.

During one terrible thunderstorm, a Vietnamese passenger airliner crashed only a few hundred meters from the monastery. All the passengers and crew died except for one co-pilot. In the following days, we joined hundreds of other local monks in merit-making ceremonies chanting and dedicating merit to the hundreds of dead passengers and crew. It was amazing to see the outpouring of compassion from the local people, who were willing to arrange funeral chanting and make offerings, as if they were members of their own family. We speculated on the workings of the law of *kamma* and how one man could walk away from the crash almost unhurt, while everyone else had died instantly.

One of the main things, I learned during my time practising at Wat Fah Krahm, was the importance of not indulging in irritation and negative reactions to the difficult conditions and to maintain effort in cultivating mindfulness, patience and *mettā*, following Ajahn Piak's example. I could see how his emphasis on cultivating the four sublime attitudes of goodwill, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity was an essential basis for attaining strong mindfulness; and deeper states of *samādhi* and also for interacting skilfully with the world. Rather than feeding the negativity my mind constantly threw up, I learnt to observe and let go, and kept returning my attention to the breath as much as possible.

Inspiration From Awakened Beings

By the end of the rains retreat, my meditation practice had matured, and I had a better understanding of how to look after my mind. My mind was not always peaceful, but I understood better how to maintain mindfulness in all situations; and how to use the secluded lifestyle and monastic discipline to restrain the worst of my mental defilements. At the end of the retreat, we travelled to Rayong for the *Kāṭhina* offering at Wat Marp Jan. Even though I already knew Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Dtun well, it was my first visit to the monastery. We spent a couple of nights in the lush jungle; and Ajahn Anan invited me to return and spend more time there later. It seemed a quiet and suitable place to practice.

Ajahn Piak arranged a trip, for the community, to visit different teachers in northern Thailand. One of the highlights was having the opportunity to pay respects to Luang Por Kasem Khemako in Lampang. Luang Por Kasem, was revered throughout Thailand as a fully Awakened *Arahant*, with one of the most powerful minds, of all the monks in the country.

He had dedicated his life to the practice of abandoning mental defilements and was well-known for being utterly fearless and equanimous in the face of pain, difficulty and personal suffering. He had given up his position as the Abbot of a city monastery, at a young age, and gone to live in a charnel ground, not leaving until he had attained full awakening. He received us kindly but was only strong enough to give us a brief blessing; and a few simple words of encouragement. It was enough. Ajahn Piak told us that Luang Por Kasem spent much of his time sending *mettā* to protect the King of Thailand.

On the same journey, we visited Luang Por Boodah Thavaro, in Sing Buri province, who was also revered as a fully Awakened *Arahant*. He was over ninety, and had visited Luang Por Chah a number of times, over the years. He spoke kindly to us and I asked him how his health was. He answered with a smile that he was feeling ‘yen sabai’, which means cool and happy in Thai. It seemed like an apt description for his state of mind which was bright and radiant and filled with loving kindness. Even after a short chat with him followed by a blessing, everybody departed from his monastery, feeling uplifted; and like they were floating on clouds. It was easy to see how a well-practiced monk can uplift so many people simply with his presence. In Chiang Mai, we visited the Chedi housing the relics of Luang Por Waen and then paid respects to Luang Por Sim, another fully Awakened disciple of Luang Por Mun. It was as if we had been given a Dhamma holiday after the rains retreat; and by the time we returned to Ajahn Piak’s monastery, the flood waters were slowly beginning to recede; and the monks began talking about going wandering in distant jungles for the cold season.

Tiger Stream Monastery Cave Retreat

As the cold season approached in December 1988, Ajahn Piak gave me permission to follow one of the senior monks, Ajahn Jeera, on a journey to a remote hermitage, in the jungle of Kanchanaburi province, near the border with Myanmar. It was an area that was popular with wandering forest monks, as it was one of the last regions in Thailand that was still relatively unpopulated; and still had large areas of old growth forest full of native birds and animals. The branch monastery is called Huay Sea or Tiger Stream Monastery. It is located a long way from any developed towns and roads. There was no public transport to the nearest village, in the hills, so we had to hitch a lift with a mining truck and then walk along mud tracks through the jungle. Only one monk and one novice resided at the hermitage, but the secluded atmosphere was conducive to meditation. The monastery was several thousand acres in size, with caves and streams; and surrounded by a much larger area of native jungle. There were many wild animals, such as tigers and bears, moving in and out of the forest of the hermitage. The Buddha often reminded the monks to find secluded places as a supportive factor for training their minds; and it seemed like a suitable place to stay for the dry season.

We rode on top of the mining truck, along the mud track, into the mountains; and then had to walk for half a day. We walked along a dirt track, with trees hanging over our heads to shade us from the hot sun; and encountered no traffic at all. We were tired but the beautiful jungle made up for it and we really could not complain. About ten kilometres out from the monastery, we met a couple of hunters travelling by motorcycle; and they offered to carry our bowl bags on their shoulders and send them ahead to the monastery for us. We were happy to let them make some merit because they regularly made a lot of bad *kamma*,

hunting animals. We arrived in the monastery at dusk and were caught by surprise, as the temperature suddenly dropped to about 12 degrees Celsius, which for Thailand, felt really cold. We hurried off to take a bath in the stream which snaked through the monastery, but soon realised that the water was icy cold, so we cleaned off the dust and sweat from our journey as quickly as possible. Standing in the freezing water, we bathed so fast that the resident fish did not have time to nibble our skin which is what they would normally do if we lingered in the water.

I moved into a retreat cave on the cliff face, which had a chamber long and deep enough to cut out the light and sound from outside; and provided a place to walk meditation quietly. The cave was well-ventilated; and without the smell of bat excrement polluting the air which makes so many caves uninhabitable. It provided a suitable place for retreat, for the next four months. At dawn, the temperature fell to 3 degrees Celsius on some mornings; and the cold weather changed my perception of Thailand as a hot country. The first morning, I went on alms round to the nearby village. I walked along a track where the mud had been pounded into powder by the heavy logging trucks; and the air temperature was so low that the powdered mud felt like snow under my feet. I called it Thai snow. We ate our meal sitting outside in full sunlight, something which would normally be very uncomfortable, in Thailand; but because the air was so cold, it was actually more comfortable than sitting in the shade. After our simple meal, the senior monk Ajahn Suphon, took us on a tour of the monastery. It took several hours because he showed us the full extent of the jungle area under the care of the monks. At a second set of caves, further along the mountain, we found fresh tiger tracks which was a surprise and tested our equanimity. The discovery motivated us to stay mindful and alert.

I asked permission, from Ajahn Suphon, to begin a solitary retreat in the cave I had moved into. He kindly allowed me to stay there and meditate with no other responsibilities. Inside a small dark chamber, in the inner cave, was a small wooden platform set up for sitting meditation and sleeping. A second chamber, nearer to the cave entrance was long enough for me to pace up and down in meditation. An old oil drum had been placed to collect water that dripped down, through a crack in the rock ceiling, and could be used for drinking and bathing. The cave was completely dark, which was a new experience for me, but I thought the challenge of complete isolation and sensory deprivation might teach me something. With no sunlight, no normal sounds to hear and no one to socialise with, my own internal mental activity became much clearer to me; and aided my close examination of the five aggregates. I cultivated mindfulness and clear comprehension, directed to my own body and mind; and was able to meditate in the dark, all day long. I had previously experienced intense heat, and weeks of immobility and little distraction when I had cellulitis in my leg at Wat Keuan; and in the cave, I also faced a situation with little distraction, but the difference was that it was cold and dark all the time.

I only had a few months available to practice in this unique situation. So I was determined to put forth as much effort in my meditation as I could. I was used to meditating for many hours, through the day and night, but without other activities I sometimes meditated for up to 18 hours a day. The only external distractions included a few animals who came by; and one brief visit by a small group of monks, from a nearby monastery. Each morning and evening, a rat wandered in and out of the cave, and stopped for a drink of water at the oil drum. I put down a water scoop containing some water so that the rat would not

have to risk drowning, when it dangled by its rear legs from the rim of the oil drum to drink the water. A solitary bat slept, above me, during the day, hanging from a string line that ran across the cave above my seat. I gave it permission to sleep there as long as it left no droppings; and did not bring home friends. A couple of times a group of porcupines disturbed the silence with the sound of their spines clicking together, as they explored the cave. One night, a huge snake track appeared across my walking path. The snake appeared to be almost as thick as my leg from the imprint of its body in the dirt; and I assumed it was a python. I never saw the mysterious snake, so I never knew if on that night it had come into the cave; or had been in there all the time and departed.

I used the precious opportunity for solitary meditation to improve my efforts in developing continuous mindfulness and insight. Between December and April, there were times when my mind absorbed deeply into the breath; and became brighter and more peaceful than ever before. At those times I experienced strong rapture, happiness, calm and one-pointedness which lasted for many days afterwards; and facilitated contemplation and insight into the impermanence of body, feelings, memories and thoughts. There were also plenty of days when I toiled away at my practice, wading through the five hindrances which vied with each other to take over my mind. Much of the time I relied on patient effort to maintain mindfulness with whatever I was experiencing. I was letting go of any desire for particular results or special experiences from my meditation; and focused on maintaining mindfulness with whatever came into my awareness. I had to find skilful ways to arouse energy and enthusiasm for meditation - when my mind was not concentrated, and was caught into endless mental proliferation. I realised that being mindful or bored or restless still keeps you on the same path that the Buddha walked.

Stillness

When I considered how to improve my meditation, I reminded myself of Luang Por Chah's analogy that training the mind is similar to a farmer gathering in his fishing net that he has flung out into a flooded paddy field. He keeps feeling his way and bringing each corner of the net closer to himself, until he has gathered all of the net in his hands and has trapped some fish. I was in the pitch-black cave slowly gathering my mental energy together, aided by the lack of distraction and the limited sense stimulation, and occasionally my mind did unify in one-pointedness and displayed its own luminosity.

On one occasion, I had been meditating all day and by about 10:30pm, I felt tired and was preparing to rest. My mind was calm and focused on the breath, but the feelings of tiredness in my body made me think it would be more profitable to rest first and meditate more the following morning. Just as I was about to finish meditating and get up from my sitting posture, my mind suddenly, but quite naturally, unified in a deep state of *samādhi*; and I experienced an intensely powerful feeling of rapture and happiness. The mind became completely one-pointed within itself, letting go of the body and unifying in one-pointedness. It seemed like I had dived into a deep state of calm without making any effort; and without any person making it happen. I continued to sit for the next few hours resting in the quality of refined knowing; and with no movement of mind seeking for anything else to satisfy it. My mind was completely luminous and its radiance seem to fill the whole cave. At one point, the radiance of my mind seemed to penetrate upwards through the rock ceiling of the cave and into the sky above the hill. The heightened level of mindfulness and equanimity, accompanied by rapture and bliss, lasted several days. I realised that it was the result of all the previous efforts I had put into meditation, and even in those periods, when the mind did not seem peaceful at all.

Later on, when I returned to stay with Ajahn Piak and described this experience to him, he replied that he regularly entered a state where his mind appeared to be boundless and its radiance quite naturally penetrated beyond solid objects. He said that when he first gained *samādhi*, all his mental energy flowed upwards, without any apparent limits. We chuckled about that. Usually, my biggest obstacle in meditation was the increasing *dukkha vedanā* or feelings of pain; and tiredness that arose from sitting and walking for long periods of time without rest; but on this occasion, all the painful feelings in the body disappeared for several days; and were replaced by equanimity. At the same time, the five hindrances that so easily come into the mind, completely disappeared and seemed unable to affect the mind. My mind seemed to be floating in space, detached from the body and I felt no pain.

When one experiences deep states of stillness, it is easy to get attached to them; and give them too much importance. If that happens, it triggers the desire to claim the experience as an attainment; and want to repeat it at will, which can create disappointment when things do not go the way you want. I turned to contemplate the impermanence of the factors of *samādhi*; and how they arise, change and pass away over time. I reflected on the impermanence of the rapture and happiness; and observed painful feelings returning and aimed to maintain mindfulness and equanimity. I reflected on the supportive causes and conditions leading up to the mind entering states of deep stillness and how the qualities of mind change as one emerges from stillness. As I put effort into maintaining mindfulness, I attempted to preserve the quality of the ‘internal witness’ that Luang Por Chah encouraged practitioners to develop. It is that ability to know the experience of body and mind, with detached awareness. I contemplated that the awareness of the radiance

of the mind is conditioned; and not to be grasped at as self or belonging to self. The experience of rapture and happiness associated with the tranquil mind, lasted quite a few days, but I observed the factors of *samādhi* eventually degenerating to a more familiar level.

As I continued meditating each day, I contemplated the mental states and intentions arising and focused on maintaining equanimity to prevent the mind giving into any mental defilements. Throughout my time on retreat in the cave, I contemplated how negative desires arise and pass away; and observed how when I lost my mindfulness, it led to the mind identifying with desires as self and holding on to them. When mindfulness and wisdom are present, you know the arising and ceasing of pleasant and unpleasant feelings, as merely feelings. When you lose your mindfulness, your mind identifies strongly with any feeling as self; and cannot control the endless thinking and reacting to feelings; and perceptions of pleasure and pain. I strove to bring up mindfulness over and over again and set aside the frustrations that accompanied that effort.

I kept up the contemplation of the unattractiveness of the physical body; and focused particularly on the bone structure. I frequently observed and recollected each bone in my body. I investigated the shape, colour, and hardness of bones; the origin of bones and the cessation of bone; and how they return to the earth element when we die. I had been doing this for the previous rains retreat under Ajahn Piak, but the retreat in the cave gave me a period of undistracted meditation on this theme and it resulted in a deeper sense of dispassion and equanimity than I had experienced previously.

Meeting A Tiger For The First Time

At the end of March, we returned to Ajahn Piak's monastery to pay respects and share our experience of staying in the caves and forest of Kanchanaburi province. Arriving back at Wat Fah Krahm, we found that the monks were getting their umbrella tents and ground sheets ready to travel to Khao Yai National Park for a retreat with Ajahn Piak, Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Dtun, and I was invited to join the group. Some of the monks were a little nervous because the national park had a reputation for being home to a large population of tigers and rowdy elephants. Some monks were hiding their anxiety, in case they would not be allowed to join the expedition. Others boasted how they were not scared because they owned some good protective medallions and amulets. There was much amusement in the community when Ajahn Piak declared that all amulets, medallions and power objects would have to be left behind in the monastery; and the only protection the monks would be allowed to take along was their faith and practice of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. This is one's real refuge.

One afternoon, one of my friends was standing on a path in the middle of the monastery, boasting to Ajahn Piak how little fear he had of staying in the jungle, when a king cobra gently slithered up behind him. It was as if the snake was there to test the young monk's reactions. When Ajahn Piak kindly warned the monk that a king cobra was approaching him from behind, the monk thought it was a prank, and not heeding the warning, refused to turn around and check if there was really anything there. He was sure that it was just a trick by the teacher to test his equanimity and see how easily he became afraid. When the snake slithered right up close to his heels, the monk finally noticed it; and suddenly realising that there really was a deadly king cobra behind him, jumped up in the air screaming, much to the

amusement of the onlookers. Afterwards, he was still allowed to participate in the trip to the jungle. Every time the story was retold, he received a good lesson on how to contemplate the feeling of hurt pride, which lasted longer and felt more painful than many types of ordinary physical pain.

We arrived at the park rangers' cabin, in the middle of the National Park, on the first day. The rangers offered us some drinks; and recounted to us some of the latest stories of encounters between humans and wild animals in the park. A few months before, a monk had been killed by an angry bull elephant. At another time, one of the park rangers had been hospitalised after he was attacked by a tiger that had been hanging around the cabins used by the park rangers and their families. The conversation set the tone for our retreat in the National Park. On the first night, having set up my umbrella tent in a spot far away from the other monks, I found that I could not sleep a wink all night because of my fear of meeting wild animals.

I chose to camp on a narrow ridge close to a stream where there were plenty of visible animal tracks. It seemed like a popular spot. The first night, I listened to the footsteps and sounds from different creatures, all night long, and as I was at least one kilometre away from the nearest monk, the awareness that there was no help nearby if anything happened, added to my anxiety. I stayed in that spot voluntarily and I could not blame anyone else for my own state of mind. I observed how my imagination created the fear and worry; and how the fear produced both physical and emotional reactions; and ultimately stemmed from my identification with my body as a self.

Ajahn Piak came to visit me during the first evening, and told me that he had stayed in similar places before. He encouraged me to maintain mindfulness at all times. At about 11 o'clock

that night, I was sitting meditation in the dark, and heard footsteps approaching me. I braced myself as tension arose in my body and my heart rate increased. The crunching sound of an animal's footsteps on the dry leaves indicated that something was moving slowly towards me. I went over and over in my mind whether I should turn on my torch or not; and as the footsteps drew closer, I decided it would be best to shine my torch and check in case there was an animal threatening me. I brought up the mental state of loving kindness and reflected that if I had previously created any negative *kamma* that was to result in me being hurt by a wild animal at that time, I accepted it. I contemplated the situation and let go.

The torchlight revealed that the sound on the leaves was made by a rat jumping at intervals across the ground towards me; and it had successfully fooled me into thinking it was something bigger and more ominous. I was relieved to see the rat rubbing its eyes in the torchlight; and chuckled to myself at how easily my imagination had taken over my mind and brought up fear. I gained a good lesson in how my mind can conjure up fear and anxiety, out of a few sounds; and saw how, without continuous mindfulness and clear comprehension, the mental proliferation and anxiety based on craving and attachment can take over; and drowns the mind in fear. I could see I had created fear out of nothing, simply by endless thinking and worrying. In the end, the rat was probably more afraid of me than I was of it.

The next day, we walked for alms, to the small group of timber cabins where the park rangers and their families lived. They recounted more stories about the dangers from previous encounters with elephants, tigers and bears. We were warned to be careful. After our simple meal in the forest, we had a meeting amongst ourselves because one monk had been boasting how, if a tiger approached him, he would defend himself by hitting

it over the head, with his umbrella. Ajahn Piak wanted to help the monk clear up his wrong views that were prompting this unskilful thinking. He reminded us that we all depended on our faith in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha while living out in the forest. We had to mindfully recollect and adhere to the monastic training rules, recite the verses of protection and spread thoughts of loving kindness, each day. When we finished our Dhamma discussion, we went back to that monk's camp and found that a tiger had actually walked right around his sleeping mat, while we were away on alms round. We called the park ranger who measured the paw prints and estimated that the tiger was a full-grown adult and thus dangerous to humans. Ajahn Piak pointed out that the monk's violent thoughts had appeared to attract a swift reaction from the sensitive tiger; and it had visited the monk's camp to assert its disapproval of his aggressive stance. It was a good teaching on the importance of being heedful of the Dhamma when in the jungle and how aggression can attract more aggression; and things can escalate.

We spent the next week peacefully meditating, chanting, walking in the forest and spreading thoughts of loving kindness. One evening, as I was walking back to my camp in the twilight, I heard heavy footsteps approaching from the other side of a huge old growth tree. As I slowly walked around the tree to the far side, a large animal sprang away and bounded through the forest. In the fading light, I could not discern what kind of animal it was. I did not know if it was a tiger, a bear or a deer. But deers usually bark when you meet them, while tigers tend to be silent. My heart was pounding; and that continued for another 20 minutes, as I walked back to my camp, deep in the forest. On another night, a friend was walking back to his umbrella tent when he encountered a huge rock sitting in the middle of the trail that he had not noticed before. He was just wondering how he could miss such a large rock, when the supposed 'rock' began

to move; and turned out to be an elephant who had buried her head in a clump of vegetation that she was eating. The monk retreated hastily and being cautious, spent the rest of the night at another monk's campsite.

Many of us encountered animals and snakes on that trip; and I found it a useful experience to observe how fear arises based on attachment to the body and a lack of mindfulness. When fear arises, the mind suffers as it creates images and stories leading to mental proliferation and agitation. One feels tension in the body, and suffers in the mind. When I established mindfulness, I could see that the emotion was my own suffering; and I was creating it and feeding it through my lack of awareness. By the time we reached the last day of our retreat in the jungle, I had begun to feel more confident in my meditation and ability to maintain mindfulness; and relative equanimity towards the conditions.

On the last night in the National Park, a thunderstorm came through and because we were travelling the next day, I decided to move to an abandoned shed nearer to the edge of the jungle, so that I could keep my things dry. I stayed under the open-sided shelter to protect myself from the rain. At about 10:00pm, a tiger walked close by me; and a few of us heard it growling and attacking another animal not far away. Afterwards, the jungle became quiet and still; and the night air turned cool. I went to sleep at about 11:00pm, but was woken a couple of hours later, by a strange and uncomfortable feeling. I became aware of a very dark energy nearby; and then noticed that all the night sounds of animals, frogs and insects had completely stopped. In the deathly silence of the forest, I heard the distinctive deep breathing and footsteps of a tiger walking back and forth next to me. I could hear its breathing; and caught its strong smell as it padded up and down, right next to me in the dark, for

what seemed like a long time, but was probably no more than 5 minutes. I assumed the tiger was attracted by the smell of food scraps from the place where the monks washed their bowls, after the daily meal, which was near to where I had camped for the night. Strangely, it seemed like the tiger was walking meditation, back and forth, right next to me.

I was completely motionless, partly out of fear, and also because I was not going to run anywhere. I sensed that the tiger itself had a powerful mind that seemed to invade the area around me; and I knew that it used its mental energy to paralyse its prey with fear. I assumed the tiger knew I was there, so I just waited and watched my breath and observed the natural signs of fear in my body such as the change in my breathing, the pounding of the heart and the increasing tension as adrenaline pumps out. I was determined not to give in to any unskilful mental proliferation, so I kept mindful of my in-and-out breath. I did not allow myself to think much at all, maintaining equanimity until the tiger eventually walked away. I did not sleep, for the rest of the night, and sat in meditation observing the desire to think and create a mental story about what had happened. In the end, I observed my own mental states arising and passing away, just like the tiger had arisen in the night, and then disappeared. The normal way of the conditioned world is that things arise and cease, all the time.

The tiger had visited on the last night of our retreat. It seemed almost like an end-of-retreat exam. I did not lose my mindfulness or do anything foolish when the tiger was around; but at the same time, I saw how easily, fear takes over the mind; and manifests both physically and mentally. It can paralyse you. I saw that I still had work to do in my meditation to improve my level of awareness, but the experience of staying in the jungle gave me much needed clarity; and a sense of purpose to develop both the strength of mindfulness and insight further.

First Time Practising At Wat Marp Jan

After leaving the National Park, I received permission from Ajahn Piak to follow Ajahn Anan back to his monastery, in Rayong province. I had already visited his monastery during the *Kathina* season, so I was familiar with how undeveloped it was. The road into the monastery was just a muddy track, easily destroyed when there was heavy rain. There was still no electricity or piped water, in the monastery; and no vehicle available to get in or out of the secluded valley. On a normal day, there were no visitors; and the monks received a small but adequate amount of food, from their daily alms round. The jungle was beautiful and peaceful; and the continuous mountain breeze helped offset the fierce humidity. Ajahn Anan was kind and welcoming. He put me in the second best *kuti* in the monastery, which was next to his. On the second night, a couple of king cobras came near to the *kuti* and made strange loud hissing noises as they called to each other. It made for an eerie introduction to the jungle.

There were only eight monks living at Wat Marp Jan at that time. Ajahn Somchai was the second monk and Ajahn Dtun the third monk. It was inspiring that everyone spent a lot of time sitting and walking meditation. When they did have conversations, it was often about meditation or the monastic training rules and practices. At that time, Ajahn Anan had been a monk for fourteen years and I had been a monk for four rains.

Every morning, the first monks to arise went out to the small wooden hall to begin meditation at 2:00am. The last person to arrive for the morning meditation session was at the hall by 3:00am. We meditated through until dawn and then went on alms round. Some of the routes we walked, through the farms and orchards, were up to ten kilometres long and the round trip took 2 hours to walk. We walked along dusty tracks, through

the orchards, often getting threatened by fierce guard dogs; and the walking made us hot, sweaty and exhausted by the time we returned to the monastery.

While we waited for the meal to be offered in the eating hall, we meditated. Ajahn Anan led the meditation before the meal, sometimes for half an hour and sometimes he meditated silently for an hour or even an hour and a half before he rang the bell. We had walked out on alms round and then meditated on an empty stomach. This routine was a good way to improve our patient endurance; and taught me how to establish mindfulness when the body felt its weakest. In the evening, we meditated together from 7:00pm until 10:00pm; and on the Observance Days, we meditated together all night.

It was quite helpful living with a small but dedicated Sangha of monks who put forth effort in their meditation; and followed the monastic training rules with sincerity. One gains energy and extra mindfulness from the group, when they are willing to give up their views and conceit to follow the monastic discipline; and train in mindfulness in all activities. The monks valued the training and were willing to set aside concerns about personal comfort, food, sleep and socialising; and they were willing to expend effort and energy in the pursuit of the higher goals of the training.

Ajahn Anan gave his time to lead the Sangha and answer questions about all aspects of the practice. Generally, he gave the monks lots of encouragement. Everyone remembers how disciplined he was in his own practice; and the thorough way he trained the monks in those days. He was very careful how much time he spent speaking to lay people, particularly lay women, and was frugal in his use of the requisites. He did not let the monks indulge in unnecessary activities such as reading

newspapers or visiting the homes of lay people. He rarely gave permission for monks to visit their family home unless there was a good reason; and he discouraged them from asking for any expensive requisites from their relatives.

Many of the monks suffered from malaria or had previously contracted it. I was fortunate that in all the years I stayed at Wat Marp Jan I never caught malaria, even though I was regularly bitten by mosquitoes. On one occasion, one of the monks was so weak from malaria that when he returned from alms round and sat down to prepare his bowl for the meal, he simply passed out and toppled over onto the floor. I remember him saying that, at the moment he lost consciousness, his mind quite naturally focused directly on its meditation object and become calm and tranquil as it entered a state of *samādhi*. He felt that the state of *samādhi* protected him from the most extreme symptoms of the malaria while he was unconscious. It was a good example of how regular meditation practice quite naturally supports and even protects you at a time of extreme emotional and physical stress.



“ “

It is not your mind that is suffering;
it is the defilements that are agitated.
Be patient.

Luang Por Chah

“ “

You should all take an interest in the various duties,
such as those towards the preceptor or teacher.
These duties bind us together
and create a sense of community and harmony.
They enable us to show our respect in a way
that's been considered auspicious
since the time of the Buddha.

Luang Por Chah

11

Helping My Teacher. Helping The Sangha. Helping Myself.

Supporting Foreign Monastics

In June 1989, I received a letter from Ajahn Pasanno requesting that I return to Ubon, and assist him at Wat Pah Nanachat. I travelled back to prepare for my fifth rains retreat as a monk, and as there was still enough time, I spent a month attending to Luang Por Chah. By that time, I knew many of the monks who looked after Luang Por Chah regularly; and I could work well with them. I had more confidence and understanding in the way I developed my meditation; and maintained mindfulness in daily life. I also had better knowledge of the Thai language to help me with my duties.

On returning to Wat Pah Nanachat, Ajahn Pasanno asked me to be the monastery secretary; and look after the visa applications for the growing number of foreign monastics. In those days, none of the administration was computerised and processing visa applications involved a lot more time and effort, than it does now. Everything had to be written by hand, in two languages; and I had to keep my memory sharp not to lose track of the

dates and details of each monk's application. The job was time-consuming as each application required me to travel around the district; and gather signatures from the senior Thai monks in the administration. It was frustrating because some of the foreign monks could be difficult to work with. Some monks completely ignored their obligations to fill out their visa application form altogether. Sometimes, I was asked to write stern letters to foreign monks who were staying out in faraway places; and remind them of their responsibilities to complete and sign their application forms; and get their passport stamped. Being a junior monk, I did not have to admonish anyone myself, but I witnessed some tough conversations between the senior monks at Wat Pah Nanachat, and other Sangha members who were not always fully aware of the impact of their actions. Sometimes, when a monk failed to cooperate in a timely and efficient manner, it placed a burden on the monastic and lay community; and I had to help Ajahn Pasanno clean up the administrative mess. Whether I was caring for Luang Por Chah or supporting the community at Wat Pah Nanachat, I continued to cultivate the four meditation themes of goodwill, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, on a daily basis.

Entering my fifth rains retreat as a monk, I understood better how to preserve mindfulness and contemplate the Dhamma, in different situations; and was feeling settled in my practice for several reasons. I had received many teachings and wise words of advice, from both Ajahn Piak and Ajahn Anan, which I used to guide my daily practice. I understood better how to employ the monastic training rules to support the cultivation of mindfulness and restraint, in my day-to-day life as a monk. In particular, I had become more used to practising mindfulness of breathing in all postures; and reflecting on the uncertain nature of physical and mental phenomena. I knew that there

would always be unpredictable situations arising in my life, but, as Luang Por Chah had taught, I constantly reflected that everything is uncertain. I was practising with more sustained mindfulness, than previously; and in combination with a better understanding of how to develop insight into the Four Noble Truths. In short, I was recognising the origins of stress and suffering in my mind; and putting down the mental defilements a little bit better than before.

Contemplation Of Bones

I continued to develop the meditation and contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body, each day. I was no expert in this meditation, and found it challenging; but I kept doing it because from time to time, I found the meditation on the unattractiveness of the body did lead to deeper states of equanimity, than I had experienced before. The practice also supported clearer insight for me; and I noticed my perceptions about my body and seeing the body of others as attractive were slowly changing. Occasionally, I observed my awareness experienced some separation between mind and body. I was comfortable with viewing my own body or that of others, as a corpse in various states of decay; or analysing the body and breaking it down into the component thirty-two parts and also the four elements. Sometimes, such insight arose spontaneously as a result of previous efforts directed to this practice.

When I was living with Ajahn Piak, I focused my meditation, particularly on the contemplation of the bones of the human skeleton. I continued to do this back in Wat Pah Nanachat. Each branch monastery has a human skeleton hanging up in the meditation hall, as a resource for contemplation; and I took to heart Luang Por Chah's exhortation to contemplate the bones to the point where you can see your friends as

walking skeletons. Whenever my mind was calm and peaceful, I contemplated the bones in my body, particularly the skull. Sometimes a clear image of the skull arose spontaneously and at that time, I experienced strong detachment and equanimity. I contemplated the skull to see it as the earth element and as empty of self. Every time I did this, I was eroding away a little bit of attachment to self-view. Occasionally, the meditation gave rise to a deep sense of dispassion. I felt that this way of training was correct for subduing and eradicating mental defilements. The contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body also had a useful role to prevent the practice of *mettā* meditation turning into lustful attachment for female practitioners.

The monastic routine I followed at Wat Pah Nanachat was much the same as in earlier years, and I offered my linguistic skills to help the community in administration and translation. This meant that I had more work to do than in earlier years. I continued to translate Luang Por Chah's talks into English, which always brought me joy and supported my personal reflection and insight into the Four Noble Truths. As I went about my business as a monk in both Wat Pah Nanachat and Wat Nong Pah Pong, I experienced plenty of passing mental defilements arising; and I observed that if I clung to any of them, I suffered. I reminded myself to be vigilant. I did my best to keep my own suffering to myself; rather than let my internal mood affect my relations with others; or spill out into my speech and actions. I investigated the causes of any unwholesome mind states to adjust my view; and observed their transient and non-self nature. I relied on the quality of patient endurance constantly whenever I experienced physical and mental suffering; and aimed to keep my mind cool and calm all the time. If I lost my calm and equanimity, my aim was to get back to it, as soon as possible.

I regularly cultivated goodwill in my meditation and actions, which meant that I rarely indulged in anger or entertained negative thoughts towards myself or others. I grounded myself in the daily cultivation of kindness and compassion, for myself, the resident community, all the lay visitors and even the forest creatures. At one point, Ajahn Pasanno travelled away from the monastery, and left me in charge with another visiting senior monk. One day, a huge parcel arrived, addressed to one of the novices. In those days, the monastery rule was that all letters and parcels were first opened and checked by the senior monks, before being passed on to the recipient. The parcel was damp, smelling strongly and full of ants, so I opened it with another monk and found it contained a huge amount of cheese, chocolate and some food items. The recipient was a novice who is allowed to handle food, unlike a monk. So I had the parcel sent to his *kuti* without removing anything. The novice had been fasting for several weeks, while the Abbot was away; and seemed to be struggling with his extreme moods; and negative emotions which were stirred up by the long period without food. Not long after the parcel was sent to him, he came running through the forest shouting and waving his fists. He was upset that his parcel had been opened. I was carrying a bench together with a layman in the monastery forecourt; and the novice ran straight at us shouting with his fists clenched. The layman saw the novice and dropping the bench behind me, ran away in another direction, because he feared that we were about to be physically attacked. I focused my mind on the object of *mettā* as Ajahn Piak had taught me, calmed myself and then spread goodwill to the novice. As I did this, he stopped running and shouting, looked at me in frustration, turned around and then stomped off back into the forest. Later that day, he came and found me; and apologised profusely for his aggressive conduct. It seemed to be a victory for the cultivation of goodwill.

Teachings From Luang Por Chah

I took whatever opportunities I could to spend time with Luang Por Chah. As I was more senior now, I was often put in charge of the small group of monks who attended on him. I preferred to enter the night shift if I could, as I found the cool and peaceful atmosphere conducive to quiet practice and reflection. When I was with Luang Por Chah, I noticed that he kept his eyes open at night and usually did not sleep until 4:00am or even 5:00am. When there were no tasks to perform, I sat meditating next to him for long periods. He slept just before dawn and into the morning; and rested on and off throughout the day. We always had to remain vigilant with him, at any time of day or night, because of the risk that he might experience a coughing fit or some other small emergency, so there was good incentive not to be distracted or lazy.

When I stayed at Wat Nong Pah Pong, I also assisted Luang Por Liem, in whatever small ways I could; as he was not only caring for Luang Por Chah, but building and preparing the monastery for the inevitable moment when Luang Por Chah died and a funeral would be organised. After finishing the night shift, I walked back to my *kuti* in the forest, by about 10:00am each morning. Before resting, I often helped with whatever work project Luang Por Liem was engaged with. Sometimes, he was leading the monks and villagers in pouring concrete to make roads, water tanks or public toilets for the monastery. Once in a while, he asked me to translate for him if he had some foreign monks or lay devotees visiting. There were times, I did not get back to my *kuti* to rest before 2:00pm or 3:00pm in the afternoon. Luang Por Liem himself set the example to the community; and took as little rest time as he could get by with. I once asked him how he survived with the heavy workload, and pressure of responsibility involved in looking after Luang Por Chah; and running the monastery. His response was that as long as he had one hour for himself in every 24-hour cycle, he could manage.

Whether they were supporting work projects, running the monastery, teaching or meditating, all the monks were energised by their love and respect for Luang Por Chah. When Ajahn Anan heard how often we struggled with power outages at Wat Nong Pah Pong, he arranged for a truck to make the 12-hour drive to Ubon; and donated the electrical generator from Wat Marp Jan. We needed power to run the medical equipment for Luang Por Chah's safety, as he sometimes required oxygen; and after he had a tracheostomy, he relied on a suction machine to remove phlegm from his throat. One afternoon, during a thunderstorm, the mains power cut out and the generator failed, so I did not hesitate to run the four hundred metres to where Luang Por Liem was working to inform him of the problem. It was one of the few times I have ever actually ran as a monk. As soon as Luang Por Liem heard that we had no power supply, he knew there was a danger for Luang Por Chah; and not waiting for me, jumped through the window of the hall and commandeered a pickup truck parked next door. The driver sped off to Luang Por Chah's *kuti* so that Luang Por Liem could quickly fix the generator, while I trotted along behind, soaking wet.

I found that quite naturally, I increased my efforts in maintaining mindfulness on the breath when I was with Luang Por Chah; and as a result, I experienced more rapture and deeper states of calm than usual. The positive mental energy, rapture and improved mindfulness helped to cushion the feelings of fatigue that I inevitably experienced, when going without sleep. Like so many other monks around me, I learned to endure the painful feelings of the body; and just keep going when necessary. Occasionally, when caring for Luang Por Chah, I found my mind to be so bright and energetic that even when I lay down to rest after a night without sleep, I did not actually sleep. I simply rested the body for a few hours. As I was still young, I was not too concerned about my health; and I was willing to sacrifice

my physical energy to follow the Buddha's way of training; and to serve Luang Por Chah. I could see the progress I was making in understanding the Dhamma; and letting go of the mental defilements that cause us suffering. I had less problems with my digestion or dysentery after the time I had spent in central Thailand. I saw that it was my chance to really put forth effort in my personal practice, as well as to assist Luang Por Chah and the Sangha.

When I was in charge of the group of monks looking after Luang Por Chah, I had to take responsibility for his care, and also ensure the harmony of the monks who worked as a team. I met with the daily visitors, communicated with the doctors and nurses, and kept up my own meditation practice. I found that most of the time my mind remained bright; and with few mental hindrances arising. I had to feed Luang Por Chah, provide him with medication, bathe and dress him and so on. I was physically larger than most of the monks, so when we weighed him, I picked him up and stood on the weighing scales, holding him to find out if he was losing weight. When he needed a bath or use the toilet, I carried him to the bathroom. Sometimes I even caught his excrement in my hand if we did not reach the toilet in time. I never felt aversion for such tasks, and considered it to be my good fortune to help a fully Awakened disciple of the Buddha.

On one occasion, towards the end of his life, the doctor fitted a catheter into Luang Por Chah's bladder and the procedure was clearly causing him extreme pain and discomfort. I observed Luang Por Chah heave with the pain; and I made a determination to give whatever mental and physical energy I had left, as an offering to him to help reduce his pain. Surprisingly, over the next few minutes, all my physical energy

seemed to drain away to the point where I could no longer stand. I needed to move outside the room and sit down on the ground. It took me the rest of the day to recover my energy.

Time progressed and I had to be increasingly patient as I sifted through the multitude of views and opinions expressed by fellow monks; and laity about the best way to care for Luang Por Chah. Increasing numbers of monks and lay people expressed opinions on the way the caregiver monks should be doing their job; and what medical techniques and medicines were best for Luang Por Chah. I learnt how to take direct and indirect criticism. I observed other senior monks receive criticism, some of which was unjustified. I also had to contemplate the dangers of becoming lost in the words of praise and positive attention which people gave to us, because we were Luang Por Chah's attendants. My mindfulness and equanimity were regularly tested, as I learnt to deal with different obstacles that stimulated craving, in reaction to both pleasant and unpleasant conditions.

My wisdom faculty was constantly being sharpened. I learnt not to make a personal problem out of each issue that arose. Sometimes, I had to navigate criticism of myself, other times, I had to listen to criticism of Luang Por Liem. On many occasions, monks in the room with Luang Por Chah, became too heated in expressing their opinions or disagreeing amongst themselves. Luang Por Chah would cough violently or hiccup, in a timely manner, to interrupt the disagreement; and in a very natural way, to make the monks stop talking, and attend to him. No one could say that when Luang Por Chah coughed or hiccupped, at a time when monks were being unmindful; whether it was just coincidence or done by him deliberately, but many monks noticed how often it happened; and on each occasion, it seemed to be perfectly-timed.

The healthcare professionals and monastics, who knew Luang Por Chah and looked after him, were amazed at how he managed to keep himself going. He relied on the practical care given to him, but even more so, he relied on his own liberated mind, incredible physical and mental endurance. His perfection of the factors of the Noble Path and constant insight into the non-self nature of phenomena, provided his mind with a dwelling place of equanimity and detachment. When Luang Por Puth Thaniyo visited Luang Por Chah, he meditated in the room with him and, as other senior monks had observed, he confirmed that Luang Por Chah dwelt in a state of emptiness and his mind was detached from his body much of the time. He described how Luang Por Chah could separate his mind from his body, when he was resting, but when he was engaged in physical activity, his mind was present in his body and had to endure all the painful feelings. Luang Por Puth explained how Luang Por Chah survived so many years of severe illness using his mastery of deep states of *samādhi*; and the seclusion of his mind from the mental defilements. The pure energy of his *samādhi* refreshed and rejuvenated his body whenever the state of his health deteriorated; until in the end, the body was too weak and too sick to rejuvenate any more. He said that Luang Por Chah's mind was as radiant and blissful as ever; and his mindfulness and insight into the non-self nature of body and mental aggregates was unaffected by the degeneration of his physical health. Luang Por Chah remained equanimous and dispassionate, throughout the ten years of his illness.

It was inspiring to hear Luang Por Puth's explanation of how Luang Por Chah used his *samādhi*, wisdom and endurance to deal with the challenge of his illness. These qualities were so well-developed that he appeared to use them to extend his life; and remain a living inspiration for the Buddhist community, far beyond the most generous predictions of the medical

professionals. Without the mental defilements of greed, hatred and delusion conditioning his mind, Luang Por Chah managed to cope with extreme physical pain, weakness and severe symptoms that the doctors assumed would finish most people off. Luang Por Puth's explanation of how Luang Por Chah was practising during the period of his illness, was echoed by other teachers; and helped correct the view held by some people that Luang Por Chah was in a vegetative state with no awareness and no control at all.

Luang Por Chah's Health Takes A Downturn

After Luang Por Chah's tracheostomy, we began feeding him liquids through a feeding tube inserted through his nose down into his stomach. The elder monks of the Sangha met regularly to discuss his care; and they decided that the nasogastric feeding tube should not be left in his nasal cavity all the time, as is normally the case for most patients in hospital. The decision meant that several times a day, the attendant monks had to offer the nasogastric tube to Luang Por Chah through his nose and then withdraw it after his liquid meal was finished. Before a monk was allowed to offer the tube to Luang Por Chah, he had to show Luang Por Liem that he knew the correct method how to insert an example tube, through his own nose and down into his stomach. I practised inserting the tube through my own nose until I felt adept enough to insert it for Luang Por Chah, without hurting him; but first I had to walk out of the nursing *kuti* with the tube inserted through my nose and find Luang Por Liem to prove to him that I knew the correct method. It turned out that the day I went looking for him, he was working far away in another part of the monastery. By the time I located him, to show him first hand that I could insert the feeding tube into my own nose, I had walked around the monastery for over half an hour, with a nasogastric feeding tube inserted into my nose, much

to the surprise of those who saw me. The challenges around feeding Luang Por Chah moved from helping him to swallow the food himself, to the challenge of inserting and withdrawing the feeding tube several times a day without hurting him. If a monk ran into trouble doing this, tears would form in Luang Por Chah's eyes; and the former could become paralysed for fear of hurting his teacher and making bad *kamma*.

A Radiant Light

During the night before Luang Por Chah's birthday in June 1990, I was attending on him when there was an unusual occurrence at his *kuti*. It was the Observance Day. The Sangha and laity had gathered together to meditate, and listen to teachings, through the night in the main hall. Around midnight, I was with another monk inside the *kuti* with Luang Por Chah; and the monk requested to sit meditation next to Luang Por Chah. I took the opportunity to do some walking meditation outside on the veranda in the cool night air. I was walking back and forth, for a while, when I noticed a radiant golden light appear next to the pond in the garden, beside the *kuti*. The globe of light was several metres wide and I observed it floating just above the ground, for about one minute. In those days, no one had a camera, but I went back inside and called my fellow monk to come out and witness the radiant sphere of light. By the time we both returned, we just caught the end of it, before it faded and disappeared. Later, we described the light to various teachers and the general agreement was that it was probably a *Deva* visiting and paying respects to Luang Por Chah.

When I was resident at Wat Pah Nanachat, I joined the community in their weekly visits to Luang Por Chah each Observance Day. We followed Luang Por Puth's recommendation to recite *Parittas* (Verses of Protection) and chant the *Vipassana Bhūmi*, which

was a verse listing the causal links in the process of Dependent Arising. Luang Por Puth encouraged us to recite these verses to stimulate Luang Por Chah's memory and wisdom faculty. The practice of chanting and meditating with Luang Por Chah was good for the Sangha and laity themselves. The weekly visits to Luang Por Chah were clearly a skilful thing for the Sangha to do; and some senior monks even said that it could give a subtle physical boost to his energy level.

Treasure Hunt - Visiting Teachers

One of the ways I offered service to the community of foreign monks, was helping when their family members visited from overseas. I assisted several monks when they needed a guide and translator; and travelled with them and their family around Ubon province to visit other monasteries, and even to visit Dhamma teachers in other parts of Thailand. I accompanied one English monk and his family, all the way to Suan Mokh Monastery in southern Thailand where we paid respects to Luang Por Buddhadasa and had the chance to hear him teach. Generally, he welcomed foreign monks and when he gave teachings, they were clear and useful for developing a better understanding of what the Buddha taught. I always found him kind and supportive of Luang Por Chah's monks. When I asked him about meditation, he particularly encouraged me to perfect the practice of mindfulness of breathing; and cultivate insight into the teaching on the process of Dependent Arising. He encouraged me to give up everything for the sake of training my mind to cultivate the factors of the Buddha's path to Awakening. He spoke from the heart; and said that this is how he had cultivated the path, and had never been disappointed. He praised the role of meditation on the unattractiveness of the body, but always encouraged me to reflect specifically on the teaching of Dependent Arising.

On another trip, I took a young German monk to see Luang Pu Jia who was one of the senior living disciples of Luang Por Mun. Our many questions managed to prompt a detailed and energetic discourse from him on the stages of insight into the path; and fruit and *Nibbāna*. In particular, he explained to us how one progresses in the development of *samādhī*, right up to the level of *nirodha-samāpatti* (cessation of perception and feeling). Even though this was more advanced Dhamma than we had ever experienced, it was invaluable to hear a well-trained monk explain some of the more refined experiences of meditation, with such confidence and clarity. Listening to him speak with such knowledge and energy, made us resolve to meditate even more.

The Dhamma Leads Inwards (*Opanayiko*)

I spent my fifth and sixth rains retreats at Wat Pah Nanachat in 1989 and 1990. I continued to meditate on the themes of goodwill, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity; in conjunction with mindfulness of breathing and the contemplation of the conditioned and non-self nature of the body. The resident community continued to grow in size as the monastery became more well-known. The number of visitors, from around the world increased. With such a mixture of different nationalities and personalities training together in one place, each member of the community had to cultivate patience and goodwill; especially because some of the new people were inexperienced with the monastic training. Newcomers to the monastic environment sometimes held on too tightly to their views about the proper and correct way to practise the Buddha's teachings; and some could be a little too self-centred and unwilling to adapt to the needs of living in a community. I kept returning to the theme of compassion and tolerance in my own daily practice; and continued to train myself in finding ways to let go of the mental hindrances, in my meditation. I

constantly reflected on Luang Por Chah's teaching: to observe other people only ten per cent of the time and observe oneself ninety per cent of the time.

In the retreat of 1989, I was asked to teach the Vinaya (Code of Monastic Discipline) to the Sangha throughout the rains retreat. I found that it was a good opportunity to learn the rules in greater depth for myself; and to help my friends by presenting the information to the Sangha. I found it a useful way to improve my own understanding of the training rules and their background. I did not yet engage in any formal teaching of Dhamma, in English or Thai, as I tended to shy away from getting close to the laity and I focused on the development of my meditation practice. I was actually criticised a few times for not speaking enough in public, but it was not unusual for a junior monk to keep to himself.

Some of the different teachers I had met such as Ajahn Piak and Ajahn Anan, encouraged me to minimise the amount of teaching I did to preserve my strength of mindfulness and the opportunity to develop insight. However, at the end of the rains retreat, it was the custom for each monk to be invited up onto the high seat, to give a talk about their practice, to the assembled lay community. Some monks had learnt Thai and could speak without a translator, others spoke in English. Ajahn Pasanno agreed to translate for the non-Thai speaking monks until about 11.00pm; when he went to rest. The lay people were determined to hear from more monks, and they requested for another monk to help translate. I ended up translating for the rest of the Sangha from 11.00pm until 5.00am, when the last monk finished his talk.

We always looked forward to the rains retreat. It was a period devoted to quiet meditation, without the need to travel or engage in other projects. In the retreat of 1990, I regularly sat

in meditation from 1:00pm in the afternoon, until the evening chanting at 8:00pm. Sitting for long periods without getting up was hard work, but I found it was conducive to cultivating stronger mindfulness, improved levels of patient endurance and clearer insight into the non-self nature of painful feeling. On each Observance Day, I aimed to sit meditation, without moving from my seat, from 9:00pm until the time for morning chanting at 4:00am. Meditating through the night meant facing the challenge of sleepiness and physical tiredness, increased levels of pain in my limbs; and the restlessness of my mind. Following Luang Por Chah's instructions, I focused my mindfulness and used wisdom to observe and recognise craving as it arose; and resolved not to indulge it. I became familiar with discarding my foolish thought patterns and the moods that emerged out of ignorance; and turning my mind to contemplate the Dhamma whenever I could. In those periods where my mindfulness and clear comprehension was clear and continuous, I focused on recognising any mental state of wanting, and not wanting as the cause of suffering. When I could not let go immediately, I observed with patience until I could. Then I experienced the mind brightening and becoming dispassionate. Whenever different desires and negative reactions took over my mind, it became darker and more agitated; and sometimes, all I had to rely on was patient endurance. But at least I knew that even the darkest mental states and painful feelings, arise and pass away.

At this time, I also continued my work translating Luang Por Chah's talks. The first talk I had printed as a booklet was a collection of his teachings on the basic method of meditation called "*On Meditation*". It was printed and published in Ubon for the first time in 1989. I also translated several of his talks for the Forest Sangha Newsletter published in the UK. After that, I translated and arranged printing of the talk "*The Key to Liberation*" which was later re-titled as "*Unshakable Peace*".

Line Of Duty - Assisting Senior Monks

Part of the monastic training we received from Luang Por Chah was the training in different ‘duties’ or ‘watta’. One of the most enjoyable duties I took on in 1989 and 1990, was attending on visiting senior monks. Earlier in my life as a monk, I had assisted Ajahn Pasanno, the Abbot, and found it helpful for my practice. Sometimes, I was asked to assist visiting senior monks because of my language skills; and sometimes, because I was the only monk who volunteered. Luang Por Chah encouraged us to give importance to this part of the training; so I performed this duty partly out of respect for Luang Por Chah, partly because of my wish to serve and learn the Dhamma. I found that assisting visiting senior monks allowed me to spend time with them and it was a good opportunity to learn Dhamma by observing them; and hearing their instructions on the way to practise; it was also a way to offer service to the community.

The duty of looking after senior monks is known as *ācariyavatta*. It includes washing the senior monk’s bowl and robes, finding him any requisites and medicines he needs, looking after his accommodation and so on. I assisted visiting monks who were both Thai and Western. Sometimes I attended on senior members of the Wat Nong Pah Pong Sangha such as Luang Por Jun, Luang Maha Supong, Luang Por Liem or Ajahn Anek. I also assisted senior western monks such as Luang Por Sumedho and Ajahn Jagaro when they visited from overseas. In addition, I assisted senior monks from outside Luang Por Chah’s lineage of monks such as Luang Por Puth, Somdet Prayuth Payutto, Luang Por Panyananda, and Venerable Maha Kosananda and Bhante Dhammavara from Cambodia.

Giving service to senior monks was a good way for me to practise letting go of my conceit and attachment to views; and

to open my mind to learn new perspectives on the Dhamma. As I cleaned and prepared the dwelling place for the visiting monk, washed his alms bowl and robes, chaperoned him when talking to female students and generally attended to his needs, I had to give up my time and energy, and let go of my own personal interests. My upbringing emphasised the importance of individualism, becoming a success and getting ahead in life; so I found attending on senior monks a good way to slow myself down, let go of some of my selfishness, give up my time for other good human beings; and appreciate many other aspects of the practice. I could see that when I assisted a senior monk, it was I who was benefitting from the experience; and it also helped the community. One thing I learnt from Luang Por Chah was that the more one gives up to the practice, serves the teacher with mindfulness and lets go of deluded self-interest; the better one's meditation tends to develop.

As Hot As It Gets

In February 1990, Ajahn Pasanno invited me to take a one-month retreat staying in a newly donated piece of forest in Kanchanaburi province. I had been working hard combining my duties looking after Luang Por Chah, as well as administering the paperwork for all the visas for the foreign monks; and was happy for a break. The land was offered to the Sangha by a local businesswoman who had strong faith and wished to make merit by beginning a monastery. The forest seemed suitable for monks to practise as it was secluded; and situated on the edge of the Sri Nakalini National Park. There were still many large trees on the hills and abundance of animals; both of which needed protecting from illegal logging and hunting. Monks are often seen as the most reliable custodians of the forest. The only facilities present at that time were a single bamboo platform set up for a monk to use for sleeping and eating; and a pit toilet with a simple bamboo screen around it.

Ajahn Pasanno kindly accompanied me to the land himself; and after camping there for a night, we took a long walk around the area and promptly got lost in the jungle for a few hours. The extreme heat of the summer, sometimes, brought the midday temperature up to 40 degrees Celsius. All the streams and springs had dried up; and the air felt the hottest I had ever experienced in Thailand. We walked around all day looking for a reliable water supply, but to no avail. In the end, we asked the lay supporters to transport water in and fill a plastic storage tank to use for bathing and drinking. There was a small village with Mon people living about two kilometres walk away from the bamboo platform where I camped; and they had faith to offer alms food every morning. Unfortunately, the first meal I ate gave me extreme diarrhoea, and I became very ill. It seemed that I had dysentery again. After two days, I had to go to the hospital. I received some medication, returned to my bamboo platform; and looked after myself in the extreme summer heat. I could not be sure which was worse for me - the food from the villagers or the drinking water that was delivered from the town. The summer heat was so intense that the forest lost all its moisture; and even the bees craved water so much that they swarmed around me all day long, trying to get moisture from my sweat. Every time a bee landed on me, I was reminded of the Buddha's words that the nature of craving is like an insatiable thirst that agitates the mind and is never satisfied. From morning to night, the bees swarmed around me. One morning, as I ate my meal, I failed to notice a bee crawling on the underside of my spoon; and was stung on the inside of my mouth.

Luang Por Chah taught us to adapt to the different conditions we encountered; and see the impermanent nature of all formations. The longer I stayed in that jungle, the better I got at adapting to the conditions. I simplified my diet to cut out any food that

I thought may be unclean; and I boiled all my drinking water. During the day, I did more walking meditation in the shadiest part of the forest to stay further away from the bees, and I sat meditation at night when they disappeared. One afternoon, as I was contemplating how to let go of any attachment to the heat; my mind had just settled and was absorbing into the breath, when two jeeps full of forest rangers with rifles drove up looking for illegal loggers. At first, they spoke to me in an intimidating manner as they thought I was trespassing, and even suggested that I was in league with the loggers. Once we had talked, they realised I was protecting the forest and therefore supporting their work, and they relaxed. In the end, we had a long conversation about Buddhism and meditation. Inevitably, the conversation circled around to the role of amulets and magic charms, because so many Thai men are fascinated by these. Like so many government officials who faced some risks in their work, this group of officers were interested to obtain any amulets I could give them to protect them from bullets and knives. I chanted a blessing for them and instructed them that the best protection came from practising *mettā* or loving kindness; and being restrained and mindful in their speech and conduct. I told them that if they were restrained in their conduct and maintained their integrity, other people would not be so easily provoked, and they would be protected.

After the forest rangers moved on, the dysentery subsided, and I found more conducive conditions for meditation, during the second half of my retreat. I laughed that I had gone to the forest to rest and meditate; only to end up with as many problems and challenges as I had left behind. However, I continued to reflect on the impermanence and uncertainty of my mental states; and the external events of my life. I lowered my expectations of what I could achieve meditating in that place; and easily found contentment. My aim was to maintain mindfulness and

equanimity, and to continue to observe the arising and passing away of conditions; rather than spending my time scheming and planning how to obtain the most perfect conditions for meditation. As the Buddha instructed, *dukkha* or suffering is to be known, so I directed my efforts to knowing suffering for what it is; and not running away from it.

I reflected that the pain and discomfort from the dysentery, extreme heat and lack of water was impermanent; and was just what it was. I could not control the heat or the quality of the food I received. However, I could control my reactions; and what I gave attention to in my mind. I realised that I needed to rely on patient endurance, and the way to cultivate insight, was always open to me. I was alone in the forest with no distractions other than my own thoughts, but because I had already been in this situation a few times before, it hardly bothered me. I was used to contemplating the unattractiveness of the body; so it was quite natural to continue with this as the sweat and dust built up on my body, each day. One afternoon, a western man and his Thai girlfriend visited me from Bangkok; and kindly offered some drinks and soap, but as they sat and talked to me, they found it hard to endure the heat and the swarming bees. Whilst we talked, they became more irritable and started bickering between themselves, in front of me. When they regained their composure, they were embarrassed and promptly left, followed by swarms of bees. I felt really sorry for them, and received an unexpected reminder that the lay life is also full of challenges. The monk's life is the most suitable life for cultivating wholesome dhammas that lead to the end of suffering.

For the rest of my retreat, I continued to put effort into maintaining mindfulness and clear comprehension; and tried not to let my mind slip into negativity or despair. It seemed obvious that whether I was living at Wat Nong Pah Pong,

Wat Pah Nanachat or in the middle of the jungle on my own, the real cause of mental suffering is ignorance, craving and a lack of wisdom; rather than other people, external conditions or memories from the past. As if to provide a grand finale to the retreat, one of the local villagers set fire to the jungle, which by then was already completely parched. So, for the last seven days of my stay in the forest, a bush fire moved slowly along the mountain side all around me. At one point, I was forced to beat the flames back from my bamboo platform with branches. I spent the evenings counting how many large trees were lost each day and when I felt some disappointment, I looked back at the trees that were still standing with gratitude. Even though the conditions had been harsh, I appreciated the kindness of the lay supporters and the opportunity to practise meditation. Before I left, I spread *mettā* to them and dedicated merit to all beings in the area.

Inspiration From Luang Por Chah

After returning from the retreat in Kanchanaburi in March, I spent most of the next few months caring for Luang Por Chah. I returned to Wat Pah Nanachat occasionally, to keep up with the various visa applications in process; and chase down monks who had forgotten to prepare their documents. Luang Por Chah was getting weaker. Occasionally, he had to be sent to the intensive care unit in Ubon hospital. When he was in the monastery, I could tell he was physically weaker because, unlike before, he rarely used his arm to pull back on mine when we massaged him. After his tracheostomy, he was less mobile, but we could still put him in a wheelchair and take him outdoors once or twice a day. It was still a great source of happiness for both monastics and lay people to sit with him. The round-the-clock system of care for Luang Por Chah was continuing smoothly, and during the rains retreat I stayed at Wat Pah Nanachat.

During the rains retreat of 1990, I did not take on any special practices other than occasional fasting. On each Observance Day, I stayed up meditating all night, and aimed to sit without moving the whole night. I consciously put effort into overcoming sleepiness and improving my practice of patient endurance with painful bodily feelings; the inevitable fatigue; and the different negative states of mind it can stimulate. I resolved to make my mindfulness and insight as strong and clear as possible. When I found the practice of mindfulness of breathing was obstructed in some way, I cultivated *Saṅghānussati* meditation and reflected on the life and *pāramī* of Luang Por Chah and other teachers I knew. I also cultivated gratitude as I recollected my parents, teachers and all the lay devotees who supported the Sangha. These discursive meditations brightened my mind which helped me let go of various mental hindrances, at times when my energy was flagging.

Luang Por Chah's constant exhortations to eat little, speak little and sleep little, were my main guidelines for minimising distraction; and cultivating calm and insight during the retreat. Sometimes, I received criticism from other monastics and laity for not speaking as much as they wanted me to. I could speak both Thai and English, and some lay devotees wanted to hear Dhamma teachings to support their meditation, but I was still a junior monk. I reflected that the primary purpose of my ordination was for cultivating the Noble Eightfold Path; and liberating my mind from ignorance and the mental defilements. I had little aversion towards other people; and little to complain about in my daily life. I minimised contact with other people to preserve energy for meditation; and reduce the impact of sense objects that stir up lust and sexual desire. At that time, I felt my priority was to develop strong mindfulness and insight into the three universal characteristics of existence. I continued to serve the Sangha with whatever time and energy I had left after the

visa application and secretarial work. If there was no need to teach, I remained quiet.

The highlight of the week for me was visiting Luang Por Chah at Wat Nong Pah Pong on the Observance Day, followed by a night dedicated to cultivating meditation. As we sat in front of Luang Por Chah, we chanted the *Vipassana Bhūmi* and *Paritta* verses and offered some quiet meditation, in gratitude to him. These sessions were inspiring as I could talk to the attendant monks about any changes or developments, in Luang Por Chah's condition. I focused my mind on my teacher; and sat with him for as long as he was outside his *kuti*. I always returned to Wat Pah Nanachat mentally uplifted, but physically drained.

As soon as the rains retreat was over, I preferred to spend more time serving Luang Por Chah, rather than attending the *Kāṭhina* offerings at different monasteries. I continued to assist him at his *kuti*, until December; and then handed over to other monks at the end of my shift. After two years, I was able to hand over the duty of administering the visas for the monks at Wat Pah Nanachat to another monk. I had completed two rains at Wat Pah Nanachat and helped the Sangha with a number of duties; and had spent considerable periods of time assisting with the care of Luang Por Chah. All the senior monks I talked to, encouraged me to spend more time developing my personal meditation, while I was young and healthy; so I asked permission from Ajahn Pasanno to spend time away from the community. Even though I was reluctant to leave Luang Por Chah, there were many other monks who wanted a chance to serve him, and I was happy to make way for them. I felt it was time for a change; and I set off for Nong Kai province to spend some time with Luang Por Tui, another teacher I had great respect for.





Luang Ta Maha Bua with Ajahn Anan and
Ajahn Kalyano at Wat Marp Jan in 1999.

Why do we speak of a “conventional” *citta*
 and an “absolutely pure” *citta*?
 Are they actually two different *cittas*?
 Not at all. It remains the same *citta*.
 When it is controlled by conventional realities,
 such as *kilesas* and *āsavas*,
 that is one condition of the *citta*.
 But when the faculty of wisdom has scrubbed it clean
 until this condition has totally disintegrated,
 the true *citta*, the true Dhamma,
 the one that can stand the test,
 will not disintegrate and disappear along with it.
 Only the conditions of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*,
 which infiltrate the *citta*, actually disappear.
 No matter how subtle the *kilesas* may be,
 they are still conditioned
 by *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*,
 and therefore, must be conventional phenomena.
 Once these things have completely disintegrated,
 the true *citta*,
 the one that has transcended conventional reality,
 becomes fully apparent.
 This is called the *citta*’s Absolute Freedom,
 or the *citta*’s Absolute Purity.
 All connections continuing from
 the *citta*’s previous condition have been severed forever.
 Now utterly pure,
 the *citta*’s essential knowing nature
 remains alone on its own.

Luang Ta Maha Bua
 Arahattamagga Arahattaphala - The Path to Arahatsip



Luang Ta Maha Bua at Wat Marp Jan. He was generous with time and concern for the monks under his guidance.



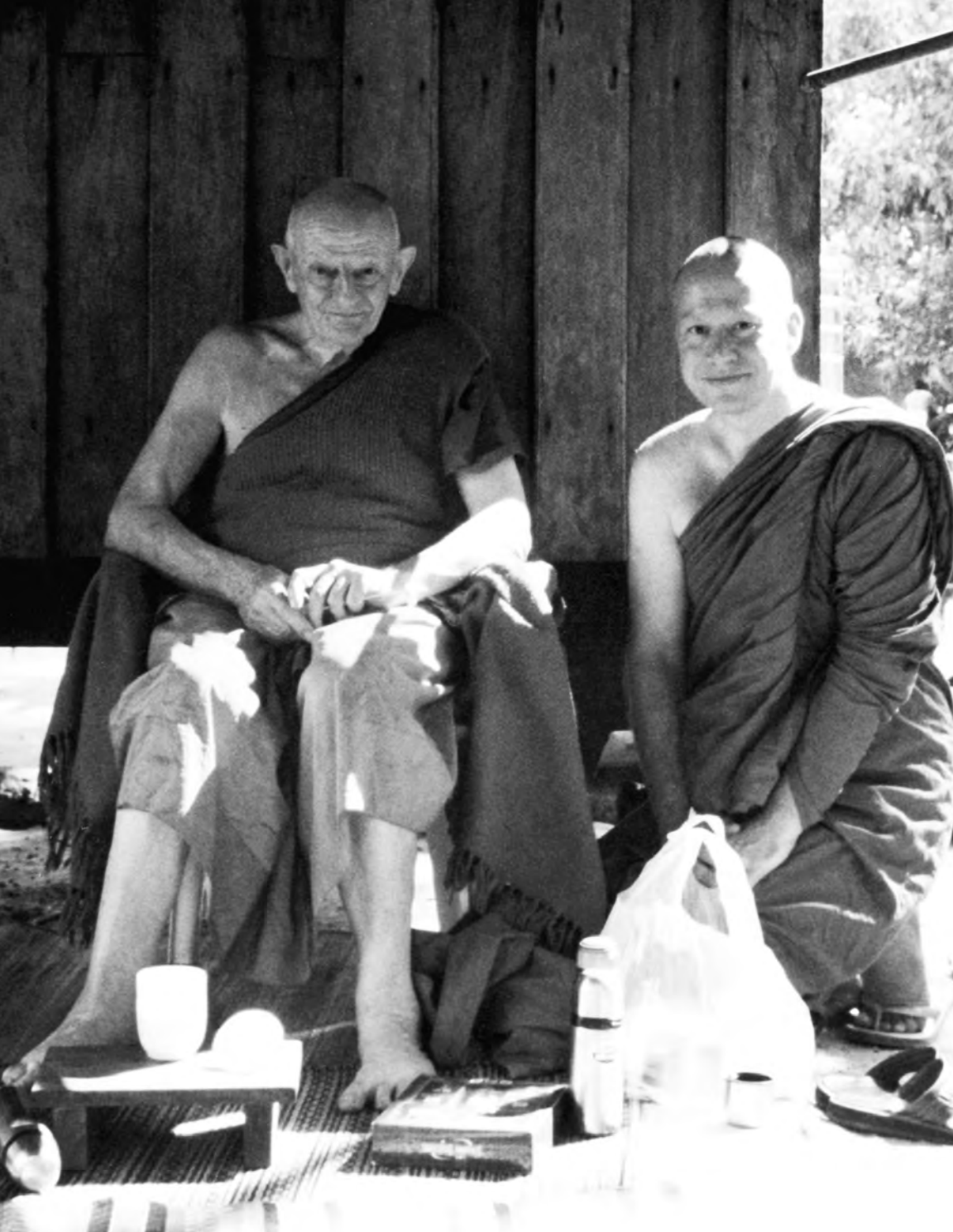
Guidance From An Enlightened Master

Dangers of Worldly Dhammas

I travelled to Udon Thani to spend some time with Luang Ta Maha Bua. On the first day at his monastery, as we were preparing for alms round, he walked straight up to me and asked me where I was from. When I said I was a student of Luang Por Chah, he began talking loudly and enthusiastically to the other monks in praise of Luang Por Chah; and continued to describe his many good qualities throughout the morning. He singled out Luang Por Chah's well-developed kindness, compassion and wisdom; and in particular, his generosity towards monastics and laity. I followed Luang Ta Maha Bua out on alms round; and when he returned to the monastery, he continued talking to the laity, in praise of Luang Por Chah. While the food was being distributed to the monks, Luang Ta Maha Bua sent a platter of delicious-looking fried chicken down to me. I appreciated the kind gesture even though I did not eat it because I was vegetarian. I became a bit self-conscious, as the eyes of all the assembled monks and laity followed the large tray, as it moved across the eating hall towards my seat, near the end of the line. I shared the fried chicken with the monks sitting close by.

I was assigned a *kuti*; and every day received teachings from Luang Ta Maha Bua and Ajahn Pannavaddho, the senior English monk. Ajahn Pannavaddho was happy to discuss his own cultivation of the Dhamma with me; and any other aspects of the Dhamma. He kept encouraging me to use my time to develop meditation; and echoed the instructions of many other teachers who generally recommended developing one's own skills and knowledge in meditation first, before going out to teach. Ajahn Pannavaddho was another senior monk who confirmed the importance of contemplating the unattractiveness of the body as a basis for developing wisdom; and shared with me examples of how he had developed that meditation, over the years.

On some afternoons, Luang Ta Maha Bua joined us at teatime and when he discussed Dhamma, he emphasised the basic aspects of the practice. He loved to warn us of the dangers to monks who get caught into worldly dhammas, such as the desire for praise and attention; and who seek to make a reputation for themselves as teachers. He warned against the dangers posed from becoming attached to power, influence and material wealth, that can accrue to a monk who spends a lot of time teaching the laity. He pointed out that the more people one knows, and the more one receives invitations to teach and engage with society, the more sensual stimulation, one has to navigate and the less time one has for meditation. He also warned of the danger, to monks, from sexual desire and being too close to women. Luang Ta Maha Bua's radiant energy seemed to fill the whole monastery, in the same way, as Luang Por Chah's energy did. Even at night when I was meditating, I noticed a strong and positive energy that filled the monastery, and it became even more tangible when I was in formal meditation. The wholesome energy emanated directly from Luang Ta Maha Bua, and was magnified by the many other monks who were meditating sincerely and in a determined way.



With Ajahn Pannavaddho at the robe-dyeing shed
at Wat Pah Ban Taad in 2001.

Luang Por Tui

After a period of time with Luang Ta Maha Bua, I travelled on to Luang Por Tui's monastery known as Wat Pah Dan Viveka, which means a place of seclusion; and as the name implies, is situated in a large, untouched forest, with a quiet and peaceful atmosphere. Luang Por Tui had a reputation for living in simplicity, with minimal facilities and comforts in the monastery; and for strictly upholding the monastic training rules, that were handed down to him from Luang Por Mun and Luang Ta Maha Bua. There were usually about twenty monks living at the monastery which had no electricity, phone or running water. The large forest was about 2,000 acres in size with a wall surrounding it. The forest provided a habitat for many native animals and birds; and was a very suitable place for meditation.

Luang Por Tui put me in a grass roofed bamboo hut, about one kilometre away from the meditation hall. The *kuti* was ageing and a bit run down, but quiet and secluded. Luang Por Tui was always kind and caring of the monks under his guidance. Within a few days of my arrival, he arranged for a few monks to bring some materials to the *kuti* and repaired the leaks in the grass roof. They also repaired the well nearby where I could draw water for bathing, and use in the simple pit toilet. I also had the choice of bathing in a nearby pond. Normally, I never saw any other monks in that part of the forest; and my neighbours were deers and porcupines.

Luang Por Tui often invited me to walk together with him on alms round; because I could speak fluent Thai. He loved to talk about different aspects of the Dhamma and monastic training and he frequently praised Luang Por Chah and his skill in teaching Dhamma. One of his favourite topics for conversation was what constitutes danger to the life of a monk; and what obstructs one's progress in meditation. He warned me against

spending too much time teaching women, because it can easily stimulate sexual desire in one who is celibate; and how too much luxury and material wealth coming into a monastery becomes a distraction; and leads to a decline in the quality of the monks training and meditation. He taught the monks as he walked around the monastery; and reminded everyone that being too comfortable was ‘convenient but not good for the practice’ and said that when conditions were troublesome, it was ‘inconvenient but good for the practice’. He encouraged monks to cooperate with each other; and set aside any differences, so that there is harmony in the group; and the monastery can remain a peaceful place for practice.

Luang Por Tui encouraged me to develop mindfulness and clear comprehension in every situation; and to train in *yonisomanasikāra* or giving proper attention to everything. He told me about episodes in his life where he had used wisdom, to solve different problems. He warned me not to trust people I had only just met, too quickly; and that I should become familiar with their habits and conduct, over time. He said that following this guideline had saved his life a few times during the Communist era, when some people posed a threat to forest monks. He also told me how he had sometimes protested against certain expensive government projects that wasted public money; but had been reminded by Luang Ta Maha Bua to let go of those things that you cannot control or influence. He instructed me to train my mind to observe the ways in which the mental defilements of greed, hatred and delusion arise and to notice how once arisen, it is their nature to blemish the radiance of the mind and create suffering. He taught me to reflect on the impermanent and non-self nature of phenomena; and not to cling too strongly to views and opinions about different ways to practice meditation, the monastic training or even events out in the world.

Luang Por Tui's voice could always be heard, when the monks were engaged in group activities, in the central area of the monastery, such as before the daily meal, during the afternoon clean-up or when the monks were sitting down for an afternoon drink. He gave out words of instruction and Dhamma reflections. For example, when we were sweeping leaves along the forest paths, he might walk up unexpectedly and give an admonition to sweep mindfully, or to explain to us where to put the leaves. He might add that mindfulness is always practised to give rise to wisdom, so one should consider how to sweep in a way to preserve the shape of the paths, and the ditches along the side of the paths; so that rain water can flow away properly. At any time, he might approach a monk and ask him where his mind was, and reminded him that as he sweeps, he should check whether his mind is at the end of the broom or had wandered off in another part of the world. He taught us that a monk's priority is to keep his mind in the present moment; and be fully aware of any action he is undertaking. Before we ate our meal, he talked about the need for restraint; and to contemplate the repulsive aspects of food. Sometimes he emphasised paying attention to the recitation of the meditation word '*Buddho*' to train one's mindfulness. At other times, he encouraged the use of wise reflection directed to the perception of impermanence or examination of the causes and conditions, lying behind suffering.

Almost every day, he reminded us that at each moment, we must always know what we are doing and why. He reminded us that we are students of the Buddha and he constantly referred to the various training rules for monks. His instructions encouraged sense restraint, frugality, fewness of wishes; and harmlessness. Every two weeks, he had the monastery store opened and each monk received a single bar of soap, a box of candles and a box of matches; and one was encouraged to make them last as long as possible.



Ajahn Kalyano sweeping the leaves at Wat Marp Jan.

Sometimes, I fasted from the daily meal as a way to intensify my efforts in meditation and to temporarily release physical energy that is usually taken up by the digestion of food. In the early afternoon, we had a simple drink to boost our energy for the daily chores; and Luang Por Tui reminded everyone not to spend too much time chatting and socialising. He kept some pet parrots that were let out while we sat with our drink, and flew around the monastery forecourt screeching with excitement. He called them ‘blabbermouths’ and warned the monks not to end up blabbering like the parrots.

One day, Luang Por Tui called me over to his seat at the end of the daily chores and handed me a family sized bar of Cadbury’s plain dark chocolate. He knew that I occasionally fasted and he encouraged me to take the rare treat saying that he thought I might make use of it. With a smile and a twinkle in his eye, he made me promise not to give any chocolate to the other monks because, he said, it would make them fat and lazy. He often joked as he taught, and even spoke a little bit of English. He said that people’s mental defilements make them attach to comfort and convenience, but such attachments become obstacles to training the mind and make people lazy and selfish. Having discussed the drawbacks for monks when they become obsessed with comfort and convenience, he walked around for a while exclaiming how people’s faith and practice of Buddhism was on the decline and everyone should be vigilant; otherwise, the teachings might disappear from the world.

He took time to talk with the older village men who worked for the monastery or were there on business. He listened to their problems, gave them advice and looked for ways to help improve the infrastructure of the village that supported the monastery. He loved to feed birds and animals such as peacocks



Feeding one of the numerous resident birds at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery.

and monkeys. At one point, he had the monks work together to round up a large python that had been terrorising the animals in the monastery and once caught, it was taken away to be released in a large national park. Before it could be transferred outside the walls, several monks had to grapple with the huge snake, while the monkeys (who are arch enemies of pythons) cheered them on. Before the snake was loaded onto a truck, it provided an opportunity for another Dhamma reflection from Luang Por Tui who noted that a monk with no restraint and no goodwill is no better than a greedy snake. Then he added a final punchline, that a greedy monk is actually worse than a greedy snake, because a snake is ignorant of the Dhamma, but a monk should know better.

One morning, a tiger arrived in the monastery. It had probably swum, across the nearby Mekong River from Laos, looking for food. In its search for prey, the tiger had jumped the monastery wall, attracted by the large population of deer, wild boar, civet cats, porcupines, and other native animals. Early one morning, a junior monk came across the tiger as he walked down to the eating hall. The monk was clearly shaken and approached his fellow monks at the hall with the unusual remark that he had just met a tiger. At first everyone thought he was joking or mistaken, but he insisted he had. Then, a second monk arrived and confirmed that he had also seen it. For a few days, everyone was on edge because there was a wall around the monastery, and no one knew where the tiger was. It was certainly hunting for prey. No one tried to hunt it down, everyone kept their patience and goodwill and eventually the tiger seemed to move out of the monastery all by itself.

Staying with Luang Por Tui for about four months was a pleasant and inspiring experience. It was an opportunity to

compare his style of teaching and practice with Luang Por Chah's; and to receive Dhamma from a teacher who was just as at home teaching the wealthiest visitors from Bangkok, as he was teaching the poorest villagers. I found that the essential principles of the training at his monastery complemented what I had learnt at Luang Por Chah's. I did not experience doubts about any difference in style or create a problem comparing or choosing between one style or another.

I appreciated Luang Por Tui's love of simplicity and nature as an aid to the cultivation of *samādhī* and insight. He was always reflecting on the Dhamma and encouraged me to keep the monastic training rules strictly and cultivate wisdom and understanding through the practice of wise reflection. In private, he confirmed to me the depth of understanding and attainment of other teachers such as Luang Por Chah and many of the disciples of Luang Por Mun. He praised Luang Por Buddhadasa and suggested Ajahn Pannavaddho was a good example to follow if I wanted to progress in meditation. I only read one Dhamma book while I was staying at his monastery and that was the Thai version of *BuddhaDhamma* by P.A Payutto.

Luang Por Tui taught the monks to recite the meditation word '*Buddho*' to develop mindfulness, but he had no objection to my using mindfulness of breathing as my main meditation object. He taught us to overcome the five hindrances through the power of mindfulness and wisdom and bring the mind to experience emptiness. He taught that the more often we experience the emptiness of mind, the more we should contemplate the true nature of the body, feelings, and the mind itself; and see them as impermanent, unsatisfactory and without self.

An Unexpected Meeting In The Jungle

By the time I left Luang Por Tui's monastery in March 1991, I felt inspired by the experience I had there; and fortunate to have had the chance to receive teachings and training from him. I had learned a lot. I travelled to Khao Yai National Park for the second time in my life, but this time I was alone. The park ranger, who had looked after me before, kindly agreed to let me camp in the same area as I had with Ajahn Piak and Ajahn Anan previously. I set up my monk's umbrella and mosquito net in a spot near to where I camped before, and I was able to go on alms round to the same cabins of the park rangers and their families, who lived in the central area of the park.

The atmosphere in the forest was different from before, because this time I was alone. Practising alone in a big forest brings up new challenges, and even stronger perceptions of one's own vulnerability. There is a greater risk from wild animals when you are alone, and you are aware that in case of an accident or disease, there might not be any help available. However, the park ranger thoughtfully offered to drive his motorcycle into the forest, on some evenings; and brought me a kettle of hot water with a tea bag. Sometimes when he brought me the hot water, he lingered a few moments and talked about Dhamma. On one occasion, we had a look at some animal faeces, full of hair near to my camp; and he confirmed they were tiger droppings. The next night as we were talking, and the light was fading, a deer barked loudly close by; and the loud noise made him so nervous that he rushed off to his motorbike, without pausing to say good night.

The park ranger had worked at the National Park for many years. He was fully aware of the dangers of the forest; so at that moment when he ran off, I felt deep compassion for him. The next evening, I gave him an amulet of Somdet Dtoh for his

protection and inspiration. It was a genuine protective amulet made and blessed by the great meditation Master, Somdet Dtoh Brahmurangi, who was teacher to the Thai King Rama V. Somdet Dtoh was considered a *Bodhisatta* or a practitioner destined to become a Buddha, in a future life. I had received the amulet as a gift when staying with Ajahn Piak; and it seemed appropriate to pass it to the park ranger who regularly helped monks and also lived in the park with all the daily risks it involved. I was much more confident in my own meditation and understanding of Dhamma by then; and felt that I did not need to depend on such objects of faith, even though I appreciated their spiritual value.

Meditating alone in the forest brought up the usual physical challenges to adjust to; and required me to use patient endurance and wise reflection to avoid them becoming a source of mental suffering. There was very little vegetarian food offered on alms round, so my meals were small and simple. I only had the minimum of toiletries and relied on a single bar of soap to wash myself, my bowl and my robes. Even though it was the dry season, there were still summer storms that blew in, across the mountains; and several times I ended up soaked through by the heavy rain. I suffered ant bites, tick bites which take up to a year to heal; and had to endure the hardness of sitting and sleeping on the ground, night after night. When the conditions are challenging, it can bring up doubts; and you wonder why you are practising in that way. When your mind wants distraction, you are tempted to fantasise about things that make you happy; or sometimes you go to the other extreme and feel sorry for yourself. Whatever moods my mind tried to generate, I contemplated Luang Por Chah's teaching that it is like having an untamed tiger in your mind that stirs you up, and makes you suffer. I had to cultivate my practice of mindfulness and wisdom to tame the tiger.

On the positive side, I enjoyed the seclusion and living close to nature. I had plenty of time to develop mindfulness and insight into the impermanent and non-self nature of conditions; and in particular, the uncertainty of mental states which arise and cease in the same way as the external physical conditions. One evening, I opened my eyes from my meditation to find several wild dogs had silently moved to within a couple of feet and were sniffing me. They looked fierce and I knew that when they acted as a pack, they were capable of bringing down and killing a large animal, so I stayed quiet and watched them. The last thing Ajahn Pannavaddho had mentioned when I left him a few months before was a warning to watch out for the wild dogs. After a while, I sensed they were not threatening me as they did not growl or show their teeth. I smiled at them while I watched them; and eventually, they trotted off.

I found that the presence of wild animals highlighted the importance of maintaining mindful awareness and stillness of mind. I no longer went through sleepless nights fearing tigers as I had experienced previously in the National Park, but I did not want to let my effort in maintaining *samādhi* drop as that would lead to anxiety and distraction returning. I found enjoyment in cultivating awareness of breathing and my daily practice of *mettā* meditation. One night, as I was walking meditation in the moonlight, a large bear came crashing through the forest and ran towards me at full speed. I stood still and waited to see what it would do next. I was waiting to see if there was any old *kamma* between us, but it pulled up right in front of me and sniffed me as it hesitated a moment before it finally ran off in another direction. I assumed we were not old enemies and wished it well.

I met with troops of monkeys regularly and as I had experienced at Wat Keuan, they always created some problems. A large troop

of thirty or so monkeys came past every couple of days and at first, seemed wary of me. One afternoon, the leader, who was huge in size compared to the others, ran up to me on the ground and growled for a while as he showed me his teeth. It looked like he was threatening me but afterwards the whole troop began sleeping on the tree above my umbrella tent. They seemed to trust me. At night, they argued amongst themselves and were so restless and noisy that the peaceful atmosphere of the forest changed dramatically. In the day, they liked to sit above me and drop fruit on my umbrella to hear the banging sound or else shake the lower branches and watch the umbrella swing from side to side. Whichever forest I stayed in, monkeys always tested my equanimity.

One afternoon, almost two months after arriving at the National Park, I was sitting in meditation peacefully, and heard the sound of someone walking towards me. I looked up and was pleasantly surprised to see Ajahn Anan strolling towards me through the forest. It was a blessing but a complete surprise to me as I had heard no news that he was coming to camp there. He brought with him a small group of monks who were all friends of mine; and they planned to stay in the forest for about ten days on retreat. Ajahn Anan invited me to join him for a cup of tea, as they had arrived by vehicle and had brought a small gas stove and some supplies with them. It was a good opportunity to discuss the Dhamma, our meditation practice and share experiences.

Once the other monks had set up their umbrella tents, we all continued meditating at our individual places, so I hardly changed my routine. One afternoon, as I sat in meditation, I heard the sound of a large animal moving through the forest towards me. I could smell it; and heard the sound of its heavy breathing, but because I was calm and my mindfulness was continuous with the breath, I did not want to open my eyes

or concern myself with the animal. I continued to meditate with my eyes closed, in a state of stillness and equanimity. I had no wish to allow my mind to move from its object or fall into anxiety or doubt. I sat still and determined to ignore the animal, whatever happened. Whatever the animal was, it came right up in front of me, paused for a few moments and then moved on. About ten minutes later, one of the monks came down the hill to where I was meditating, and asked me if I had seen the bear that had just walked up from the direction of my camp. I answered honestly that I had heard something, but not seen or known that it was a bear. It seemed like I had passed a small test of how to maintain equanimity and continue meditating on the breath, whatever the external disturbance might be.

Ajahn Anan had to leave us for a few days to visit another monastery, so the other monks invited me to join them in determining to not sleep or lie down for three days. We were all quite sincere in wanting to train and develop our mindfulness, and clear comprehension in all situations; and this was one way to bring up extra effort. We had no other duties or tasks to perform in the forest, and it seemed like a good way to learn how to maintain equanimity and mindfulness, when going without any sleep or rest. By the end of the second day, I found I was experiencing sleepiness whenever I sat down; and even felt drowsy when walking meditation. On the third morning, I noticed myself becoming drowsy as I ate my meal, which was the only time in my life, I have ever experienced that. It was a good training in how to summon up additional resources of effort and determination; because at some moments, the desire to lie down and sleep was overwhelming and needed all my mental strength to resist it. I also experienced many images and visions when I was most exhausted, which also required all my effort and endurance to prevent them taking over my mind or lead to mental proliferation.

Looking For Solitude Again

Ajahn Anan returned to stay for a couple more nights; and then he invited me to accompany him back to Wat Marp Jan to spend the upcoming rains retreat with the community. I thanked him for the invitation, but I explained to him that I felt I would benefit from some seclusion and wanted to pursue my meditation practice, without a lot of other responsibilities. Ajahn Anan offered to help find a suitable quiet place for me to spend the rains retreat. A lay supporter in Chumphon province in southern Thailand had invited him to send monks to a remote jungle area where there was a small population of fairly poor Buddhist farmers growing coffee and papaya in the mountains. There were no monasteries or monks in the area to guide the locals or help them practise generosity nor listen to Dhamma teachings. I agreed to have a look at the place.

I spent a month or so practising at Wat Marp Jan with Ajahn Anan and the resident monks; and then headed back to Ubon to visit Luang Por Chah before the rains retreat. I returned to spend some time caring for Luang Por Chah around his birthday in June. I also paid respects to Ajahn Pasanno at Wat Pah Nanachat.

Luang Por Chah - Like A Block of Ice Melting In The Sun

I was always happy to spend time with Luang Por Chah even if it was just a few minutes. However, in June 1991, when I returned to Ubon, I found the atmosphere and mood amongst the monks looking after him, a little more tense and challenging than in the past. Many of the monks appeared anxious as they cared for him, because he was getting visibly weaker all the time; and there were many conflicting views about the best treatments to give him. Everyone was concerned that he could die at any moment. I had been away for six months and returning to spend time with Luang Por Chah, I felt that his prediction that his body would degenerate; and disappear like a block of ice melting in the sun, seemed to be more true than ever.

As Luang Por Chah's birthday drew close, he seemed to be especially weak, was losing weight and he began to hiccup all the time. He closed his eyes at all times, as he lay in bed; and the hiccupping continued day and night, for many days. Luang Por Chah's body was pale and withered. However, his mind seemed radiant and detached from the declining condition of his body. As usual, the Sangha gathered to pay respects to Luang Por Chah, on the day before his birthday; and during the night some of the senior monks came to the *kuti* to seek an update on his condition. Luang Por Jun, the most senior monk, knelt down and talked gently into Luang Por Chah's ear at length, praising him for his compassion and great endurance. He also encouraged Luang Por Chah to take a rest from the endless pain and suffering of his condition, and enter *Nibbāna*. Whatever anyone said, Luang Por Chah remained in *samādhi* with his eyes closed and quietly hiccupping all the time. Even after we took him to the hospital ICU, he continued to hiccup. He was there for several days. The doctors told us that we should prepare ourselves for the end of his life. All his vital signs seemed so weak that the doctors predicted he would not recover or return to the monastery. But he did.

A few days later, when the monks who had gathered for his birthday had dispersed and returned to their respective monasteries, Luang Por Chah was deemed strong enough to return to his monastery. Again, he had surprised the doctors with his resilience. He had experienced constant urinary infections and lost control of his bladder, so the doctors ordered a urinary catheter to be fitted. As the catheter was fitted, Luang Por Chah seemed to me, to be under the most extreme physical pressure I had ever witnessed, and heaved with pain. But once the catheter was fitted, he settled down again to a new level of increased care. He was much weaker than before, but steady. It seemed like he continued to defy all the odds, and no one could accurately predict how long he would last.





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vayadhammā saṅkhārā appamādena sampādethā ti.

Conditions fall apart.
Persist with diligence.

Dīgha Nikāya 16

13

Relinquishing Mother

Meeting Luang Por Baen

A few weeks later, after Luang Por Chah's health had stabilised, I paid my respects to him and Ajahn Pasanno; and travelled to Wat Marp Jan where I joined Ajahn Anan and travelled to southern Thailand. We went first to visit a new monastery in Ranong province where Luang Por Baen was leading an event, for two days. We had a wonderful opportunity to pay respects to him, and listen to his teachings before the rains retreat. He heard that myself and Ajahn Boonchu, another student of Ajahn Anan, were going to spend the rains retreat in the jungle in Chumphon province, and he encouraged us to meditate as much as possible. He reminded us to focus our mindfulness on contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body; and not give in to the mental defilements of greed, hatred and delusion. He also focused his teaching on the repulsive aspect of food; and explained that this would lead us to see the non-self nature of the physical elements that make up this human form; and to abandon anger and lust. He taught us that even if we did not receive much material support in the jungle area where we were going to reside, our practice of the Dhamma and Vinaya would always support us. I reflected on his teaching often during my time in southern Thailand. Luang Por Baen blessed and reminded us that as long as we followed Luang Por

Chah's teachings and his way of training, we would progress in the Dhamma.

We were invited to stay in a piece of uncleared jungle in Lamae district that had previously been the location of a communist militia camp. The whole region was completely undeveloped with no roads, electricity or phones. The way through the jungle was just a muddy track next to a river that was always flooding. There were still wild elephants and other animals in the vicinity; and every morning we listened to the sound of gibbons whooping in the trees, as we walked on our alms round. Most of the local people had moved into the area, from other parts of southern Thailand; and were busy clearing the jungle to create rubber and coffee plantations. They were very poor and there was very little infrastructure or local government to help them.

The only building in our patch of jungle was an old tin-roofed shack with no walls, and a mud floor. We could at least use it as an eating hall, to keep the rain off our heads. We began building a toilet, with a few volunteers from nearby farms; and then a couple of simple *kutis* were erected on the hillside, to protect us from the heavy monsoon rains that were arriving. Each evening, we bathed in the river at the valley bottom; and felt almost totally cut off from civilisation. Every morning, we walked out to the nearby farms, and went from farmhouse to farmhouse, until we collected enough food for the day. We were acutely aware of how poor the local people were, so we did not ask them for anything. If the first farmer did not come out to put food in our bowls, we simply walked on to the next farm, until we had received enough food to eat for the day. The people were generous with what they had; but we observed how much fear and anxiety they suffered because of their vulnerability to poverty; and the generally undeveloped nature of the area. There was little sense of law and order; or much

obvious presence of local government in the area. The presence of monks living nearby in the jungle seemed to bring the local population a good feeling; and the locals saw us as a positive addition to the immigrant community.

The word *Lamae* in Thai translates as 'relinquish mother' and historically, the name was given to the area by new settlers who moved in from overseas; and were forced to abandon their mothers, in their homeland. The meaning turned out to be quite poignant for me as in 1991, my parents separated and eventually divorced. I only received occasional letters from my parents because of the remoteness of the district, so each small piece of news I received tested my resolve to stay in Thailand; and continue with my practice. My father left my mother to live with another woman and, like my siblings, I was concerned how my mother would cope on her own.

Advice From Luang Por Buddhadasa

At the beginning of the rains retreat, Ajahn Boonchu and myself went to visit Luang Por Buddhadasa, as his monastery was only about a one-hour drive away. I explained to him my situation; and asked if he thought I should return to England to support my mother at that time. He answered that if her health was still good; and my other siblings were there to give her immediate support, during the difficult time of the separation, then I would actually do more good for my parents by staying put; and continuing my training in the Dhamma and Vinaya. He suggested that in the long run, I would make more good *kamma* training as a monk in Thailand. The good *kamma*, I developed through my cultivation of the Dhamma, would benefit both myself and my parents more than if I returned home at that time. This was not necessarily the answer that some people might have expected, but it seemed to confirm what I was already thinking myself. I wanted to deepen my understanding

of the Truths the Buddha pointed to; and make my mind firm in the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, before I returned home. I continued to correspond regularly with my parents and occasionally, phoned them; but I decided against travelling home, at that time. I gathered all my effort and energy, into following the monastic discipline and cultivating calm and insight meditation; and I dedicated the fruits of my practice to my parents, throughout the three months of the rains retreat.

I started the rains retreat with the intention of putting all my effort into cultivating mindfulness and contemplating the Dhamma. I did not know any of the local people. At first, I even struggled to understand the local dialect when the villagers spoke to me. Unfortunately, one man who had recently moved into the area, had set his sights on taking for himself, some of the jungle that had been set aside by the community to build a monastery. He had already, cleared part of the jungle illegally; and planted young rubber trees in between the original hardwood trees, hoping that he could claim the land for himself, when the rubber trees were mature. Our arrival made him anxious that he might get in trouble with the authorities; and although we wished him no harm, he told the other villagers that we should leave and even threatened us that if we did not move on, he would not guarantee our safety. We reflected that nothing could guarantee our safety except our own good practice of the Dhamma. On the second morning of the retreat, we came out from our huts and were surprised to find six border police officers sitting in our small eating hall with their machine guns propped up against the wooden posts. The police officers explained that a threat had been made against us and they had been assigned for our protection. We replied that we only wished to keep our precepts, quietly practise meditation and give the locals, a chance to make merit for the period of the rains retreat.

We emphasised to the police and the local people that we had no wish to dispute land ownership with anyone; and had nothing against the man who had made the threat and did not want him to be punished. We continued to spread thoughts of loving kindness and compassion to all the local people; and any dissatisfied ghosts in the area for the next six days, while the border police stayed with us. By the end of the week, the atmosphere seemed to change; and the policemen decided that the situation was peaceful enough for them to return to their headquarters. The man made no further threats and we continued to practise for the rest of the rains retreat in peace.

With the issue quickly resolved, the villagers breathed a sigh of relief; and were happy to support us, as we went on our daily alms round. Myself and Ajahn Boonchu began staying up, every night, to meditate together in the simple tin-roofed shed. We rested during the day. The weather was cool because we were deep in the mountains; and we wished to put our hearts into meditation practice. As they say, we just went for it. Every evening, we began our meditation sessions at 7 o'clock with some chanting; and continued sitting and walking meditation, until the following dawn without resting. The walk to collect food, from the nearby farms, lasted a couple of hours; and I returned to the hermitage feeling completely exhausted, but satisfied that I had put forth effort in my practice.

Once the villagers became more familiar with us, some of them asked to join the evening chanting, and meditation on the Observance Days. Three or four villagers stayed in the monastery overnight, but they rarely could stay up meditating all night, unlike the lay people in Ubon. Later, they admitted that their primary motivation was to spy on us; and see if we really meditated for the entire night. Once they realised we really did meditate all night long, they became inspired and



Ajahn Kalyano and Ajahn Anando on their first *piṇḍapāta*
at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2001.

wanted to learn how to meditate themselves. They had never met forest monks who meditated before; and were quite curious how we practised. We realised that although we could give occasional teachings in a formal way, more often, we taught them by example. They observed our conduct and saw how we trained in the monastic discipline. Gradually, the numbers participating in the overnight programme on Observance Days grew and some people started to come to the monastery, to offer food in the morning, even though there was no kitchen available to prepare any food.

As more people visited the monastery, they began to express their shared wish to see a permanent monastery, in the area. The jungle had previously been home to communist rebels, who were outside government control, but now the locals could see how useful it would be for the local community to have monks living there. We appreciated that the secluded jungle was ideal for our simple lifestyle dedicated to training in meditation; but we also understood the wish of the locals to develop the area and build a permanent monastery with proper facilities. A permanent monastery fitted into the local farmers' plans to develop their local community.

Personally, I found my time in Lamae very valuable. I had the chance to throw everything into my training in meditation. I did not have to teach or manage building projects or administration, so I felt really unburdened. Every night, I was meditating for many hours, without rest; and I was regularly experiencing deep states of stillness. I found that, sometimes, it was possible to be completely lucid and concentrated, even at two or three in the morning. Of course, there were also periods in between when I experienced drowsiness and dullness, or restlessness and agitation; but I could see what a rare chance I had to devote all my energy to meditation.

Ajahn Anan came to visit us in the middle of the rains retreat; and encouraged us to put our hearts into the practice. We visited Luang Por Buddhadasa, a second time during the retreat; and he told us how happy he was that we were practising in such a remote place, which never had monks resident before. He encouraged us to put all our efforts into the cultivation of the Dhamma. My friend asked him if one needs to rely on *pāramī* and good *kamma* accumulated in past lives, to reach *Nibbāna* in this life. With a disapproving look, Luang Por Buddhadasa answered that we should make our priority establishing mindfulness and clear comprehension, in the present; and observe closely the process of dependent arising as it takes place, from moment to moment. He reiterated that when you are mindful, you can cut through the craving that arises dependent on the pleasant and unpleasant feelings, arising from each sense contact; and undermine the cycle of craving conditioning suffering. He concluded that one cuts off attachment through cultivating mindfulness; clear knowledge and insight, in this very lifetime. He advised us not to waste energy speculating about past lives.

My friend, Ajahn Boonchu and myself continued to put forth effort in our meditation on a daily basis, throughout the rains retreat. We lived frugally with minimal comfort and material support; and trusted in our good intention to follow the Buddha's teachings. Meanwhile, the local villagers were formulating plans to build a fully functioning monastery for the future of their community. All of their ideas and expectations were quite reasonable from their point of view, but I had made it clear I was on a temporary retreat; and would return to Ubon after the rains retreat. Ajahn Boonchu was more senior to me and out of compassion, he listened to the wishes of the villagers and did some small jobs around the monastery to improve things. However, I was not sure that he really saw his future, building a monastery in that place either.

Towards the end of the rains retreat, the villagers celebrated the merit-making festival known as the day when the gates of heaven and hell are opened; and people make offerings for any of their relatives who may be caught in the hungry ghost realm. In southern Thailand, it is a hugely popular festival day. Many people who are not normally free to attend merit-making ceremonies in monasteries, because they are poor and need to work, try not to miss this one day of annual merit making. We were taken by surprise when over three hundred people turned up at our small tin-roofed shack to make offerings. Normally we had almost no visitors at all, but by the time we sat down to receive food offerings that morning, there was no room left for anyone to sit down. We only had one pit toilet to cater for everybody. Each villager brought a stainless-steel tiffin box with at least five containers of food, stacked one on top of the other. The village headman requested that the monks receive each tiffin box from the owner, and take a little food from each of the five different containers; because they believed that otherwise the ghosts of their departed relatives might not receive the full merit. That request meant that we had to spoon food out of at least fifteen hundred different food containers. It took over an hour to receive all the food that was offered to the monks that morning. Our alms bowls were overflowing.

People were very happy to see the community express so much faith and interest in the monastery; and they could see the monastery's potential to generate benefit in the locality. We appreciated the growing support from the local community and their wish to dedicate merit to their deceased relatives, but it was also a sign that our secluded forest hermitage was about to become something else. On that day, we gave a blessing and some teachings; and then the village headman invited us to remain on the land indefinitely, to help build a monastery. Ajahn Boonchu answered kindly that he would consider their

offer. After everyone had left, we cleared up and I went back to my hut to rest, as I had been up all night meditating and had not slept.

As I laid down on my mat exhausted, my mind converged into *samādhī*. I had an unusual vision of Luang Por Chah. In the vision, I was sitting on a secluded island in the ocean meditating peacefully, when a huge cruise liner full of young male and female tourists pulled up to the jetty; and hundreds of people began to disembark on to the shore. They swarmed up the beaches and the slopes to where I was meditating and surrounded me. As I tried to maintain my equanimity, Luang Por Chah walked up and told me that I was foolish for thinking that I could ever physically escape from the world. He pointed out that you can temporarily isolate yourself from the world, but eventually you must return to meet people and the things of the world. True liberation must come from cultivating the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, in your heart until you gain detachment, and true knowledge and vision of the way things are. You will then transcend the world from within.

The vision seemed to be a timely reminder that however perfect, the place is for secluded meditation, the conditions cannot last forever. Therefore, I should not cling to external conditions. Perfect isolation from the world is impossible, but you can detach your mind, from the changing conditions of the world, by cultivating mindfulness and wisdom; and clearly seeing all conditions as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. When one has clear knowledge and vision of the way things are, one experiences a separation between the mind and conditions; and true seclusion from the mental defilements.

I realised that whatever difficulties I encountered when I was caring for Luang Por Chah, I should always maintain mindfulness; and let go of my attachment to views and negative

desires rooted in ignorance, rather than seeking to physically escape. We were drawing close to the end of the rains retreat and I felt that it was time to return and pay respects to Luang Por Chah while he was still alive. We considered the village headman's invitation to stay on, but we could see that with the growing faith of the laity and the improving material support for the new monastery, it would not be long before other monks were invited to stay there. We knew that when we left the retreat to return to Wat Marp Jan, we would be leaving the newly created hermitage and the lay community better off than when we arrived.

Meditating With Luang Por Buddhadasa

After the rains retreat, Ajahn Boonchu returned to Wat Marp Jan, while I went for one last visit to pay respects to Luang Por Buddhadasa and spend time with him. When I arrived at his monastery, I heard that Luang Por Sumedho and the Sangha from Wat Pah Nanachat, were coming to visit in December, so I stayed on for a few weeks to meet them and travel back together to Ubon. I found that although the forest at Luang Por Buddhadasa's monastery was damp and humid, the pure and radiant energy emanating from him, was pleasantly supportive for my practice; and in combination with his teachings, was a real boost for my meditation.

It seemed like all the efforts I had put into meditating every night, through the rains retreat, had given me greater patience, stronger mindfulness and insight into the transient nature of my own mental states; and I experienced deeper states of stillness than before. It was a good preparation for receiving teachings from Luang Por Buddhadasa. He loved to teach at length about the process of Dependent Arising. He would describe each causal link in the process, in detail; and how to investigate and reverse the cycle of mental events that is normally causing

suffering. He explained at length how cultivating the factors of the Path puts the process in reverse; and leads to the cessation of suffering. Spending time with him was like a constant training in the fourth foundation of mindfulness, or mindfulness of dhammas (*dhammanusati satipaṭṭhāna*). After each discussion with him on the theme of the origin and cessation of suffering, I walked back to my *kuti* feeling light and peaceful; and buoyed by the Dhamma.

One afternoon, there was a knock on the door of my *kuti*, and a layman told me that it was time for me to give a Dhamma talk. I was taken by surprise because no one had mentioned anything about giving a talk previously, so I asked him what he meant. He could not give me any explanation but told me that everybody was ready and waiting for me in the main hall; and I should follow him. When I reached the meditation hall, there were over 500 lay Buddhists, from a nearby university, waiting for me to give them instruction on meditation. I had never given a public talk before, in English or Thai, so I was really thrown in at the deep end. Out of gratitude to Luang Por Buddhadasa and the community, it did not feel right to refuse. We had always been reminded of Luang Por Chah's instruction that we should not prepare, before giving a Dhamma talk, as it was not a formal lecture; rather we should speak from the heart, on whatever aspect of the Dhamma appropriate at that time.

I related to the assembled laity how I had meditated and cultivated the Dhamma during the rains retreat. I described what kind of obstacles I faced; and the methods I used to train my mind. After answering some questions at the end of the talk, I headed back to my *kuti* and continued with my own meditation. A year later, when I was visiting Wat Pah Nanachat, someone came up to me and told me how useful they had found my

latest Dhamma book. It was at that moment that I discovered that Luang Por Buddhadasa's disciples had transcribed the one public talk I had ever given; and printed it as a booklet for free distribution. No one had ever informed me; so I was a little confused until I realised what had happened.

I stayed in a quiet *kuti* at the back of Luang Por Buddhadasa's monastery for several weeks and continued to enjoy my practice of mindfulness of breathing; and investigating the nature of the five aggregates as impermanent, unsatisfactory and without-self. Sometimes, the rapture and joy I was experiencing from the states of stillness I entered was so profound that I hardly needed to sleep; and I kept meditating for hours on end. I found that contemplating non-attachment and emptiness brought my mind to a quiet place, on the inside, where it dropped everything. I was grateful to Luang Por Buddhadasa as I felt his presence helped my meditation.

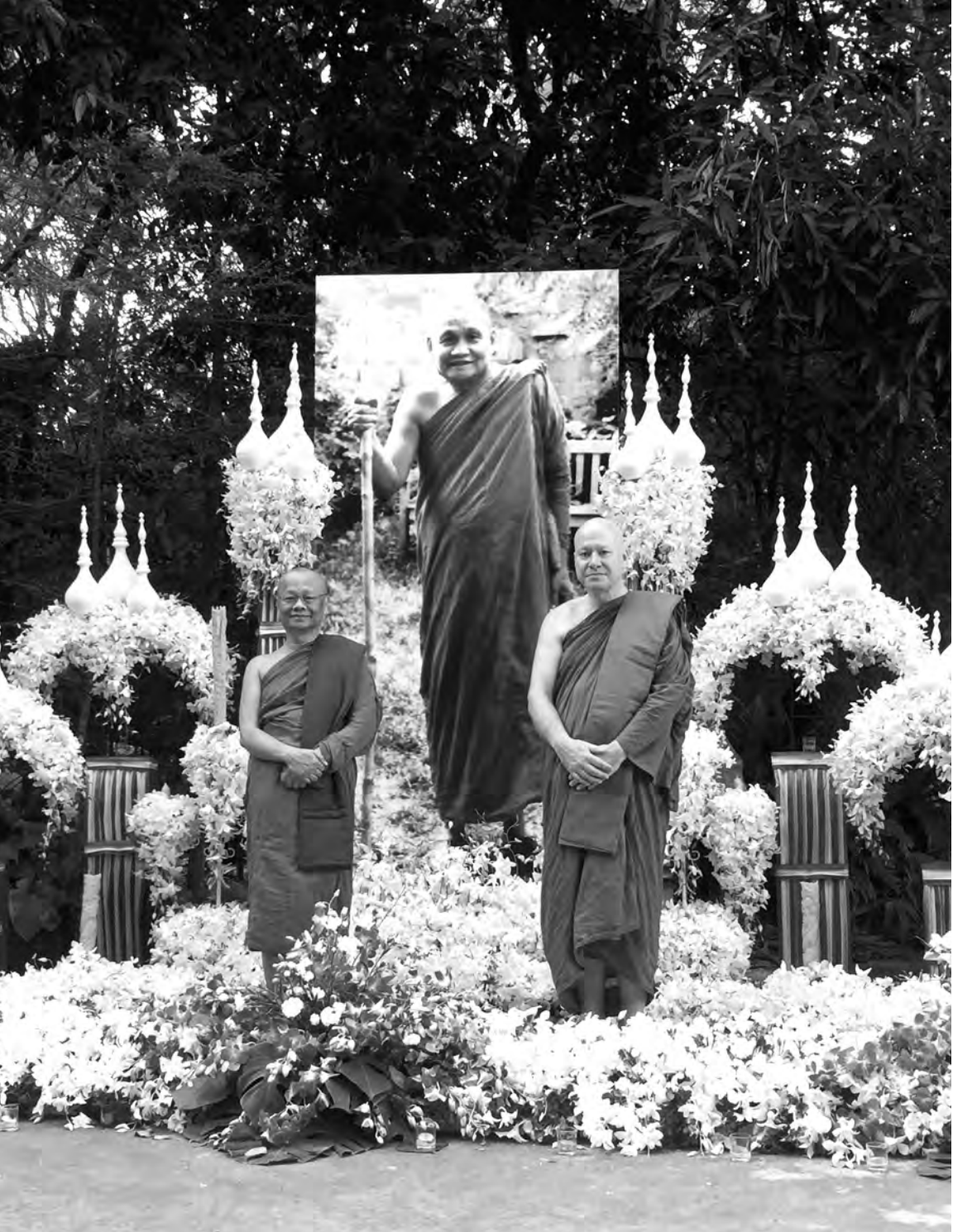
One morning, as Luang Por Buddhadasa was teaching around the time of dawn, I decided not to join the talk and kept meditating at my *kuti*. My mind became more and more concentrated until it entered a state of deep *samādhi*; and all awareness of my body and the external world disappeared. My mind was as if floating in space, the quality of knowing was strong and continuous. At one point, when my mind emerged from the deepest stillness, I realised that it was dawn already and decided not to go on alms round. I continued sitting through the morning and refined my awareness of the factors of *samādhi*; and entered a deep state of stillness again. Later in the day, when I withdrew from the stillness, I contemplated any thought, feelings and memories arising and continued to cut off craving as it was arising; and I returned to contemplating the bones in the body.

Having settled any doubt about my family; and having no duty with the monastic Sangha, I experienced a great sense of relinquishment and dispassion, arising in my heart, at that time. One evening not long before I returned to Ubon, I was walking meditation outside my *kuti*, when a strong and profound feeling of sadness and disenchantment, came up in my mind. Tears formed in my eyes and trickled down my cheeks as I contemplated the impermanent nature of life and the inevitability of death. My mind seemed to withdraw from my body with a clear sense that there is nothing to be clung on to in this world, nothing lasts and nothing belongs to a self.

Following this insight, my mind entered a deep and long-lasting state of peace; and I automatically let go of attachment to the past, and put down any ignorant desires directed to the future. I thought of Luang Por Chah with great gratitude and appreciation; and had a strong intuition that he would not be alive much longer. As I recollected Luang Por Chah, all the energy seemed to flow out of my mind and body until I went weak at the knees and could not stand any more. I sunk to the ground on my knees and had to lean against a tree for a while, to support myself. It was as if someone had taken all my strength away. I had to wait a couple of hours for my energy level to return to normal. I had a strong intuition that I must return to Ubon and pay respects to Luang Por Chah, as soon as possible. I realised that the impact of Luang Por Chah's death would be like someone taking my strength away in the same way; and I would have to brace myself for what was to come. A few days later, Luang Por Sumedho and the Sangha arrived from Wat Pah Nanachat and we spent several days receiving teachings on the Four Noble Truths, and the theme of Dependent Arising from Luang Por Buddhadasa. We travelled back to Ubon before the New Year.



Ajahn Kalyano at Wat Marp Jan in 1997.



Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Kalyano at Wat Nong Pah Pong in 2018.



Sati or mindfulness
depends on the presence of "*Buddho*"
- the knowing. It must be a clear knowing,
which leads to
the mind becoming brighter and more radiant.
The illuminating effect that
this clear knowing has on the mind is similar to
the brightening of a light in a darkened room.
As long as the room is pitch black,
any objects placed inside
remains difficult to distinguish
or else completely obscured from view
because of the lack of light.
But as you begin intensifying
the brightness of the light inside,
it will penetrate throughout the whole room,
enabling you to see more clearly
from moment to moment,
thus allowing you to know
more and more the details of any object inside there.

Luang Por Chah

14

Caring for Luang Por Chah One Last Time

A Lingering Bow

Arriving in Ubon, my priority was to spend time with Luang Por Chah. I quickly went to Wat Nong Pah Pong and spent the end of the old year and the beginning of the New Year assisting Luang Por Chah, at his *kuti*. He was clearly very weak; and all the monks remained tense because of the fragility of his health. I felt there was little I could do for him, other than make myself available. Even when he had coughing fits, they were not as violent as before. He had lost more weight; and spent much more time sleeping with his eyes closed. I meditated with a strong sense of urgency as we prepared for the end. When my 15-day shift ended in early January, I was grateful to have spent the time with Luang Por Chah. Knowing how much weaker he had become, I could tell that he was very close to the end of his life. Most days he was too weak to be lifted onto a wheelchair. His limbs no longer seemed to have any strength at all. I was well aware that he could pass away at any moment; so when I finished my shift and paid my final respects, I really took a long time to bow to him, and lingered for ages, as it felt like I would never see him again.

Sleeping With A Skeleton

I travelled out to the island monastery, Wat Keuan, where Luang Por Sumedho and the monks from Wat Pah Nanachat had gone to spend time on retreat. While I was looking for a spot to set up my umbrella tent, I heard that the villagers had recently brought the corpse of a man into the monastery; and left it in a shallow open grave. He had died without any close relatives, and there had been no funeral service, so the villagers brought the corpse to the forest; and left it for the monks to contemplate. This was done out of faith and respect for the resident monks. The villagers thought it was a way to make merit for the deceased man. I had camped next to an open grave in a previous year; and I was aware that I had a rare opportunity to meditate and observe the decomposition of the human body. I had a keen sense of Luang Por Chah's impending death. It seemed both poignant and appropriate to camp next to a corpse; and contemplate the impermanence of life, in the way he had practised in his early years as a monk.

Observing the skeleton that remained, it was not immediately obvious whether it was previously owned by a man or a woman, as most of the skin and the physical features had disintegrated. On close examination, the clothes indicated a male, but the physical remains seemed genderless. I set up my umbrella tent, about eight metres away, because the smell of decomposing flesh was rather strong. Part of my daily meditation included sharing merit with the departed person, out of gratitude, to them for providing me and other monks with the chance to contemplate the degeneration of the human body. The meditation on the decomposing human body provided invaluable images and perceptions of the impermanent, unattractive and non-self nature of the body; and the process by which the body breaks up and returns to the basic elements of nature. In the modern

world, with the strict health and safety regulations and legal bureaucracy, this custom of donating a corpse to a monastery for the monks to contemplate has all but disappeared.

I spent many hours sitting and walking meditation next to the corpse, in between listening to Luang Por Sumedho's teachings and walking on alms round in the morning. I had done this form of meditation before, and I was familiar with the theme of death and had little fear of ghosts. I used my time to reflect on my own mortality. I developed mindfulness directed to the changing images of the decomposing body that I observed before me, and drew those images into my mind until they left a clear impression. When I was calm, I contemplated the nature of my own body and the non-self nature of the physical elements that it is made from, until the mind experienced a deep and peaceful sense of emptiness.

‘He’s Gone’ - Luang Por Chah Dies

While I was at Wat Keuan, I heard that Luang Por Chah had been taken to hospital and so I sought out daily updates on his condition, during the retreat. On the evening of the 15 January 1992 after Luang Por Sumedho's final talk of the day, I continued to practise walking and sitting meditation at my camp in the forest, but continued to recollect Luang Por Chah. At about midnight, I lay down to rest, but my mind was bright and energetic, so after only one hour or so resting, I got up and continued meditating. Luang Por Chah passed away just after 5:15am in the morning; and at that time, I was sitting meditation next to the corpse in the forest, contemplating the impermanence of human life and recollecting my teacher.

Luang Por Chah had been in the hospital's ICU but during the night of the 15 January, the monks with him made a decision

to bring him back to the monastery. They were aware that the doctors wanted to provide more treatment at the hospital, but they also felt it appropriate to take Luang Por Chah back to Wat Nong Pah Pong knowing how weak he was; and how he was close to the end of his life. Everyone agreed it was appropriate for him to enter his final *Nibbāna* in the monastery. Through the course of the night, his vital organs gradually shut down and he became weaker and weaker, and his breath became shallower and shallower. The monks who were with him, told me that observing his last hours was like watching a candle slowly burning down to its base, flickering on and off, until eventually it was extinguished. To their surprise, they noticed him opening his eyes at about 1:30am when he was experiencing intense pain. It seemed to be a signal to them that he was fully aware of what was happening, even though the pain was intense and in spite of the extreme pain of his body, the monks did not detect any sign of mental suffering in their teacher.

At the very moment Luang Por Chah died, I had been meditating in the forest contemplating impermanence; and quietly following his instructions and teachings. As I got up to prepare for alms round, my intuition told me something was up. Instead of following the other monks out on alms round, I went over to meet the senior monks, Luang Por Sumedho and Ajahn Puriso. They were considering whether to visit Luang Por Chah or not as we had not received the news of his passing yet. I added my voice and encouraged the senior monks to go immediately; and asked if I could take up the last space in the car. Perhaps because I had spent so much time nursing Luang Por Chah, they agreed to let me join them; and we drove first to the hospital and then to the monastery.

When we arrived at Luang Por Chah's *kuti*, the first monk we met coming out, told us calmly: "He's gone." Luang Por Liem and the monks were slowly filing out of Luang Por Chah's

room. There was a sombre mood amongst the monks, doctors and everyone else present. We went inside his room and paid respects to Luang Por Chah's body as he lay still and silent on his bed covered in his robe. Everybody was silent and reflective. It was the end of an era.

“Don't Become A Hungry Ghost Hanging Around The Chedi”

The Sangha had been slowly adjusting and preparing themselves and the monastery, for the death of Luang Por Chah, over the previous ten years, but within that time, we had seen him come close to death; and then recover over and over again. When the news of his death gradually spread outwards, people were inevitably stunned and the realisation that Luang Por Chah was gone, tugged at the hearts of so many monks and laity; in the same way as when one loses a beloved family member. The events of 16 January 1992 triggered a strong and continuous outpouring of emotion, albeit in a calm and restrained manner. After the first monks had gathered to pay respects and formerly bathe Luang Por Chah's body, preparations began for the funeral ceremony. Luang Por Chah's corpse was prepared and eventually placed in a coffin which was moved to the main meditation hall. Every night, we gathered for meditation, funeral chanting and Dhamma talks. The atmosphere at these nightly gatherings was sombre, but uniquely energising for everyone's practice.

Luang Ta Maha Bua arrived to pay respects in the late afternoon of 16 January and he gave a spontaneous Dhamma talk that expressed his deep *muditā* and appreciation for Luang Por Chah, his practice and his teachings. Luang Ta Maha Bua intended to provide support to the Sangha, at a difficult time; and it was inspiring to hear his words as he talked about his own experience of losing his teacher, Luang Por Mun. Even

though I had left some of my possessions back in the forest at Wat Keuan, it was clear to me that help was needed at Wat Nong Pah Pong; so I stayed on to assist in receiving and looking after Luang Ta Maha Bua. Ajahn Anan also arrived and was assigned the duty of receiving and hosting any visiting senior monks; and I assisted him with that role each day throughout the following year.

Luang Ta Maha Bua's arrival and his generous attitude as he displayed kindness and support for the Sangha and lay disciples of Luang Por Chah was appreciated. He was the first of many senior monks from around the country to visit and pay respects. After his impromptu Dhamma talk, we took him over to Luang Por Chah's old timber *kuti* to spend the night. Interestingly, as soon as he sat down on the upper storey of the *kuti*, he squinted in the glare of the solitary fluorescent light that had been switched on and suddenly the light went out by itself. In fact, the power supply for the whole *kuti* had strangely gone dead, and the monks could not get it working again until the next day after Luang Ta Maha Bua had left. Power supply throughout the rest of the monastery, remained unaffected. One monk pointed out that Luang Ta Maha Bua had always preferred not to bring electricity into his own monastery; and it was as if invisible forces had responded to that preference.

I assisted Luang Ta Maha Bua with his bath, and prepared his bedding for him. Before he went into his room for the night, he pulled me aside and quietly reminded me that even though my teacher was dead, I should not spend the rest of my days, like a hungry ghost lost in grief. He explained that it was important for me to continue my practice and increase my efforts in cultivating the Dhamma. He emphasised that the skilful response to the loss of one's teacher is to put forth more effort in one's practice out of gratitude and appreciation to the teacher; rather than

becoming overwhelmed by the pain of loss. He described how after the funeral of his teacher, Luang Por Mun, he went off into the forest and redoubled his efforts in his own meditation and cultivation of the path. He finished the conversation by teasing me, that I should be careful not to let myself become a hungry ghost hanging around Luang Por Chah's Chedi sweeping and dusting the relics and feeling sorry for myself. He suggested that the appropriate way to express my appreciation for Luang Por Chah was to follow the monastic training, make my mind firm in *samādhi* and develop the wisdom, to cut off the mental defilements.

I appreciated the reminder from Luang Ta Maha Bua because he was speaking from his direct experience. The next day, he kindly visited Wat Pah Nanachat and gave some teachings there. I spent time at Wat Nong Pah Pong over the following weeks, sometimes helping to receive incoming senior monks, sometimes helping Luang Por Liem with different projects to prepare the monastery for the funeral. Every evening, I attended the funeral chanting and meditation sessions with the Sangha. It was inspiring to help receive Somdet Nyanasamvara who was the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand. I had met him several times over the years, ever since I first practised meditation at Wat Bowornivet as a layman; and was always inspired by his kindness and compassion. On his visit to Wat Nong Pah Pong, the whole Sangha was there to receive him and having prepared an armchair on the raised monk's seat for him, it was a blessing to witness his humility when he refused to sit on the chair, and sat down cross legged on an ordinary mat. I noticed that during the course of the funeral ceremonies, many senior monks and famous meditation teachers who visited and paid respects to Luang Por Chah, shunned any special or preferential treatment they were offered when they arrived at Wat Nong Pah Pong. Each senior monk appeared quite humble and they emphasised

that we are all monks together. It seemed to be each monk's way of showing their great respect for Luang Por Chah; and the way he trained his monks.

A Quiet Retreat At Dtao Dtum

After some weeks of helping with the funeral preparations, the advice from Luang Ta Maha Bua surfaced in my mind. After the 50-day funeral ceremony, I took leave to spend a quiet month in the forest of the newly established Dtao Dtum hermitage in Kanchanaburi. Prior to Luang Por Chah's death, Ajahn Pasanno had been invited to send monks to a simple hermitage near the old tin mine of Dtao Dtum, deep in the jungle on the border between Thailand and Myanmar. The hermitage was really just a large area of protected forest with no permanent building or infrastructure and at that time there were no monk in residence. I had the chance to spend a period of time completely alone in a secluded forest; and to collect my thoughts together after the tumultuous events surrounding Luang Por Chah's death.

At that time, the facilities at Dtao Dtum were at a bare minimum. There were no permanent buildings or toilets for the monks. The family who owned the old tin mine concession, kindly offered some food at the foot of the mountain, every morning. I camped at the foot of one of the biggest trees in the forest. I had a beautiful experience practising in a very natural forest; with the feeling of being completely cut off from the world. I walked down the steep and narrow path next to the waterfall each morning; and after collecting my food, returned the same way to eat my meal, at the top of the waterfall. Monkeys and gibbons swung around in the trees overhead as I ate; and any leftover rice was given to the fish in the stream. The family offering food to me admitted, at the end of the four-week stay, that they had been really anxious about my staying alone on top of the mountain. They told me of their concerns about



Ajahn Kalyano meditating in the mountains of Victoria in 2002.

all the potential dangers that they could imagine: wild animals, malaria, falling trees or an accidental fall on the rocks. They described how they breathed a sigh of relief, every morning, when I walked into view. On both the days when they drove me eighty kilometres into the jungle, from the town, and the day that we left, they carried loaded guns in the vehicle as a precaution, because of their concerns about the risk from wild animals and armed insurgents.

I spent about a month meditating alone on top of the hill at Dtao Dtum. It was a good time to recollect Luang Por Chah and his teachings. I heard tigers and bears at night; but they never came to bother me. My camp, at the base of the massive hardwood tree, seemed to bring good energy to my meditation; and the forest at that spot, was open enough to walk meditation conveniently. As was my usual habit, I spent much of the night meditating; and rested more in the day. One afternoon, I lay down to have a short rest, and following my usual habit I placed a photo of Luang Por Chah on a folded robe, next to my head and bowed to my teacher, three times before lying down. As I drifted off to sleep, I heard a loud cracking sound above me and instinctively sat straight up and put my hands over my head. A huge dead branch broke under the weight of a group of monkeys, that were jumping around looking for food at the top of the tree; and came crashing down on top of me. Afterwards, I was relieved to see that the largest and heaviest part of the branch was embedded in the ground right in front of me where my head had just been. It laid between where I sat and the photo of Luang Por Chah. If I had stayed lying down, I might well have died. I thanked Luang Por Chah and out of gratitude, I dedicated all the meditation I did to Luang Por Chah, Ajahn Pasanno, Ajahn Anan and the family who were feeding me every day.

The Hundred-Day Funeral Ceremony

I headed back to Wat Nong Pah Pong for the hundred-day funeral ceremony, in April. Different milestones, in funeral ceremonies, are measured by the number of days after the teacher's death. I remember thinking that in the one hundred days since Luang Por Chah passed away, so much had happened that it seemed more like several years had passed. Wat Nong Pah Pong monastery was being transformed physically by the construction projects underway to prepare for the large royal funeral which was to be held. Luang Por Chah was now a memory and it was hard to plan anything for the long-term future, other than to prepare for the cremation.

After the ceremonies, I took my leave of the senior monks; and returned to Wat Marp Jan with Ajahn Anan. I returned to Wat Nong Pah Pong periodically throughout the year to offer help with the funeral preparations; and to join in the meditation and chanting sessions that took place every night until the actual day of the cremation.

Taking Dependence From Ajahn Anan

Although I was always prepared to offer help with Luang Por Chah's funeral preparations, I returned to Wat Marp Jan. I saw that my efforts to cultivate the Dhamma through my practice was of benefit to others, in its own way. The atmosphere in this monastery was conducive to the practice of the Dhamma and Vinaya; although the physical conditions were not always easy. The monastery was secluded as it was located at the end of a cul-de-sac; in a small valley surrounded by hills which protected it from outside noise, and minimised the number of visitors travelling into the monastery. The lush jungle was still a habitat for wild animals; malaria and dengue fever were endemic to the area. In the rains retreat of 1992, eight members of the Sangha

had malaria, only myself and Ajahn Anan did not. I am not sure why I never caught malaria at Wat Marp Jan, Wat Keuan or in the forest of Dtao Dtum because in each monastery I resided, other monks and laity caught malaria and even died from it.

At Wat Marp Jan, our daily routine began with morning meditation sessions from 3:00am until dawn. We then walked out of the monastery on alms round, through the local farms and villages, for a distance of between two to eight kilometres. We walked back to the monastery, covered in dust from the gravel roads; drenched in sweat from the heat and usually exhausted. I recited the meditation word '*Buddho*' as I walked along on alms round. Sometimes, I counted the number of steps I took from the start of the walk to the finish to maintain mindfulness, and to prevent my mind wandering away from the present moment. Alms round is always a test of how composed and mindful a monk is, because it is the time when monks have their main interaction with the world, outside the monastery.

It was not uncommon to walk up to a house, and come across a couple having an argument or a parent angrily scolding their child first thing in the morning. Sometimes we had to stand for a while in front of the house, waiting for the family members to see us. Such moments reminded us of the difficulties of family life, but also required us to practise patience, loving kindness and equanimity. Every day, we encountered farm dogs protecting their owner's property that rushed at us barking and occasionally, even bit the monks. In north-east Thailand, the village dogs also barked at us, but they were not generally dangerous; because they were used to living together closely with many different people in the villages. Around Wat Marp Jan, the farms were far apart, and each dog protected its owner's farm and were much more aggressive. One morning, I took a junior monk out with me on alms round; and he was bitten by a small but vicious dog, in a durian orchard. When the monk saw his own blood,

he fainted on the spot. On another occasion, I was walking with a teenage novice monk who was so badly bitten on the leg, that he could not walk back to the monastery. Fortunately, the village clinic was only five hundred metres away; and I had no choice but to carry him there in my arms. Usually, when a monk was bitten by a dog, he had to have a set of injections for rabies. On one occasion, I entered a chicken farm to collect alms and immediately, the fierce doberman guard dog charged at me. Normally, the owner tied the dog up after letting it run loose at night to discourage thieves; but that morning they had forgotten. The dog ran straight at me and bit a hole in my robe, but when it turned to bite me a second time, I held up my bowl lid and used it as a shield. I managed to stave off injury and by that time, the owner took control of the dog and apologised.

Walking on alms round also brought us into close proximity with young females, which was a test for our practice of sense restraint. We walked up to each farm, and waited silently until the owner saw us; and brought out an offering of food. On one occasion, as we stood waiting in front of a house, a beautiful teenage girl was bathing in the open air at a water jar next to the house. She did not see us and continued bathing in front of us. So, after waiting briefly, I let the junior monks know that we should walk on without receiving food rather than embarrassing the poor girl who had not seen us, nor risk unnecessarily stimulating sexual desire, in a group of young celibate monks.

I always developed the quality of goodwill; and viewed the families that supported us as Dhamma relatives. Cultivating that perception made it easier to let go of any sexual attraction for females; and sympathise with any stressful family problems that we unexpectedly encountered, on our morning visits to each household. Each day, I brought up thoughts of gratitude

towards the families who shared their food with us. Although they were not well off financially, the food they offered was nutritious and always enough to support us for the day. The simple style of the food also helped us maintain mindfulness and sense restraint. Occasionally, we listened as the farmers told us their good or bad news; and responded with some simple words of Dhamma to encourage them.

Each morning, we returned to the monastery after alms round and put all the food we had received on trays; and then sat in meditation, waiting for the food to be offered to the senior monk. In those days, it was very rare for anybody to visit the monastery and offer any additional food. Most days we sat in meditation for about 45 minutes, but occasionally and without warning, Ajahn Anan increased the amount of meditation time to one hour or even an hour and a half, or two hours. Before the meal, I made a habit of sitting in the full lotus posture as I was still training to improve the flexibility of my legs; and when I meditated, I found the stability of the full lotus posture helped my mind settle down; and became firm in concentration. I was cultivating mindfulness, patience and determination so I sat without moving, until the bell for the meal offering was rung. On the mornings when Ajahn Anan led us in extended periods of meditation, I had to work hard to keep my equanimity and not change my posture, but I was glad for the unexpected challenge, as it really pushed me to learn patience and preserve my mindfulness. By keeping to my own resolution not to move, I had to observe the arising and passing away of many different feelings and emotions; and the stability of the lotus posture aided that.

On Observance Days, the monks meditated together through the night; and I found it inspiring to witness the efforts each monk made in their practice. My mind was rarely peaceful

and radiant the whole night through. I experienced sleepiness and dullness like everyone else, but I found the beauty of the Dhamma was in the sincerity of the effort made by the monks to train; and go without the comfort of sleep for a night. In those days, the resident Sangha was small and it was pleasant to sit and walk meditation with a few monks in the cool night air. On the full moon night, the monastery was particularly beautiful, and I trained myself to walk around without a torch. The words ‘Marp Jan’ actually translate as ‘the hills under the moon’ and is the name of the local village.

Ajahn Anan had a good reputation as a meditation practitioner who had realised the Dhamma. He inspired us with his talks and explanations of how to train the mind and deal with obstacles. His teachings echoed those of Luang Por Chah; and he reminded us to investigate the first three fetters of self-view; attachment to external practices and rituals; and sceptical doubt. He emphasised how our ignorance binds us to the world, more suffering and rebirth. We regularly received visits from other senior teachers, and also from wandering monks, who move around Thailand between the forest monasteries. These visiting monks might be from either of the main two monastic sects in Thailand and Ajahn Anan was generally very kind and supportive of visiting monks, whatever their background or tradition. Occasionally, we hosted some monks who held unusual or eccentric views on the Dhamma, but he encouraged us to be tolerant as long as those monks did not break the training rules or cause trouble.

Whenever we travelled to Luang Por Chah’s monastery, we combined the travel with visits to other senior meditation masters such as Luang Ta Maha Bua, Luang Por Tate, Luang Por Chawp or Luang Por La. Each teacher encouraged us to

put forth effort in developing the Noble Eightfold Path; and keeping up the traditional practices and training rules of forest monks. Each different senior monk had their own unique way of speaking about the Dhamma. Sometimes they recollected how they trained and developed understanding of the monastic discipline; or told us stories of how they, dealt with different mental defilements, and let go of their attachment to conceit and views; or battled with lust. Most of them encouraged us to meditate a lot and to avoid spending too much time teaching or get too close to lay devotees, while we were young and filled with energy available for training in mindfulness and investigation.

It was helpful to hear such teachings, after Luang Por Chah's death, because in the following years, several of his senior western disciples seemed to lose faith and gave up the training, to disrobe. I was grateful that Ajahn Anan did not encourage me to go out and teach; or get involved with establishing new monasteries, as so many of my contemporaries tended to do. He encouraged me to keep my head down and meditate, which is exactly what I wanted to do. When lay people whom I did not know visited Wat Marp Jan, and requested to talk with me because I was the only foreign monk, Ajahn Anan usually discouraged them and told them to let me get on with my meditation practice, in peace and quiet.

Sometimes I did assist Ajahn Anan when he had foreign visitors and needed a translator, but once my duty was finished, he sent me back to my hut to meditate. Most of the time there were no other foreign monk staying at Wat Marp Jan, so my spoken English actually became a bit rusty. Ajahn Anan kindly allowed me to ring my mother, from time to time, on a satellite phone; and to give her some encouragement after her divorce. During the conversations, she occasionally complained that I was forgetting my own mother's language. Learning new Thai words and forgetting English words brought me some helpful

insight into the impermanence of memory and perception. Most of the time, I only spoke in the Thai language and I even began to think in Thai. I found that by thinking in Thai, I gained a useful way to become more mindful and aware of my own thinking process and to discern more clearly the difference between wholesome and the unwholesome mental states. When I deliberately thought in Thai, I cultivated more skilful trains of thought that supported wise reflection; and understanding of the Dhamma. At this time, I was translating some of Luang Por Chah's talks from Thai into English, which I always found deepened my understanding of his Dhamma teachings. Those talks were later published in books such as: '*The Path of Peace*', '*Clarity of Insight*' and '*The Key to Liberation*'. I even found that when I dreamt, the people in the dreams, spoke in Thai.

Samanera Sai - An Unusual Novice

During this time, there was a teenage novice staying at Wat Marp Jan who was from north-east Thailand. He seemed to be naturally gifted in cultivating his mind in mindfulness; and he gained deep states of *samādhī*, much quicker than most other practitioners. With his attainment of *samādhī*, he also gained some psychic ability and special knowledge which included the ability to recollect his own or other people's past lives, know future events, see beings in other realms; and know other people's state of mind. As you might expect, he became the focus of people's attention in the monastery, although he generally kept his skills and knowledge to himself, as a protection.

The novice was known as Samanera Sai. One result of his presence in the monastery was that quite a few sceptics were given first-hand experience of the potential of the human mind, to develop psychic powers and special knowledge. He gave insightful Dhamma teachings and advice; to help his fellow practitioners understand themselves better, and to become

aware of their mental defilements, more clearly. People paid attention to what he had to say because living with him and seeing him practise every day gave them confidence that his skills in *samatha* meditation were genuine. On Dhamma, the novice spoke with confidence about the importance of virtuous conduct, the practice of mindfulness and cultivation of wisdom to purify the mind from the mental defilements. No one could fault the truths in his teachings. He was teaching in line with the words of the Buddha. However, another result of his presence was that it stirred up some jealousy amongst some of his fellow monks and novices.

Healing A Hernia

During the year, I developed an extremely painful hernia and over time, the level of pain gradually became so intense that I felt it in every posture, through the day and night. Perhaps it had been caused by the action of vigorously sweeping leaves or from carrying a heavy object. I felt pain all the time; and I found that practising mindfulness directed to the painful feeling was the best way to cope with it. I joked with my friends that the hernia was like a teacher who was constantly scolding me, to be more mindful, in every posture, throughout the day. In that sense, the hernia was reminding me to follow the Buddha's instructions. The local doctor insisted that I needed surgery to repair the hernia. I did not wish to spend time in hospital or undergo surgery; and I was ready to endure through the pain and discomfort, but the intensity of the pain continued to increase.

Before I made an appointment for surgery, Ajahn Anan and Samanera Sai said they would use their *samādhī* and spread *mettā* to help me. On the Observance Day, the community gathered together as usual, to practise meditation, through the night. Samanera Sai made some specially blessed holy

water for me to drink and then he and Ajahn Anan meditated together spreading *mettā* for my well-being. I continued my own meditation through the night; and surprisingly, by morning, all the pain had completely gone. The extreme pain I had experienced constantly, for many weeks, completely disappeared; and the hernia appeared to be repaired. Later, when I informed the doctor that after many weeks of suffering the pain was gone, he found it surprising that the hernia could resolve itself, but he was happy with the outcome and accepted that I no longer needed surgery. The doctor was a disciple of Ajahn Anan; and he accepted that the power of the Dhamma could have had an influence in the healing process. I was grateful that the pain had disappeared. Whether the healing was caused by the good energy I received from Ajahn Anan and Samanera Sai as they spreaded *mettā* or from my own good fortune, I was still grateful for their kindness and compassion. The experience gave me useful insight into the healing power of *samādhi*.

Normally, I developed mindfulness and states of stillness as a foundation for contemplation of the Four Noble Truths, and to reflect on the impermanent and non-self nature of the five aggregates. However, over the years I found that the development of *samādhi* can have a naturally healing effect on the body and mind. When the body is suffering illness or injury, the pure energy of the mind that arises from deep stillness, quite naturally flows to the location, in the body that requires healing; and can be one positive factor in healing the body. Developing a state of calm when you are ill is not easy, but it can help soothe some types of pain, such as headaches or stomachaches; and when the mind reaches one-pointedness, painful feeling can disappear altogether. It is also possible for someone skilled in *samādhi* to spread the energy of *mettā* to others; and soothe their physical and mental pain, and support their healing process.

Ajahn Anan encouraged us to develop a strong foundation in the cultivation of the four *brahmavihāras* or meditation on the themes of the sublime abidings. In addition, he encouraged us to persist with developing mindfulness of the perception of the unattractiveness of the body; and to meditate on the four natural physical elements: earth, water, fire and air. This was a meditation I had begun in earnest when I stayed with Ajahn Piak several years before; and I had kept it up on a daily basis. Usually, I cultivated mindfulness of breathing to calm the mind and when the mind reached stillness, I turned to contemplate on one or more aspects of the body. Occasionally, I turned straight to contemplating the body, at times when my mind was not peaceful or was struggling to settle down with the breath. Contemplation of the repulsiveness of the thirty-two parts of the body was another way that I found could successfully bring my mind to stillness, when I was tired or ill.

Mind Reading

Samanera Sai's mind was very sensitive; and regularly picked up on the moods and thoughts of different monks in the monastery. If the individual was open to advice, he pointed out to them where their thinking was going wrong; and how they were falling under the influence of the mental defilements. If one monk was jealous of another or missing home or thinking too much about an old girlfriend, the novice often pointed it out to him as the cause of his suffering; and helped him establish greater mindfulness and understanding by teaching him to observe impermanence, and practise letting go. A novice is not bound by quite the same refined level of monastic discipline as the monks. This allowed him to talk more openly about psychic phenomena than the monks. Unfortunately, some of the monks were not so comfortable with a novice having this level of skill with *samādhi*; and the special knowledge that accompanied it.

A few monks experienced jealousy because the young novice seemed to be progressing so easily in his meditation; and also because it led to him receiving more attention from other people, than did some of the older monks. Actually, Samanera Sai often tried to avoid talking about his special knowledge to deflect from such jealousy, but he was not always successful.

One evening, Samanera Sai got really fed up with the jealous comments by a couple of the monks, behind his back. He wanted to prove to the other young novice that they were speaking negatively about him. Samanera Sai grabbed his friend's hand, and making his mind firm in *samādhi*, made a determination to allow the other novice to hear a conversation that was going on between two monks, in another part of the monastery. The other novice had been sceptical when told that there were monks speaking critically about Samanera Sai, behind his back; however, when he heard their voices as if he was in the same room with them, he could not deny it. Later, the second novice repeated the exact words that the two monks had spoken in their conversation, and after an awkward pause, the two monks confirmed the truth. The two monks were both embarrassed and impressed at the same time.

Another memorable incident that demonstrated the novice's skill in *samādhi*, happened after one evening meditation session. Ajahn Anan walked out on to the veranda of the meditation hall to give some teachings to a group of visiting laity who had joined us for the evening *Puja*. However, none of the monks had remembered to switch on the veranda lights for him. He was sitting in the dark. I was still meditating inside the hall with Samanera Sai and another novice, when we heard Ajahn Anan call out for someone to turn on the veranda lights for him. I turned around as Samanera Sai made a gesture for his friend to watch him as he fixed his gaze on the light switch on the

back wall of the hall. Suddenly the veranda lights came on by themselves. No one had actually walked over to the light switch control panel and physically turned the switch on.

Eventually however, Samanera Sai succumbed to his own youthful desires, curiosity and his inexperience in the practice. His family were extremely poor rice farmers living in north-east Thailand. When he went home to visit them, Ajahn Anan sent one of the monks to accompany him as a Dhamma friend. They stayed in a small forest monastery near to his home village; and each day, he visited his ageing mother who was sick. The villagers loved to come out to the monastery to talk to the novice. One of the regular visitors was a young girl of the same age, who had done well at school and qualified to attend teacher training college. She seemed to be inspired by the self-assured young novice who could teach Dhamma so confidently; and inspired faith in so many people. Later in the year, he returned to visit his home village a second time, and the girl came to see him, every day. Over time, they appeared to become infatuated with each other. Not long after his second visit home, he disrobed. The young novice provided us all with a good lesson, as we could see that even when a practitioner attains deep states of *samādhī* and experiences psychic powers, it is still possible for them to fall prey to their own desires and attachments. The Buddhist path to awakening includes the cultivation of morality, meditation and wisdom, and ultimately it is insight into the three universal characteristics of existence that cuts off the ignorance and wrong views that fuel craving and attachment. Attaining states of stillness and psychic powers cannot remove worldly desires, without insight into the true nature of phenomena.

Sammāgārava - Right Reverence

One thing I had to learn quickly, at Wat Marp Jan, was how to integrate with the Thai monks, because for long periods of

time, I was the only foreign monk resident there. I learnt to speak, listen and respond in Thai, all the time; and to keep to the monastery regulations and refined monastic etiquette, which was the normal practice for the monks. In the same way as monks at Wat Nong Pah Pong, had great respect and devotion to Luang Por Chah, all the monks at Wat Marp Jan had the utmost respect for the teacher, Ajahn Anan. Most of the monks were from central Thailand, and shared similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, at Wat Pah Nanachat, I had lived in a community of monks from diverse backgrounds and not one particular cultural background, held sway over the group.

Training in the monastic discipline naturally encourages you to develop the qualities of mindfulness; and restraint in your speech and actions. That provides a good foundation for living peacefully and harmoniously, with other monks of different ages and cultural backgrounds. If a monk does not follow the monastic training rules, they naturally experience difficulties, living and cooperating, with others. Even when you follow the training rules, you still have to maintain an attitude of goodwill, take care with your speech, and cultivate sensitivity towards the character and personality of the other monks you live with. You have to take responsibility for your actions; and fulfil any obligations and requirements to the community. This includes attending group meetings, completing any chores assigned to you; and basically fulfil various duties given to you by the teacher; or required by the monastic training. There can still be opportunities for some misunderstandings to arise, between monks; or differences of interpretation, in some aspects of the training; but I found that generally my practice continued smoothly if I paid attention to these things; and kept up my cultivation of kindness and compassion towards others, on a daily basis.

In my first year at Wat Marp Jan, one of the senior monks asked me if I had any difficulties staying in the monastery long term, because previously, other foreign monks had visited the monastery, but for only brief periods of time. I answered that I was content in my practice and did not have any particular problems living in the monastery. The monk suggested that the reason, I was able to stay at the monastery longer than other foreign monks, was I had the mental quality of *sammāgāra*, meaning that I maintained the quality of respect, for the teacher and the training. It is part of the practice of wisdom and understanding, as described in Right View, the first factor of the Noble Eightfold Path. He noted that because I had respect for the teacher and followed his instructions; and I was sincere in my respect for the training and the traditions of forest monks in general, my practice would continue to progress. These qualities came naturally to me, and perhaps was one reason I had faith to follow Ajahn Anan, as my teacher.

It was not that the monastery was particularly comfortable for me. The weather was generally hot and humid. There was little vegetarian food in the early days; and malaria and dengue fever were endemic. Most of the food dishes offered to the monks contained meat or seafood. My usual practice was not to inform anyone, that I was vegetarian, so as not to place a burden on anyone or expect special treatment. Meat dishes and seafood are usually considered luxuries in Thailand, so when I did not eat them, some of the monks thought I was not honouring the kindness of the laity; and even told me off once for not eating a dish, made from crab. Eventually, the monks worked out that I was vegetarian and left me alone. In later years, vegetarian food became more fashionable amongst the laity, and was offered more regularly to the monks.

The presence of Ajahn Anan, at Wat Marp Jan, generally brought out the best in people and he was constantly a source

of inspiration, both in his teachings and through the example of his personal practice. The monks, under his guidance, put a lot of effort into the cultivation of the Dhamma. They were careful and restrained in the way they used requisites; and continued to put forth effort in developing mindfulness, and put effort into sitting and walking meditation. One sign that the monastery was a conducive environment, for developing meditation, was that even when relaxing together the monks often talked about different aspects of meditation, the obstacles to progress and how to overcome them.

Each monk had their own particular knowledge and skills, and they used them to serve the community. Some monks could sit meditation, all night for six or seven hours without moving; and helped inspire others to stick with their meditation, even when they wavered in their commitment. Another friend of mine regularly walked meditation for eight hours a day, but he remained humble and not conceited, despite the great effort he put forth. He never criticised other monks if they did not meditate for as long as he did; or attain equally deep states of stillness. One monk was very strict on how much food he allowed for himself, and did not accept food on any day, that he caught himself falling asleep in the early morning meditation session. Some monks took temporary vows of silence, to improve their mindfulness around speech; and direct attention to their meditation object. One monk slept on a plank of wood raised on two bricks so that if he rolled around unmindfully or slept too long, he would fall off and wake up.

Some of the monks were drawn to the practice of *ācariyavatta* or assisting the teacher. They gave up much of their time and energy to look after his alms bowl, robe and dwelling place, and to assist him with administrative work. Ajahn Anan trained us to follow the teachings of Luang Por Chah; and we looked after

all the senior monks in the monastery, in this way. I attended on Ajahn Anan for many years; and found it was an opportunity to learn about myself because the practice requires one to set aside personal preferences, pride and conceit. It is a full-time job, seven days a week, and requires patience, dedication and persistent effort. Sometimes I was exhausted but still had to do my duty. In the same way I had served Luang Por Chah previously, the practice helped me to bring up energy and resilience. I benefitted from the time I spent with Ajahn Anan and learnt new and different aspects of the Dhamma and Vinaya discipline, as he shared his knowledge and experience. Over time, he became familiar with my character, as I did his, and he gave me advice that was relevant to my meditation and cultivation of understanding.

In general, the monks at Wat Marp Jan encouraged each other in all aspects of the practice, and worked well in whatever they were good at. Some monks loved to study and could quote the texts and the Pali language; and give lengthy explanations on aspects of the Dhamma. Ajahn Anan did not stop monks from studying, but he did not let it take over their lives to the point where they gave up on meditation; and ignored other parts of the monastic training. Occasionally, if a monk had a real aptitude for study, Ajahn Anan sent him to a monastery where he could pursue the study course in the Pali language and take exams, but he always reminded us that the purpose of study is to support the cultivation of the Noble Eightfold Path.

It was not that any of us were particularly wise or gifted in meditation, but because we had strong faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and the teacher, and we were willing to commit to the training, there was a good atmosphere in the monastery. No one complained about the difficulties and challenges. Even when a teenage novice caught malaria, I

remember how dignified he was and just put up with the fever and exhaustion, without complaint. In the early days, there was no monastery car, and monks would only go out to visit a doctor or dentist if it was absolutely necessary, because of the difficulty in arranging transport.

The main aim of my training was always to address the mental defilements that kept arising in my mind; and find ways to establish mindfulness, restrain the defilements and develop the wisdom to abandon them. I relied on cultivating the qualities of patience and restraint in my conduct, that came from the monastic training rules; and this nurtured mindfulness and clear comprehension. I trained myself in investigating to find ways to teach myself how to let go of unskillful mental states, through observing and reflecting on their impermanence. Much of the time, I established mindfulness with the breath and contemplated the unattractiveness of the thirty-two parts of the body; until I brought my mind to a state of stillness and emptiness.

Ajahn Anan gave teachings and instruction centred around the theme of body contemplation, developing the perception of the unattractiveness of the body and directing attention to the four foundations of mindfulness. I had already been developing the corpse meditations, and the meditation on mindfulness of body when I was with Luang Por Chah, and I continued this under the guidance of Ajahn Anan. Even as a monk, it can be quite rare to hear teachings on the way to cultivate meditation on the unattractiveness of the body, so I felt genuinely supported to train myself in this way. The contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body is always a challenging object to develop insight, so I found it beneficial to hear teachings and reminders of this aspect of the Dhamma.



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Look on the world as empty,
Mogharāja, being always mindful.
Having removed wrong view of self,
in this way one will cross beyond Death.

Sutta Nipāta 5.15

Dhamma Lessons From More Teachers

Final Funeral Preparations

I returned to Wat Nong Pah Pong periodically throughout the year of 1992 to offer help with Luang Por Chah's funeral preparations; and to join in the meditation and chanting sessions that took place every night; until the actual day of the cremation. A few weeks before 16 January 1993, the monks from Wat Marp Jan travelled to Wat Nong Pah Pong to help with the final preparations. I continued to assist Ajahn Anan with his duty to receive and look after the different senior monks who arrived almost daily. Some visiting teachers visited for the day to give teachings; or pay respects to the body of Luang Por Chah; some stayed overnight. We felt that it was a great honour to serve the memory of our teacher, Luang Por Chah, in this way. He had always encouraged his students to look after visiting senior monks; and it was a rare chance to meet and spend time with many wise and compassionate teachers.

Luang Por Chah's funeral was an exhausting time for everyone. Each of his students quite naturally gave all of whatever energy and skills they had, to make the event successful. The faith and respect the Sangha and laity had, for their teacher, seemed to help them produce almost limitless amounts of energy, and

patient endurance. Even though there were many frustrations and some small mistakes were made in the management of the event, it was still inspiring to observe so many people sacrificing so completely, for their teacher.

We offered assistance to Luang Por Liem, in whatever way appropriate. After Luang Por Chah died, the Sangha began a round-the-clock vigil of meditation, next to his coffin that continued until his cremation. Whenever I was in the monastery, I meditated next to the coffin, late at night. Sometimes, I helped on building projects, cleaning up the monastery, or with translation; and often with looking after senior monks. We all camped in our umbrella tents on the floor of the forest, for many weeks, as all the accommodation was made available only for visiting senior monks.

Luang Por Chah's Funeral and Cremation

16 January 1993

As the date for the funeral drew closer, the number of monks visiting the monastery from other parts of Thailand and overseas, gradually increased. The duty of receiving and looking after each senior monk, became more demanding. I felt it was a privilege to help and assist in whatever way I could; but the duty meant I had little time for rest. There were frustrations as the facilities to receive monks were limited. I could not complain about being tired though, because everyone was tired. We hosted visiting senior monks such as Luang Ta Maha Boowa, Luang Por Baen, Luang Por Put, Luang Por Sangvaan Khemako, Luang Por Budah, Somdet Buddhakosajahn and many others. Ajahn Anan always encouraged us to give respect to senior monks from the different traditions; and I found his appreciation, and the way he showed *muditā* for other well-practised monks inspiring. Throughout the period of the funeral preparations

and ceremonies, I had the opportunity to meet many wise and compassionate teachers; and to assist them closely. Sometimes, there was a chance to hear teachings in an informal way; and occasionally, I could ask them questions.

The day before Luang Por Chah's cremation, Luang Por Sangwaan Khemako arrived at the monastery; and I volunteered to help look after and settle him into a *kuti*. He was over eighty years old; and although he could still walk slowly, he mostly moved around in a wheelchair. When Luang Por Sangwaan arrived in the monastery, nobody informed us, and he entered the meditation hall, where the monks on duty were recording the details of all newly arrived monks. They did not recognise him as the well-known and popular senior teacher that he was. In front of a large gathering of lay devotees, he was treated as if he was an old grandad who was newly ordained; and a complete beginner in the training. They called him Lung Ta or Venerable Grandad and treated him as if he did not know much about the Dhamma; or the monastic discipline. In fact, Luang Por Sangwaan had hundreds of monks, and thousands of lay students under his guidance; and was a highly respected meditation master who was considered to be a fully Awakened *Arahant*.

Unfortunately, those monks who received him talked to him in a way that came across as conceited, even though he was far senior to them, in years; and probably much wiser too. Luang Por Sangwaan had known and respected Luang Por Chah for many years. He was determined to pay respects to him, for one last time. Many of the other monks and lay people, gathered in the hall, felt uncomfortable with what they perceived as disrespectful conduct. They were surprised when Luang Por Sangwaan responded by getting down on the floor, and requested

to pay respects to those junior monks, who were speaking so condescendingly to him. Lay devotees who observed the scene commented afterwards that Luang Por Sangwaan understood Luang Por Chah's teaching better than some of his own students; and they were amazed to see Luang Por Sangwaan display such humility, in the face of the unfortunate and insensitive behaviour of the junior monks. They felt it was a profound and inspiring teaching. By the time Luang Por Sangwaan had finished bowing to the junior monks, we arrived in the hall and I wheeled him away to his accommodation in the forest.

When we reached the *kuti* that was prepared for Luang Por Sangwaan, I assisted him out of his wheelchair and took him to sit in a chair; and then many of us paid respects to him. Once he was seated, he asked me where Luang Ta Maha Bua was staying. I pointed towards Luang Por Chah's old wooden *kuti* near the *Upasatha* Hall and then I asked Luang Por Sangwaan if he needed any requisites or refreshments. He answered that all he wanted to do was go over, and pay respects to Luang Ta Maha Bua. He said that Luang Ta Maha Bua is such a good monk, an *Arahant*; and he insisted that I take him over to pay respects. I arranged to take Luang Por Sangwaan over to the *kuti*; and when he got down from his wheelchair, he crawled along the floor towards Luang Ta Maha Bua. At that moment, Luang Ta Maha Bua was teaching a large group of lay people who had gathered, but he immediately stopped his teaching and received Luang Por Sangwaan's bow with great dignity and respect. It was a beautiful moment, to see one wise and peaceful senior monk greeting another wise and peaceful senior monk; each of them treating the other with great respect, warmth and *muditā*.

The funeral ceremonies for Luang Por Chah were full of inspiring moments; where the beauty of the Dhamma was

revealed. Moments where Sangha members and lay devotees made great sacrifices; and went without rest to get some job done; or gave up their personal comfort, out of faith in Luang Por Chah. There were moments where wise and compassionate senior monks came to pay their final respects to a great teacher; and showed how much they appreciated his life. On the night of the cremation, we took Luang Ta Maha Bua and Luang Por Baen to the newly finished Chedi which was also built as a temporary crematorium. Luang Ta Maha Bua gave a Dhamma talk to the huge crowd of Sangha and laity, gathered there for most of the day and night. Luang Por Panyananda gave the first talk of the evening, Somdet Buddhakosajahn gave the second; and Luang Ta Maha Bua gave the final teaching of the night. As Luang Ta Maha Bua gave his talk, Luang Por Baen, Ajahn Piak and Ajahn Anan sat right behind him and Ajahn Anan quietly told all the monks present inside the Chedi to focus their minds, and spread metta to Luang Ta Maha Bua to give him some extra strength, because he was so ill.

After the events of the day, there were still over a hundred thousand people gathered together, waiting for the midnight cremation, even though the weather had turned cold and windy. We were concerned that Luang Ta Maha Bua might be straining his health, as he had a serious heart condition. He actually paused in the middle of his Dhamma talk, and told us that the echo from the loudspeakers was disturbing his heart. The monks adjusted the sound system, turned off some of the loudspeakers; and we meditated silently behind him, led by Luang Por Baen. I offered Luang Ta Maha Bua a blanket and after pausing for a few minutes, he eventually carried on his talk. It was beautiful to witness how the Sangha not only gave Luang Ta Maha Bua practical assistance, but also spread *mettā* to give him energy. This is something we had done for Luang Por Chah while he was alive. After the talk I assisted Luang Ta



The Sangha at Wat Nong Pah Pong on Ajahn Chah Memorial Day.



Maha Bua's attendant monk, Ajahn Dick Silaratano, to escort him back to Luang Por Chah's old *kuti*, where he stayed the night.

The funeral ceremony and cremation were a fitting tribute to Luang Por Chah and his life and teachings. During the year between his death and the cremation, there were numerous moments for me to reflect on his life; and process the emotions that naturally welled up in my heart, during that time. The way everyone came together and gave so much of themselves, towards making the funeral preparations successful, seemed to be a skilful way to deal with the experience of loss, and any sadness arising. The continuous effort made by the Sangha and laity, to prepare for the funeral, was an expression of the accumulated virtues and *pāramī* of Luang Por Chah.

Ajahn Anan gave us important guidance, as we performed the duty of looking after the senior monks attending the funeral; and even some insights into some of the subtler aspects of the practice. He reminded us to be respectful and sensitive, to how we treated each senior monk, because they all had different characters and styles of practice. When you are a junior monk with less knowledge and experience, it is easy to jump to conclusions about senior monks you meet for the first time; and make assumptions about their level of practice and understanding of the Dhamma. The Buddha taught that we should not rush to judge another monk's level of knowledge and understanding, based on just a brief and superficial level of interaction. Some of the senior monks attending the funeral were highly attained in the Dhamma; and an inexperienced practitioner might not be qualified to know the level of practice of another monk. It is possible to make some unskilful *kamma*, when you become too lost in your own views and opinions on the Dhamma; and make superficial judgements of others.

During the funeral, we apologised, frequently, to well-respected and beloved senior monks whose vehicles got caught up in the unprecedented traffic congestion. This was caused by the huge numbers of vehicles attempting to enter the monastery at the same time, on the day of the ceremony. Sometimes, the government officials or police who were controlling the traffic did not recognise a senior monk invited to the funeral; or there was poor communication and some senior monks were unfortunately turned away or simply abandoned their attempt to enter the monastery, to join the funeral ceremony. Some senior monks made it into the monastery, but due to a lack of time, resources and available monks, they were not received in the way we would have liked. We did our best to keep up the level of good practice and training, given to us by Luang Por Chah. After the funeral, we visited a number of different senior monks to formally ask forgiveness, on behalf of all of Luang Por Chah's disciples. Each senior monk displayed their own compassion and lack of conceit; and expressed their understanding of the challenges of organising such a unique funeral.

I recalled, during the official ceremony, when the King and Queen went up to the Chedi to perform the funeral rites, Ajahn Anan pointed out to us, how the King paused and established his *samādhi* because he was an accomplished meditator. When the King's mind was peaceful, he caught a glimpse of the radiant aura surrounding Luang Por Chah's coffin; and experienced his own rapture and joy. The King saw clearly from the radiant aura what a good monk Luang Por Chah was; and straight away took a series of photos for his private collection. He was so impressed with the way the whole event was arranged and how everyone conducted themselves, in line with the Dhamma and Vinaya. He later requested that the Sangha prepare a book describing how the funeral arrangements were planned and organised. One of the things that most impressed the King was

the great respect shown for Luang Por Chah by both monks and laity, throughout the ceremonies. The King's vehicle convoy proceeded slowly from the airport, on the afternoon of the cremation; and he noticed how the crowds of people lining both sides of the road to the monastery, sat quietly and respectfully with their hands in *añjali* (palms together in a gesture of respect) as if they were inside a monastery, instead of waving flags or cheering as was more usual. He asked his assistant how come the people of Ubon were so composed, mindful and respectful, and was given the response that it was a sign of how much love and respect they had for Luang Por Chah; and how well he had trained them in the Dhamma.

Dhamma From Luang Ta Maha Bua

During a quiet moment with Luang Ta Maha Bua, the day after the cremation, I asked him about the practice of meditation; and development of the path of the Dhamma. Everything he said echoed what I had heard from Luang Por Chah and Ajahn Anan. He emphasised the central role of cultivating mindfulness, developing states of calm and detached awareness; and the need to direct your wisdom faculty to investigate the true nature of the body. He repeatedly told me to observe the impermanence, unattractiveness and non-self nature of my body. He emphasised the need for each practitioner to know and see their own mind; abandon the five hindrances and cultivate insight. He particularly emphasised the need to contemplate the unattractive aspects of the body; to break through attachment to the root cause of lust and sensuality. He was confirming what I had already heard and understood from my teachers. At the end of the conversation, I told him that I believed his student Ajahn Pannavaddo seemed to be practising well; and wondered if he would confirm my belief. Predictably he knocked me back, saying that I was like a person

with an itch but was scratching in the wrong place. He went on to explain that it was up to me to go and ask Ajahn Pannavaddo myself. Everyone listening to the conversation laughed.

Luang Ta Maha Bua And Ajahn Pannavaddho

Later in the year, I did have the chance to travel to Luang Ta Maha Bua's monastery and stayed there for a second time. On the first day, I was sitting with Ajahn Pannavaddo, at the shed where monks took their afternoon drink; and Luang Ta Maha Bua slowly walked up to us and sat down for a drink and conversation. It was as if we were continuing on from the previous conversation at Wat Nong Pah Pong; and he looked at me with a wry smile, and asked me how my meditation was going, and what I had attained so far. I kept silent as I believed he knew more things about other people, than he let on. After I paid respects to him, I invited him to share some Dhamma teachings. He was kind enough to give me some teachings on a number of subsequent occasions too. He always emphasised the central role of developing mindfulness and clear comprehension. He said that insight into the impermanence of the five aggregates could not go very deep without it, and one would not see through the false view of self.

Whenever I visited him, Luang Ta Maha Bua loved to talk about Luang Por Chah; and tell his monks what a good and wise monk he was. He also talked to me enthusiastically about what a generous and wise teacher Luang Por Chah had been. Luang Ta Maha Bua was also generous with his time; and he always showed his concern for the welfare of the monks, under his guidance. Almost every day, Luang Ta Maha Bua went out of the monastery to give donations of foodstuff and blankets, to villagers in poorer areas; or visit other monasteries or hospitals or clinics that he was helping to fund. When he was not giving

donations, he visited different monasteries to give the monks support or else, he regularly travelled to pay respects to the relics of his teacher, Luang Por Mun. He seemed to get a mental boost from meditating with the relics, at the shrine of his teacher.

In his own monastery, he divided his time between teaching the monks and the laity. Before the daily meal, he gave some powerful and energetic talks to the monks; and after the meal, he taught the laity. Some afternoons, he came over to the shed where we sat for a cup of tea before the afternoon chores period, and joined us for a relaxed talk about Dhamma. One day, he sat down and consumed a complete bag of chewy sweets and a cup of hot sweet cocoa, in front of me, as he talked about one of his favourite subjects: ‘rocket monks’ and ‘satellite monks.’ These were phrases he used to describe monks who are like rockets, rise up quickly to prominence in the Buddhist community; and then fall back down to earth and disappear. He was concerned that some monks become well-known teachers before they have developed a firm basis in calm and insight meditation and then run into problems or disrobe. His attendant monk was surprised by this change in his normal habits, and said that it was unusual to see him consume so many sweets and a sweet drink. I wondered if he was showing us that occasionally, it is all right to relax, and enjoy such allowable treats. That day he talked with us for over an hour about meditation, the cultivation of states of *samādhi*; and how to use wisdom to train the mind, and overcome even the subtlest of mental defilements. All the while, he chewed on the sweets, and ended up with a huge pile of sweet wrappers in front of him. Maybe he was waiting to see our reaction; or if we harboured any critical thoughts in our minds.

One day, Luang Por Tui came to visit during one of these tea time sessions. As he approached Luang Ta Maha Bua, he knelt

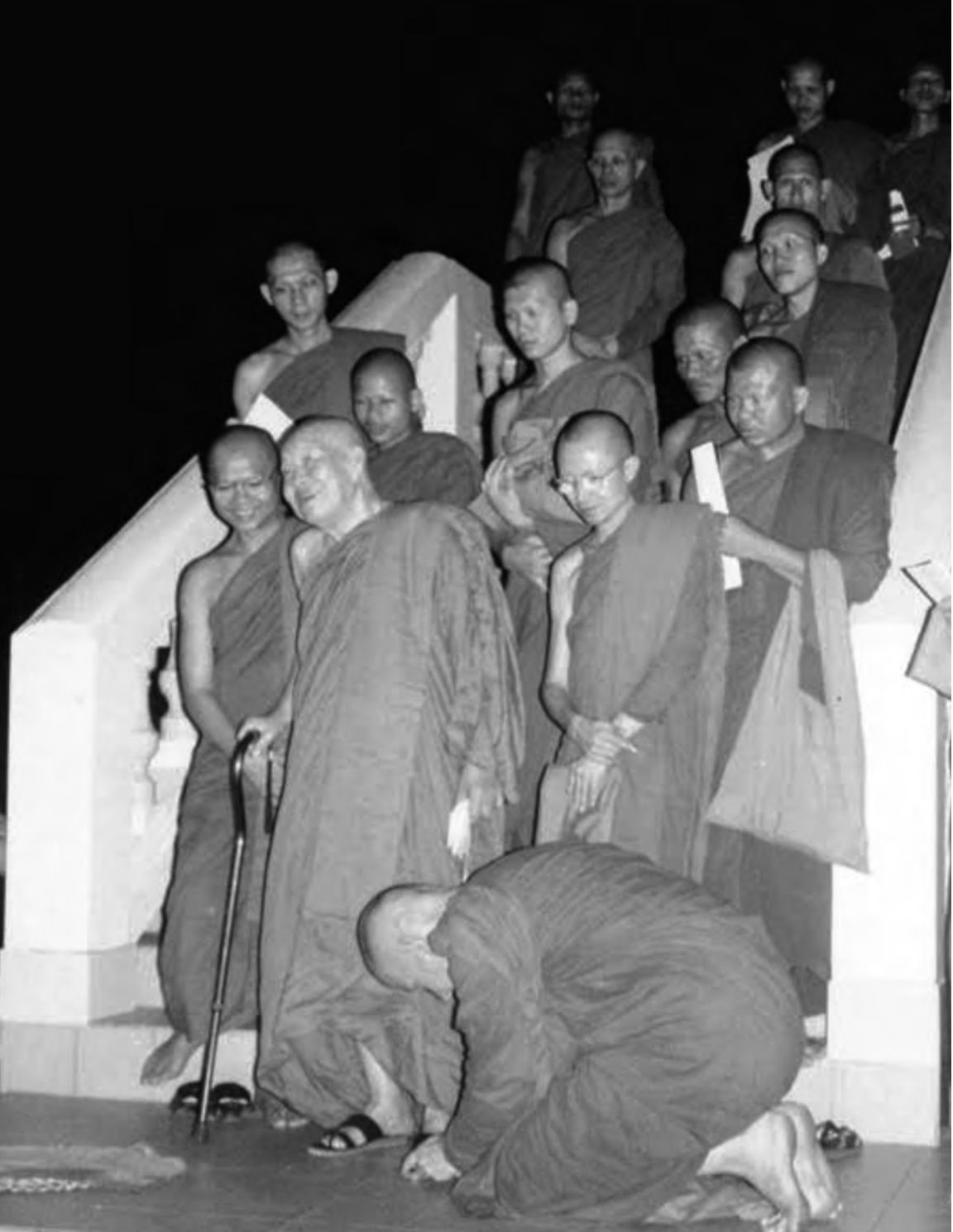
down and paid respects to his teacher by bowing in the dirt. It was inspiring to see one highly-esteemed senior monk kneel down, in the dirt to show respect to another senior monk. They were both radiant and relaxed. Luang Por Tui was especially humble and gentle with his teacher. This conduct provided us with a glimpse of a different side of his character that the monks rarely saw in his own monastery. Normally, when he was in his own monastery, he spoke loudly and barked instructions at the monks and talked about the Dhamma, in a very direct way.

Ajahn Pannavaddo suggested that I make the cultivation of mindfulness, states of calm and wisdom, the priority in my practice. He reminded me that the more effort I put into developing my meditation practice, the more I would be able to help other people in the long run. The best teachings to give others are those that come from personal experience, rather than from simply memorising the books or theorising. He encouraged me to keep coming back to the practice of *ānāpānasati* to make my mindfulness strong; and to contemplate the thirty-two parts of the body, to gain insight into impermanence and the unattractiveness of the body.

Repaying An Old Debt

After Luang Por Chah's cremation was completed, I stayed on to help collect his ashes from the crematorium; and assist Luang Por Liem in clearing up the monastery. Luang Por Chah's relics were carefully put into containers. Then, Luang Por Liem and Ajahn Anan led an impromptu procession carrying the relics, through the monastery, to the main hall. The relics were safely stored; and eventually placed into small, sealed receptacles which were given to each branch monastery.

Once the main work of clearing up the monastery was completed, I left Wat Nong Pah Pong with a couple of other



Ajahn Kalyano (kneeling down) assisting Luang Por Reean
Varalabho on his visit to Wat Marp Jan in 1996.

junior monks; and returned to Wat Marp Jan. The monastery appeared extremely quiet, and empty of people, after all the crowds and activity of the funeral events at Wat Nong Pah Pong. Ajahn Anan and the other senior monks had not returned yet, and as there were no group meeting in the monastery, at that time, I decided to clean out the rain water tank at my *kuti*. There was no piped water in the monastery in those days, so I relied on rain water for drinking and bathing. I climbed up the wooden ladder to the top of the collection tank, which was three or four metres above ground, but I was unaware that the ladder had been eaten through by termites. When I reached the top of the ladder, it suddenly collapsed under me; and I fell and hit the ground hard. My robes were ripped by the rusty nails that were exposed as the timber gave way; and I received cuts and bruises from the fall. At first, I thought I was not seriously injured, but when I looked more closely, I noticed a rusty four inch nail was buried deep inside my knee. It looked like someone had driven the nail into my knee with a hammer. The wound hurt, blood was flowing and I was unable to put weight on my leg or walk on it.

My first thought was that I must be experiencing the ripening of old *kamma* arising from killing an animal. My second thought was that the injury might prevent me from sitting meditation in the future, so before doing anything else, I sat on the floor of the forest, composed my mind in meditation, for a few moments; and made a clear aspiration to continue practising for the realisation of *Nibbāna*, whatever the obstacles I may encounter. I determined in my mind that whatever happened, I should not let the injury obstruct my cultivation of mindfulness and wisdom; or sway me from my aspiration to realise the Four Noble Truths. As I sat there in the jungle, mosquitoes swarmed around me, flies started to land on the bloody wound and the pain got worse.

The only way to seek help was by crawling on my hands, down the jungle path towards the meditation hall, with my damaged robes hanging in shreds off my body as I could not even climb the stairs to my *kuti*, to replace the torn robes I was wearing. The hall was over one hundred meters away, through the jungle. As most of the resident monks had not returned from Wat Nong Pah Pong, I had to wait a long time, until another monk came to the hall. I then waited again as the monk walked out to the nearest village to find someone with a vehicle who could pick me up, from the monastery, and drive me to the hospital.

While I was sitting on the floor of the meditation hall, I was not sure how long the monk would take to find a driver in the village. Eventually, I decided to help myself and grabbed the head of the nail, which was just protruding out of my knee, and pulled. I pulled the nail as hard as I could to draw it out of the flesh. Surprisingly, this action was not as painful as I thought it would be, although the flow of blood from the wound increased for a while. I successfully removed the nail which was four to five inches long, and very rusty. Eventually, a villager arrived with his truck and took me to the hospital. There, a kind doctor conducted a painful but thorough minor operation to clean the rust out of the wound; and gave me a tetanus injection. It turned out that the doctor was the nephew of Ajahn Pichit, the deputy abbot of Wat Hin Mak Peng, the monastery built by the well-known meditation master Luang Por Tate. The doctor was very happy to help a forest monk and after he treated me, he began visiting the monastery regularly to listen to teachings from Ajahn Anan; and provided medical assistance to the monks. Sometimes, something good can arise out of something painful and unpleasant.

After returning to the monastery, I observed that the doctor had done a good job cleaning out the wound, and protecting me

from infection. I felt positive that I would be able to sit cross-legged in meditation again. I had to rest up in the monastery's sick bay; and walk with crutches, for a week or so. The day I finally returned to my *kuti* in the forest, I sat down to meditate and experienced a wave of joy as I folded my legs together, and sat in the meditation posture. The enthusiasm of being able to sit meditation cross-legged again made my mind, very calm and bright; and then I had an unusual vision arise. In the vision, I saw an image of the faithful fruit farmer who had first invited Ajahn Anan to reside in the jungle at Wat Marp Jan, walking towards me holding two dead birds. He was a fruit farmer but also had a reputation as a hunter and skilled marksman; and normally he carried a loaded gun with him. In my vision, the farmer handed me the two dead birds that he had shot. I contemplated the meaning of the vision, and assumed that the wound from the rusty nail and the surgery was the resultant *kamma* of having shot dead two birds when I was a teenager.

Luang Por Chah's Relics (*Mula Dhātu*)

During the time we were staying at Wat Nong Pah Pong for the funeral, Ajahn Anan had asked permission from the Sangha, to dig up the old toilet pit at Luang Por Chah's *kuti*. He noted how this had been done, after the death of Luang Por Mun and that his disciples found that the dried out earth from the toilet pit contained relics (*mula dhātu*). We wished to retrieve the earth, from Luang Por Chah's toilet pit, because we had such faith and confidence that he was as an *Arahant* who had fully transcended suffering; and were confident that there would be relics in the earth, from the toilet pit. With the help of some laymen, we opened the lid of the disused pit; and dug up the dry and sandy earth, which was then placed carefully into sacks. There was no bad smell from the earth retrieved; and at Wat Marp Jan the monks emptied out the sacks, and laid the contents to dry in the sun, on the flat area next to the meditation hall.

With my injured knee, I made myself useful and sat down on the ground and sifted through the earth using a sieve. We gradually separated the sand and earth from potential relics. In the end, after much sieving, we retrieved hundreds of tiny relics, derived from the earth mixed with Luang Por Chah's dried excrement, which had turned into a refined, odourless, black dust. The relics were cleaned carefully, with great love and respect. People wondered why monks would do this, but we explained that we had faith that our teacher was an *Arahant* and that all his body parts had turned into relics due to the effects of his pure mind. Monks and laity kept the relics, as objects of veneration; and used them as a skilful means to recollect the qualities of the Noble Eightfold Path and *Nibbāna*.

During Luang Por Chah's lifetime, the attendant monks shaved his head every two weeks and each monk received a portion of his hair. Some monks kept the hair and some distributed their portion, amongst the community of monks and lay devotees. Monks received small packages with a portion of his hair; and looked after the hair, out of faith, in their teacher. When lay devotees received some of Luang Por Chah's hair, they treasured it. Many of Luang Por Chah's students found that these small amounts of hair, crystallised and formed into small shiny relics, over the years. Sometimes, individual hairs continued to grow longer and longer. His nail clippings, teeth and even drops of blood on cloth, also crystallised into relics. It was not surprising then, that many monks were sure that even the food that passed through his body might crystallise and become relics, due to the power and purifying influence of his *citta*.

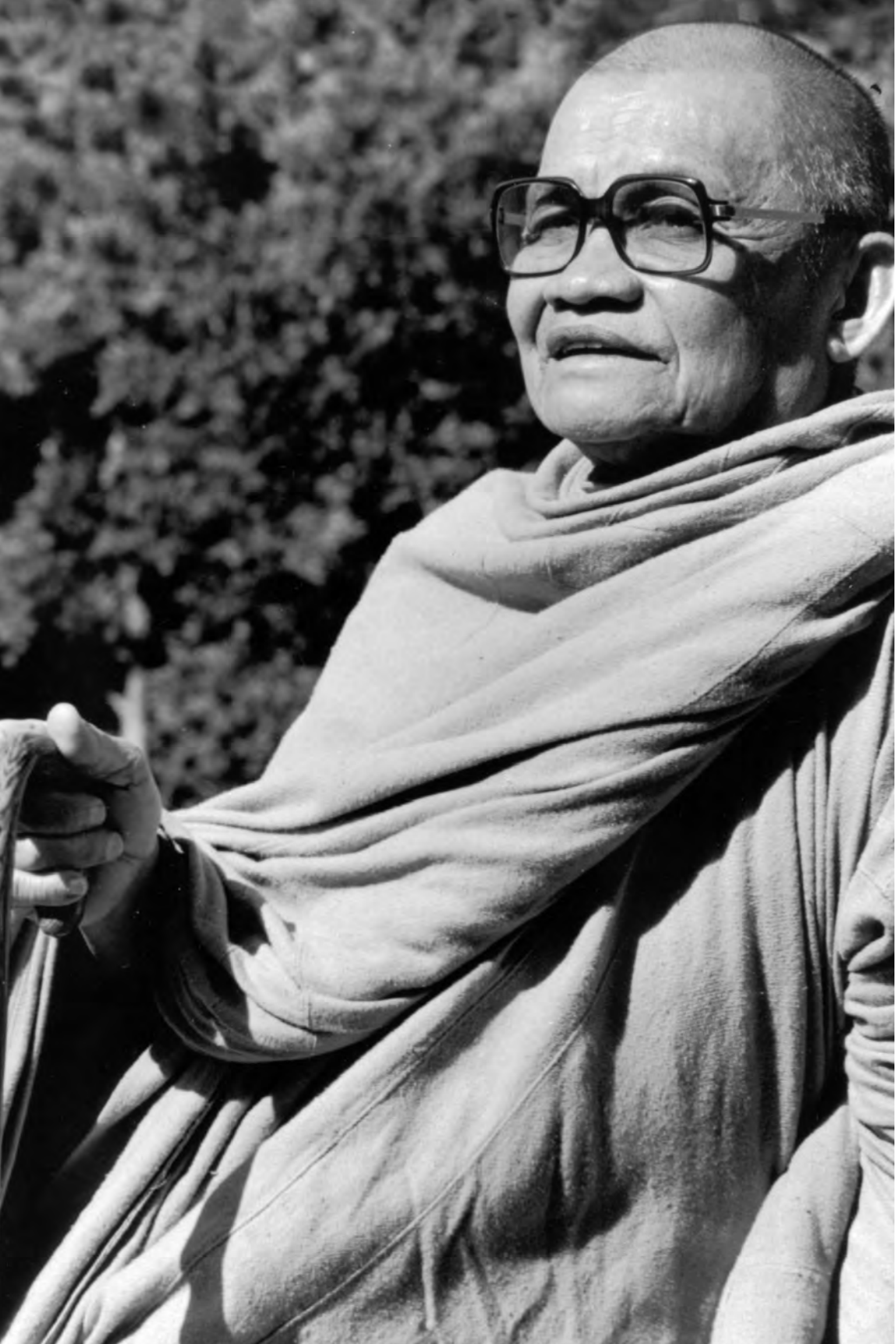
In the same way that relics of the Lord Buddha were bathed, Luang Por Chah's relics were bathed carefully in water and we found that when the relics were placed in water they floated

in the same way as other genuine relics from fully Awakened beings. All of the relics that we retrieved, from the earth dug up from Luang Por Chah's toilet pit, were bathed and observed to float. It was an amazing sight to see hundreds of his relics floating together; and they moved slowly in a clockwise direction on the surface of water.

Ajahn Anan gave each monk at Wat Marp Jan a set of nine relics from Luang Por Chah; and they put them in their *kuti*, in an appropriate place. Most of the monks regarded them as a source of inspiration; and as items of reverence and respect. However, one monk did not much care for them and was rather sceptical about the whole idea of relics. A few days after the relics were distributed, one of the monks came out at tea time, and happily told the community that his nine relics had increased in number to ten. He had been chanting *suttas* and *parittas* and meditating energetically in front of his new relic collection and it appeared that one extra relic had manifested on the shrine, in his *kuti*. Many of the monks eagerly went back to their *kutis* and checked their own relics, but most found no changes in the number. However, the monk who had been sceptical opened up his reliquary; and observed that the number of relics inside had reduced to eight. A few days later, the monk whose relics were on the increase found that his collection had grown in number to eleven and the sceptical monk found that his sealed reliquary held only seven relics. Over a period of time, this pattern continued until the first monk's collection increased to eighteen relics; and the other monk's collection had reduced to zero. No one doubted the honesty of the monks and as far as we know, no one else had entered their *kutis*, to move things around. This event seemed to confirm the possibility that relics can manifest and disappear in different situations.

Another incident took place when I gave nine of Luang Por Chah's relics to a long term lay supporter of Luang Por Chah. She was overjoyed with the gift; and when she returned home from the monastery, could not wait to open the reliquary she had prepared; and with great reverence, she ceremoniously bathed the relics. The lady knelt down and slowly bowed to the relics in respect, and then carefully placed each relic on the surface of water she had prepared in a glass bowl. At first, each relic sank to the bottom of the bowl; and when she saw them sink, her heart sank too, as she assumed that they were not genuine relics. Just as the feeling of disappointment was filling up her mind, all the relics gradually floated back up to the surface of the water, by themselves. The relics slowly moved together while they floated on the surface of the water, as is normal for genuine relics. She was relieved and very happy.







‘Attanā codayattanam’:

‘You must admonish yourself’

– that is how you become your own refuge.

Otherwise, if you think
you’d like to do something that’s not right,
you look about from side to side.

You see your mother’s not around,
your father’s not around,
there’s no teacher present, nobody can see you

- okay! You do it immediately.

Someone who thinks like that
has already gone to the bad.

You’ll do something bad when nobody can see you.

But what about yourself?

Aren’t you someone as well?...

Do you think it is possible to do something
without this person seeing?

Luang Por Chah

16

A New Era

Embracing A Third Culture

Luang Por Chah's cremation seemed to bring an end to one chapter of my life; and opened another. There was no longer any urgent need to travel up to Wat Nong Pah Pong; although I continued to attend the Sangha meetings at Wat Nong Pah Pong, in June and January. I continued to live at Wat Marp Jan; and serve Ajahn Anan in the role of attendant monk, until I reached ten rains in 1995. I washed his bowl and robes, cleaned his *kuti*; and generally assisted him, in whatever way I could. I was happy to assist him out of gratitude for the teaching and training he gave me; and also out of respect for the training I had received from Luang Por Chah. Ajahn Anan had growing responsibilities as the number of resident monks increased; and more lay visitors were attending the monastery. He began the construction of a new dining hall.

The experience of living in Thailand long term; and speaking the Thai language, everyday, gave me a good insight into the impermanence of memory. and also my cultural conditioning, that I had brought with me from the UK. Thai culture has many differences from British culture, and I had to make allowances for that when relating to people. I did not find coping with the two cultures difficult, because I was learning a third culture,

the monastic culture, which is based on the Vinaya or code of discipline. The monks' training rules support one's integrity and training in mindfulness; and promote harmonious living with others. I learned to practise composure and restraint in my conduct; and cultivated goodwill and compassion for fellow monastics. Every morning, in the monastery, we recite verses of Salutation to the Triple Gem, and a passage to arouse urgency in the practice. One line of the chanting explains that perception (*saññā*) is impermanent and not-self. Our perceptions and views are conditioned, and I could see that more clearly, when I reflected on the changes to my conduct and speech, that arose from my monastic training; and from living in the Thai culture. The most important perception I was developing is called *samana saññā* or the perception of being a peaceful renunciant. Later, I observed how living in Australia gave me further insight into this process of cultural conditioning; as the culture in Australia is different from Thailand and England. In the end, the perception of being a *samaṇa* transcends all other cultural conditioning.

Guardian *Deva*

In the early years of Wat Marp Jan, when the number of resident monks was smaller and there were fewer buildings, the jungle was vibrant, and we regularly encountered wild animals. One night, not long after hurting my knee, I was sleeping in my *kuti* when at about midnight, I was awakened by a sensation which felt like someone poking me under my ribs. I woke up with a start and sat up, wondering what caused the sharp and penetrating sensation. I shone my torch and looked around, but seeing nothing unusual, lay down again. Just before I fell asleep, I felt the same sensation again, as if someone was poking me in my side. I was sure it was a warning, so I shone my torch and looked more thoroughly around the small *kuti*; and noticed a huge banded krait, moving around on the window sill outside.

Fortunately, I had a fly screen over the window space, but the large snake was trying to force its way in. The krait's venom is the deadliest of all the snakes; and this was a large and powerful looking krait. It seemed like somebody was warning me of the danger and I eventually managed to carefully sweep the snake off the veranda of my *kuti* and back into the forest. I was grateful to my invisible friend who was so alert.

A Frightened King Cobra

On another occasion, I was walking meditation in front of my *kuti*, in the afternoon; and after about an hour walking back and forth, my mind became peaceful and concentrated. When I became peaceful in walking meditation, I experienced rapture and my body, and mind became light; and my mental energy remained gathered together at my chest, as my mind became still. When I was calm in walking meditation, the sense of time faded, and I just kept walking back and forth, absorbed in the practice of mindfulness of the body. At one point, I heard a noise next to me, so I paused and looked down to my left side, just in time, to see the biggest snake I had ever seen in my life, slowly gliding up next to me. The snake was both thick and long. It was perhaps five metres long. When it moved next to me, it slowly lifted its head a few inches off the ground revealing its thick hood. I assumed it was a king cobra, but it was much bigger than others I had seen before. I was thankful that my mind was peaceful. I was able to remain calm, as it slowly glided past me, a few inches from my bare feet. I was fully aware that it could bite me and probably kill me very easily, if it felt threatened; and it was not scared of me because it had chosen to glide along the ground, right next to me.

Such encounters give you a good idea of how attached you are to your body, and show you how near death is, at any one moment. My mind was already still from walking meditation;

and I did not register any physical tension or signs of fear, in my body. I knew that, at that moment, there was nothing I could do if the snake decided to attack, so there was really nothing to do but peacefully observe myself. While the huge snake was slowly moving past me, I considered the fragility and uncertainty of existence. It disappeared into the jungle, but the close encounter left a strong impression on my mind; and I contemplated death as an object of meditation, for the rest of the evening. I asked myself what I was still attached to in the world, and what I would take with me if I died. I concluded that I had nothing material left to cling to, but I was aware that the ignorance that causes craving, clinging and suffering in my mind, was still there. If I were to die, the real loss would be the loss of the opportunity to practise following in the footsteps of the Buddha, for another life.

On The Top Of Grandparents Mountain

Periodically, Ajahn Anan still found time in the dry season, to travel with groups of monks out from the monastery; and find suitable quiet places in the jungles of Thailand to cultivate the Dhamma. In 1993, a group of us climbed Khao Yai Dta which is the mountain on which Wat Marp Jan sits on. Khao Yai Dta means Grandfather and Grandmother Mountain; and physically overlooks the monastery like a couple of grandparents. We found a suitable area to set up camp near the summit, and were able to obtain food each morning. There were a couple of technicians, living at a telecommunications tower not far down the mountainside, who were happy to offer us alms. The atmosphere in the jungle, at the summit, was different from the monastery located five hundred metres below, at the base of the mountain. There were often low clouds embracing the summit, so the air temperature was noticeably cooler. Most of us sensed an unusual feeling as we meditated there, over a period of a few weeks. It was as if there was somebody else present.

Perhaps this feeling was generated by the remoteness of the location, and the presence of more wildlife, than at the foot of the mountain. According to the villagers and the telecommunication technicians, there were many more animals living around the summit of the mountain, including many bears, wild boars and king cobras. One morning, I got up to meditate at 3:00am and as soon as I lit a candle, I saw a huge snake lying along the simple walking path which I used under the trees. I had to steady my mind as it was not something you see every day. The large snake's body was over one metre thick in diameter and it was so long, I could not see the head. The *nimitta* gradually faded, but it had been so real it took a while to process it. Ajahn Anan was camping nearby. He confirmed he had seen something similar. It was a *Nāga* or a semi-divine being, half-snake and half-human that was associated with the mountain.

Luang Por Fuang had lived at the other end of the mountain, until he passed away, a few years earlier. On a number of occasions, he told his students that the mountain was protected by these semi-divine beings. At his monastery, he constructed an enormous statue of the Buddha sitting under a *Nāga*, inspired by the Buddha's life story from ancient India. Seeing or experiencing beings, in other realms, is not necessarily an immediate cause for insight wisdom to arise; and has the potential to distract or confuse the practitioner. However, on the positive side, it can confirm the other realms of existence, that have been described by the Buddha. It can give one insight into the central role of *kamma* and rebirth, in the workings of the universe. When we die, the body dies; but consciousness continues to arise and cease in a new birth and existence, according to the good and bad *kamma* one has accumulated.

I continued to meditate; and enjoy the seclusion at the top of the mountain, for a couple of weeks, before returning to the monastery below. After that, I sometimes used the clear memory of meditating, in seclusion at the summit of the mountain, as a way to bring up mindfulness to calm my mind; and let go of certain mental states that bothered me. Luang Por Chah once described the experience of the mind, that has let go of the five hindrances, as similar to sitting on top of a mountain, secluded from the world.

Paccekkabuddha's Cave And Relics

Later in the year, we travelled with Ajahn Anan, to the Khao Laem Reservoir near Sangklaburi, on the border between Myanmar and Thailand, to spend time meditating in a remote forest. On arrival, we first paid respects to the senior monk, Luang Por Uttama, who lived near to the National Park. He was considered to be a living *Bodhisatta*; and a wise and peaceful monk. We camped in the jungle, near to the water's edge, for a week; and received alms every morning, sent over by villagers who arrived by boat. Later on, a knowledgeable local man took us to see a remote cave system, further up in the mountains, that he suggested would be a good place for meditation. Towards the top of one mountain, further away from the reservoir, there were a series of larger and smaller caves that were habitable and suitable for meditation. The caves were miles away from any villages; and there were no proper pathways or tracks up the mountain to the caves, making them difficult to find. The climb up the rock face, to the caves was steep, rocky and uneven. Nearby there was a stream with clear, fresh water for drinking and bathing; and at dawn, we walked down to the reservoir to collect alms food from a boatman.

On the first night, the white-robed *anagārika* travelling with us, built a fire in the largest cave, and we boiled water for a welcome hot drink. The air temperature was cold at night, because we were high up in the mountains. The large cave became our meeting area for afternoon drinks, and any group meditation sessions. As we sat in a circle around the fire, enjoying the peaceful evening at the end of the first day; a long and beautifully multi-coloured snake slowly emerged, from a hole in the rocks, and glided serenely between us. It was probably a python. After observing us for a while, the snake slowly climbed the wall of the cave and coiled itself around an outcrop of rock, that hung over our fireplace. The snake seemed at peace with us; and stayed there watching us, for the rest of the evening, as if it was part of our group. During the night, it disappeared and we did not see it again.

After tea, I went to the chamber I had designated as my meditation spot. My mind settled down easily in *samādhi*; and became peaceful and bright as I meditated, even though we had been up all day; and expended energy walking through the jungle to the cave; and setting up our camp. As my mind unified in one-pointedness, I had a vision of a golden warrior carrying a sword approaching me. It was a radiant *Deva* with a powerful energy. The *Deva* held a sword which often symbolises its accumulated spiritual perfections. The *Deva* indicated it was present to protect the cave. Ajahn Anan agreed that it was a guardian of the cave, when he mentioned that he had also encountered the *Deva*.

The following day, we embarked on an extensive tour of the cave system; and headed downwards, through a tunnel, looking for water; and exploring different lower chambers to see how big the cave system was. The lower areas were

filled with stalactites and stalagmites; and other unusual crystallised formations. The caves were beautiful with pools of underground water between the rock formations. In an island, in one rock pool, at the back of an underground chamber, we found some relics. We carefully collected them; and took them back to Wat Marp Jan, out of concern that they would disappear or be damaged if we left them. Upon our return to Wat Marp Jan, we cleaned the relics; and noticed that the characteristics were similar to some of the relics of the *Arahants* from the time of the Buddha, that Ajahn Anan had already looked after at the monastery. Later, we showed them to other teachers who agreed that they appeared to be genuine relics. It seemed appropriate to preserve them for the future.

The Monastic Routine Is The Teacher

Everyday, monastic life at Wat Marp Jan involved training. Each monk rose early in the morning for meditation; and then walked on alms round; and practised mindfulness and equanimity, in the face of their own feelings; and in whatever weather. Sometimes I felt tired or occasionally, uninspired because of continuous heavy rain or some minor physical ailment, but I learned to keep going like the other monks. I always reflected on Luang Por Chah's teachings to be patient with the training; and contemplate that it is not your mind that is suffering; it is the defilements that are agitated.

With Ajahn Anan at the head of the community, the monks gained strength and wisdom, to deal with their own changing moods of elation or disappointment, or any physical obstacles such as illness or injury. He rarely scolded anyone and gave teachings each day, reminding us of our duties and responsibilities as monks; and the importance of cultivating Right Effort. Whatever I encountered arising in my mind, the priority was

to abandon the mental defilements rooted in greed, anger and delusion; and to cultivate the wholesome qualities of the path. Ajahn Anan encouraged us to bring up mindfulness; and know our own minds. He often quoted Luang Por Chah's teachings that encouraged patience with the unexpected changes of life; rather than give in to negativity or the temptation to fall away from the path of practice. He practised what he taught; and his words always seemed to be coming from genuine experience, understanding and peacefulness.

Whether I was staying out in quiet spots in the forest; or back at the monastery, one of my main priorities was to bring up evenness of effort, to establish mindfulness and clear awareness; and achieve a state of calm and stability in my mind. In the monastic training, one has to live up to the routine, follow the guidelines of the teacher and learn to cooperate with the other monks. Sometimes, one has to wait for the teacher or other monks. Sometimes, one is asked to do jobs that one does not want to do; or is not familiar with. Through the practice, you become aware of your mental reactions to things and how different types of craving causes suffering. When you have to wait and become impatient, you suffer. When you want something and do not get it, you suffer. Mindfulness allows wisdom to function and reflect on the causes of suffering; and abandon them. Reflecting on impermanence in the course of daily monastic living, helps the mind to adjust to different situations; and cope with one's own negative reactions to things. I learnt then, when mindfulness and wisdom worked together, it was easier to see craving as temporary desires that you have the choice whether to follow or not.

Now that my parents were settled into their new lives; and my health was relatively good, I felt the most skilful way to use my

time was to devote all my efforts to cultivating the practice of morality, meditation and wisdom. There were few external obstructions or reasons for me to suffer in my life as a monk. I understood more and more clearly that when I experienced mental suffering, it was from my own attachments and confusion, and I continued to cultivate goodwill and compassion, on a daily basis, to help me live peacefully with the other resident monks; and to support me in dealing with any challenges. Physical tiredness and the negative reaction to it was probably the most frequent obstacle I faced.

On one occasion, when I had been meditating all night long, without rest, I was so tired after walking on alms round, that when I returned to the monastery and was walking across the driveway of the monastery, my legs turned to jelly; and I fell into the roadside ditch. It took me a few moments to drag myself up. I knew I had not tripped over, I was simply exhausted from my efforts in meditation. I did not think anyone saw what happened; and so I could not look around for someone to comfort me, or pick me up. I simply contemplated that physical exhaustion feels like this; and carried on. On another occasion, as I was walking up the hill through the jungle to my *kuti*, I was so tired that I shed some tears thinking, how difficult it was to train the mind. As I walked along the path, I encountered two snakes having a battle and one ended up swallowing the other. I reflected that any suffering I experienced was minimal, compared to the suffering of other humans and animals in the world. As I contemplated in that way, all my feelings of tiredness and suffering disappeared, and the mind became still and at ease. When wisdom arises, your state of mind can change very quickly.

If I started to feel sorry for myself or felt lonely, I only needed to look around and see other monks or lay people who were facing greater challenges than myself; and reflect on how

good my situation was, and such moods disappeared. When I cultivated kindness and compassion, any feelings of self-pity or self-aversion quickly melted away. I was aware that there was always another monk who was doubting himself or struggling with aversion or feeling worse than me; and similarly, when lay visitors told me of their problems, and indirectly reminded me of the difficulties of the lay life, it led to compassion for them, and gratitude for having the teachings as a refuge.

One morning, after I had spent most of the night meditating; and felt that I had not achieved or attained anything, two police commandos drove in to the monastery, and asked me for a blessing. It was only about 7:00am in the morning, so I asked them if there was a specific reason for their request. I could see two big automatic rifles in their vehicle. They said they had been awake all night; and had been involved in a long gun battle with a criminal gang. The officers were tired and stressed. I chanted a blessing for them; and gave them some amulets to boost their spirits. Afterwards, I reflected how grateful I was for my life as a monk, and the support I received; and reminded myself how any self-created suffering, in my mind, was really not so bad.

A Unique Sign On Luang Por Chah's Birthday

On 14 June 1993, Ajahn Anan had travelled to Wat Nong Pah Pong, ahead of the main Sangha gathering on Luang Por Chah's birthday anniversary. The rest of us were preparing to travel up to Wat Nong Pah Pong the next day. On the night of 14 June, we meditated together at the main hall at Wat Marp Jan, as usual. After the main session of chanting and meditation ended, I went outside to walk meditation in the open area, around the hall, where there were fewer mosquitoes. After walking back and forth for some time, I noticed a huge column of orange light rising up in the night sky, above the mountain top. The light appeared to begin in the sky, over the monastery,

and formed a straight column upwards, into the night sky. It did not appear to be connected to the ground, and the base of the light appeared to originate in mid-air. The light was clear, bright and continued to manifest for about 45 minutes which gave me enough time to inform the other monks in the monastery; and invite them to witness it.

We considered the question whether the light was produced by human action, or a natural occurring phenomenon, or was created by *Devas*. We talked to Ajahn Anan by phone; and described what we were seeing. He and Ajahn Piak meditated for a while, and gave their opinion that it was a divine light generated by *Devas*. At a later date, we asked Luang Por Opart, and he explained that it was an auspicious light that brought attention to the connection between the monastery and the heavenly realm. When Luang Por Fak visited, he confirmed that Wat Marp Jan was in an auspicious location and explained that sometimes *Devas* with accumulated parami who were connected to the monastery, could produce such a light to inspire people.

An Unexpected Blessing

I continued to stay up meditating all night, on each lunar Observance Day; and there were always some monks who practised together with me. Sometimes the all-night practice was more of an endurance test, but at other times, the conditions were conducive, and I felt physically and mentally energised to practise; and was able to attain some deep states of stillness. When I attained a deep state of *samādhi*, the hindrances went quiet; and I turned my mind to contemplate the body; and examine its impermanent, unattractive and non-self nature. Maintaining lucidity of mind, in the small hours of the night, when the body was at its lightest, after having digested the day's food, helped to deepen insight into the Four Noble Truths; and

particularly to unravel unawareness as the origin of suffering. The insight into emptiness, and the non-self nature of body and mind, were often clearest at these times. Usually as the night progressed, I put more effort into maintaining mindfulness; and was determined to not let the hindrances return. The states of stillness and insight into emptiness often continued the next day.

On one occasion, I had put forth effort, through the night to maintain one-pointedness, but by about 1:00am, I was feeling tired and dehydrated; and went across from the hall to Ajahn Anan's *kuti* to find some bottled water that was stored underneath. I found a number of full water bottles together on a table, picked one up and drank its entire content because I was so thirsty. I returned to the meditation hall to continue practising. Within a short while, I felt unexpectedly bright, energetic and more clear-minded than before. Just at the time of night when the hindrances would normally be returning; and I would have to maximise my effort to maintain mindfulness before dawn, the opposite happened. The longer I sat in meditation, the deeper the state of *samādhi*, I experienced. By dawn, my mind was completely still, luminous and contemplating the impermanent and empty nature of the five aggregates. It seemed effortless to maintain one-pointedness of mind; my body felt weightless and my mind was so bright that it seemed to cling to nothing.

The next day, I found out that the water bottle I had picked up had actually been labelled as Blessed Holy Water made by Luang Ta Maha Bua. Most of the bottles on the table had been ordinary drinking water, but in the dark I had picked up the one bottle containing water specially blessed by Luang Ta Maha Bua that had been given to Ajahn Anan. It was a genuine mistake, but one that brought me some good results in my practice; and confirmed the genuine and powerful effect

when an Enlightened teacher blesses water using his *samādhi*. No one was too annoyed with my mistake thankfully, and I was able to confirm to the community that Luang Ta Maha Bua's blessed water was really top quality; and when consumed it was a real boost for meditation practice. I had drunk the water not knowing it had been blessed, which helped offset some of the superstition surrounding holy water.

Good Teacher. Good Practice.

Hearing the true Dhamma from a wise and peaceful teacher is also a stimulus for the practice; and inspires both beginners and more experienced practitioners to cultivate the Buddha's path to Awakening. During the rains retreat, Ajahn Anan gave many inspiring talks on how to train the mind in meditation; and explained the way to cultivate the factors of enlightenment. We meditated together as a group, for up to three hours per session; and some monks continued on throughout each night. On most nights, Ajahn Anan would let the monks visit his *kuti* after 10.00pm to give him a foot massage, and ask questions about the Dhamma. He was getting older and his muscles were stiffening up, so we provided him with this assistance; and he used it as an opportunity to teach Dhamma. I did not attend every night as I was often sitting or walking meditation, but I attended on at least a couple of nights, each week. Out of compassion for the junior monks, Ajahn Anan sometimes allowed these sessions to continue until midnight or even one or two in the morning. The longest Dhamma discussion session I ever witnessed ended at four in the morning, just in time for morning chanting.

I noticed how Ajahn Anan could maintain his mindfulness, composure and compassion in many situations, as he led the Sangha in the monastery. He maintained his equanimity, regardless of how much or little he slept, whether he was busy



Ajahn Somchai, Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Kalyano
at Wat Marp Jan in 2022.

or resting. He used his wisdom and compassion, on a daily basis, to help teach and guide, both monks and laity. It was inspiring to see him maintain mindfulness and equanimity, dealing with a range of different people and situations. Day in and day out, he gave his time from morning until night, and slowly the size of the monastic community grew. He was always open for his students to seek him out for advice. Monks from other monasteries were always welcome to ask for his guidance in running monasteries or about any aspect of the practice. His wisdom and experience inspired younger and older men to take ordination, and to put forth effort in their practice. Another consequence of this was that as lay Buddhists observed the growth of the size of the community at Wat Marp Jan, they came forward and made offerings of pieces of forest land to start monasteries at different locations all over Thailand.

Luang Por Buddhadasa's Funeral

When I became a novice monk in 1984, I had already read and listened to the teachings of Luang Por Buddhadasa and found them clear and inspiring. Luang Por Chah and Luang Por Liem praised the quality of his teachings; and I trusted in their judgment. When I was a novice at Wat Pah Nanachat, Luang Por Buddhadasa sent a new novice monk called Santikaro to Wat Pah Nanachat, to receive some training; and we sat next to each other in the line of monks for quite some time. Eventually, he went back to assist and translate for Luang Por Buddhadasa at his monastery, but we met each other a number of times, over the years. In 1986, I helped another English monk look after his elderly mother who was visiting Thailand; and we took her on a trip to see Luang Por Buddhadasa at his monastery. Ajahn Anan also took us to visit him on several occasions; and I stayed with him for nearly a month in 1991.

I always appreciated how Luang Por Buddhadasa's teachings cut through some of the wrong views and superstitions present in Thailand. His emphasis on the importance of cultivating the Noble Eightfold Path and the practice of meditation, echoed the teachings of the meditation masters of north-east Thailand. He was not afraid to speak directly when it was necessary, even if the listener did not fully agree. He always pursued the true Dhamma, helping to ground his students in an understanding of Right View or *Sammādiṭṭhi*. By the time he passed away, I had received many beneficial teachings from him; and also had good memories of his wise and peaceful presence. Some lay Buddhists saw him as a scholar monk who had little genuine meditative attainment or insight, but other monks who had cultivated the path of meditation, generally praised him as a truly wise and liberated being. Ajahn Anan had always praised Luang Por Buddhadasa as a truly liberated Noble One. His scholastic knowledge only gave weight to his teachings on meditation; and helped him explain the Buddha's words more effectively. Whenever I was with him, I appreciated how he always brought any conversation about the Buddha's teachings, back to the investigation and realisation of the Four Noble Truths and the development of insight into the universal characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self.

When Luang Por Buddhadasa died, it felt like a real loss to the world, in a similar way to when Luang Por Chah passed away. He had contributed so much to the spread of the teachings in Thailand; and around the world and improved the practice and understanding of the Dhamma, for so many people. Although Luang Por Chah's death had a more personal impact on me, the loss of each good teacher was like a wake-up call for me, to put more effort into the cultivation of the Dhamma because of the uncertainties of life. Just as the Buddha was a human being

whose body eventually succumbed to ageing, sickness and death, all his Enlightened disciples also had to succumb to the ordinary truths of ageing, sickness and death. The Enlightened students of the Buddha, no longer identified with the five aggregates as self; and therefore, had no fear of death and experienced no mental suffering; but everyone must eventually face the death of the human body.

Luang Por Buddhadasa's disciples announced, at very short notice, that his body would be cremated on 28 September 1993. The announcement caught many of his students by surprise. One morning, I was walking back to the monastery, from my daily alms round, when I met a car driving out of the monastery. Ajahn Anan put his head out of the window and told me that Luang Por Buddhadasa's cremation was scheduled for that afternoon. He kindly asked me if I wished to join the group who were travelling to southern Thailand at short notice; and when I said yes, he instructed the car to turn around and gave me 5 minutes to pick up my essential belongings.

We drove for 3 hours straight without stopping for food or drink, to reach Bangkok Airport because there was only one possible flight to Surat Thani that we could catch in time, to reach the funeral ceremony that afternoon. When we arrived at the Thai Airways ticket counter, there was a massive crowd of hundreds of people already gathered; and all of them were competing for the last few seats on the flight. Members of the crowd were pleading with the staff to purchase the remaining seats on the flight to Surat Thani. There were too many people milling around, for us as monks to stand at the ticket desk conveniently, so our group quietly stood to one side; and Ajahn Anan suggested to us that we meditated and spread *mettā*. After a short while, one of the staff walked over to us from behind

the desk and told us that there were only five seats left on the flight; and being unable to decide who to allocate those seats to, the staff decided to offer the seats to our group of five monks. They realised we were trying to join Luang Por Buddhadasa's funeral. The last-minute decision allowed us just enough time to walk to the gate; and board the plane, before it moved down the runway. I felt sorry for everyone else still waiting, but once on board, we were relieved to hear the flight attendants tell us that another plane had been chartered at the airport to cater for the crowd of travellers, hoping to join the funeral.

When we arrived at Surat Thani airport, we did not know any locals. As forest monks with no money, we simply walked in single file out of the airport, along the highway. It was not long before the driver of a pick-up truck realised where we were going; and offered us a lift for the forty kilometres to the monastery. We arrived at the monastery; and walked straight to the centre of the forest where the cremation was about to take place. We arrived a few minutes before the start of the ceremony, just in time to sit down on the floor of the forest, next to Luang Por Liem and a group of monks from Wat Nong Pah Pong, who had magically made it to the funeral in time, by driving down.

The funeral ceremony was inspiring for its simplicity. The resident monks carried a plain undecorated coffin into the midst of the crowd, and placed it on a simple pyre of logs, with a bamboo frame around them. The monks followed Luang Por Buddhadasa's wishes and refrained from decorating the site in the traditional way; and minimised the usual rituals that you might expect at the funeral of a well-known monk. There was some simple funeral chanting by the monks, followed by a recorded talk of Luang Por Buddhadasa's teaching. At the appointed

time, everyone got up and slowly walked up to the funeral pyre and placed a small offering of sandalwood, onto the logs, as they were lit. The fire under Luang Por Buddhadasa's body began to burn while we sat silently under the trees and heard his recorded voice, encouraging the listeners to establish mindfulness; and investigate the impermanent nature of conditioned existence. A fine mist of rain sprinkled lightly down through the trees on the crowd as we meditated, as if we were receiving a blessing from the heaven realms. Luang Por Buddhadasa's body slowly burnt in full view of the crowd; and gradually disappeared into ashes.

A Young Practitioner With Chronic Kidney Disease

In 1993, the niece of one of the monks at Wat Marp Jan came to live in the monastery, at the invitation of Ajahn Anan. She was suffering from chronic kidney disease; and was waiting for a suitable kidney donor. The young woman was from a family in Ubon. She had strong faith in the teachings of Luang Por Chah. She was relying on her cultivation of the Dhamma, to help her deal with her declining health; and the increasing possibility of death, through kidney failure. When she arrived at Wat Marp Jan, she was already very weak and had lost a lot of weight. It was clear that if she did not receive a kidney transplant soon, she would die.

The young woman was given the nickname Mei Li, as she was from Chinese ancestry. She dedicated herself to keeping the precepts and practising meditation. Over the course of time that she was in the monastery, her meditation improved consistently; even though her physical health was slowly degenerating. She had little to lose as she faced her death; and was determined to develop her mind through meditation; and to let go of whatever mental defilements she could. Eventually her practice developed until she was experiencing states of stillness; and she also gained

some psychic ability and special knowledge.

I often accompanied Ajahn Anan, as he taught Dhamma to Mei Li and her family members; and was impressed by her dedication to the Dhamma in the face of her illness, and at a time when many other people might have been tempted to give up on life and fall into depression. She displayed great endurance and patience, with the physical deterioration of her body; and she endeavoured to maintain her equanimity and insight with her increasing bodily pain, as death approached. She often shared insightful Dhamma reflections with the people who visited her, which made them appreciate her presence in the monastery. Her ability with meditation and strong mindfulness also allowed her to speak about Dhamma with confidence; and she inspired many people to practise meditation.

Mei Li's only hope was to receive a kidney donation from someone with a matching blood and tissue type. While she was staying in the monastery, a slow but steady stream of volunteers, from the community of monks and lay devotees, went for blood tests to see if they matched. During the time that Mei Li's health was degenerating, she maintained a peaceful and pleasant mood, supported by her meditation; and displayed abundant natural wisdom. She used the psychic powers and special knowledge she gained from her cultivation of *samādhi*, to help people. She sometimes let on that she knew the minds of others, or could see beings in heaven realms or ghost realms; and had the ability to recollect past lives and predict the future. She was aware when other meditators experienced states of *samādhi*; and when they were distracted or caught under the influence of the mental hindrances.

One businessman came to stay in the monastery. He doubted that the young woman who was so ill, could have any genuine skill with meditation. As he talked to her, together with a group

of monks one day, his thinking was very negative and critical towards her. Mei Li, in a peaceful and meaningful way, revealed to him and everyone else, what he was thinking. He was embarrassed, but at the same time impressed when she revealed with accuracy, his train of thought. She could tell people what their mind was like on the inside, very accurately; and not being bound by the strict training rules of a monk, she told a few people about their past *kamma*, including details of their past lives.

In one conversation, Mei Li accurately predicted that in the distant future, Ajahn Anan and I would be given the title of Chao Khun by the King of Thailand. The prediction seemed very unlikely, at that time. On a few occasions, she told people where their relatives had been reborn after their death; which often helped put their minds at rest. On one occasion, when the monks visited her in hospital, after she had gone into shock; and nearly died from kidney failure, the soccer world cup was being broadcast on the hospital television. While we were talking to her, one young monk expressed concern to his friend, that the team favoured to win the world cup was actually losing their match. She reassured him that, in a little while, they would turn the game around and score two more goals to win the match. Much to the amusement of the monks and hospital staff, the score at the end of the game turned out exactly as she predicted.

As time went on, Mei Li became weaker and weaker because of her failing kidneys. She prepared herself for death. Although she went for dialysis at the local hospital, she gave up on the treatment, and postponed her dialysis sessions and prepared for the end, in the monastery. Her skin took on a deathly pale colour, she hardly ate anything and looked skeletal. At one point, Ajahn Anan called an ambulance; and she was rushed to hospital with some of the monks following in a car as the ambulance sped down the highway. On the way to the hospital,

the ambulance suddenly stopped on the side of the highway and the paramedics invited two monks to sit and chant for the dying woman in the ambulance, because they believed she was about to die.

When the ambulance reached the hospital, she was reciting Buddhist verses to herself as a way to keep her mindfulness alert, before the moment of death. After she had been in the emergency ward for a while, the doctor came out to invite the monks inside, telling us that she was close to death. We surrounded her bed with her family members and everyone was quiet. Some shed a tear, including Ajahn Anan. Mei Li said goodbye and then closed her eyes. After 5 minutes of silence, when everyone assumed her consciousness had left her body, she suddenly opened her eyes and told us that she was unable to die at that time. It was a slightly humorous moment, as the uncertainties of both life and death became apparent. Her body was obviously stronger and more resilient than everybody assumed, and from that day onwards she stayed on in the hospital and did not return to the monastery. A few weeks later, she finally managed to receive a kidney transplant; and was able to live on for many more years.

Visit From A Deva

I spent many years practising in a small timber *kuti*, surrounded by thick jungle in Wat Marp Jan. I remember one night when I laid down on my mat, I was preparing to rest when, suddenly my mind gathered together in *samādhi*. I knew I would not be able to sleep so I sat up again, and carried on meditating. The factors of *samādhi* arose in my mind quite naturally and I was able to continue sitting for several hours without being bothered by sleepiness or any of the hindrances. When my mind withdrew from the stillness, I contemplated the refined state of mind I was experiencing. As I had meditated and experienced



At the Buddha's *kuti* on Vultures Peak (Gijjhakuta) in India 1993.

samādhī in this way many times before, I was investigating the subtle movements of mind that arise with craving for the bliss, radiance and pleasant feeling associated with states of *samādhī*.

I began to contemplate the unattractiveness of the body; but then became aware of a radiant light, in front of me, that was clearly not created by my mind. My teachers had taught me to focus my mindfulness and observe the centre of the radiance and as I did that, an image of a beautiful female *Deva* became clear. She was floating in front of me. I resolved in my mind to ask who the *Deva* was; and why she was present in my *kuti*. The understanding that arose in my mind was that she was associated with the female practitioner who had been suffering from kidney disease; and had been helping her. As I focused my mind on the *Deva* I could feel the strong rapture and positive energy emanating from her, and I could see the beauty of her form very clearly. Immediately, I recollected the teachings I had heard warning of the dangers of becoming infatuated with, and deluded by such beautiful celestial beings. I determined to observe with equanimity. I mentally informed the being that as I was a monk on my own in the forest, it was not appropriate for a female *Deva* to be present in my *kuti*. After a few minutes, the radiant light faded away and I continued meditating and contemplated what had taken place, reflecting on the Dhamma.

The Buddha Within. The Buddha Without.

Visiting India

At the end of December 1993, Ajahn Anan organised a trip to visit the main Buddhist holy sites in India. He brought along a large group including twenty monks and a similar number of lay devotees. It was the first of many annual pilgrimages to India that he organised over the next twenty-five years, aiming to help increase the faith; and support the practice of the Buddhist community. Joining the pilgrimage to India was significant for

me because at that time I still had not returned to visit my home in England; since joining the monastic community in 1984. My family members had travelled to Thailand, several times to visit me; and I was in regular contact with them, hence I had no immediate concerns about them. I was happy that India became the first country outside Thailand that I travelled to as a monk. I considered that the opportunity to travel on pilgrimage to the place, where the Buddha attained Enlightenment and taught the Dhamma, was a special opportunity that I should not miss. My decision to visit India before going home to England, was another expression of my commitment to take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha; and dedicate my life as a monk to cultivating the Noble Eightfold Path. I assumed that I would visit England at a later date, when my foundation in the Dhamma was solid; and I had some true knowledge and insight to offer my family.

One of the inspiring things, about this first pilgrimage to India, was the opportunity to see Ajahn Anan and the Sangha practise the Dhamma-Vinaya, as they travelled outside Thailand. The daily schedule was organised like a meditation retreat and there were no extra tourist-style activities or shopping visits arranged. Every morning, we arose early for meditation and chanting, and occasionally we arranged for the monks to go on alms round, when possible. At every important holy site, we arranged meditation and chanting sessions; and Ajahn Anan gave teachings. Of course, there were many challenges and obstacles to overcome, but the end result was that everyone who participated gained more faith; and deeper understanding of the Buddhist teachings; and some of the monks and lay practitioners had some profound meditation experiences.

When we arrived at Bodh Gaya, we were tired after travelling for several days; but everyone wanted to spend the night meditating



Ajahn Kalyano with Ajahn Anan and the Sangha, in India, during the trip to visit the main Buddhist holy sites in 1993.

under the Bodhi tree, out of their strong faith in the Buddha. In those days, there were less security guards and fences around the tree, so it was possible for us to do this. The second night, everyone wanted to repeat the experience and so we stayed up meditating all night, for two nights in a row.

To be able to meditate and recite the teachings of the Buddha, at each of the important holy places, was a rare and inspirational experience. I found that the faith drawn out of my heart at each site, was a cause for joy and rapture to arise; and, in turn, this supported the arising of *virīya* or the quality of perseverance, in the practice. Even when physically tired from travelling, I found I often achieved quite deep states of *samādhī* in my meditation; and was surprised how well I could let go of mental distraction, the aversion to the pain, and discomfort of constant travelling.

When my mindfulness was strong and my mind calm, as I sat under the Bodhi tree, I made a determination to practise the Dhamma-Vinaya, until I reached the end of suffering. I had no other commitments in my life; and could make the determination with a pure heart. At that time, I had no other obligations to teach or build monasteries; and my mind's energy easily gathered together in *samādhī* with rapture, joy and one-pointedness, as I made the resolution. I had no doubt that cultivating the Dhamma would benefit my family and friends, and I was being honest with myself, by making this commitment, at the place where the Buddha had attained His own Awakening.

Travelling in India brought forth many reflections; and insights into the Buddha's life story and teachings; and gave many of us a new meaning to the phrase that describes a Buddhist monk as 'son of the Buddha'. We are related to the Buddha through our ordination; and to each other in our faith, and the commitment to the training in the Dhamma and Vinaya. We

travelled through the same countryside and hills as the Buddha. We witnessed both the poverty of the ordinary people in north-eastern India; and their great spirituality. Many aspects of the Buddha's life and the important events that we had read about, became a little clearer. However, Ajahn Anan reminded us that when Luang Por Chah was asked if he planned to travel to India, he replied with the question: "Can the Buddha not arise in Thailand?" He reminded us that the true Buddha arises out of one's practice and realisation of the Four Noble Truths, not through travelling.

Nevertheless, moving from place to place in northern India, felt similar to participating in a meditation retreat devoted to the theme of recollecting the qualities of the Buddha or *Buddhānussati*. We discussed many of the important events of the Buddha's life, before and after his Awakening. As it can happen, when a group of people travel together on a foreign trip, there were moments when some of the lay people became tired and irritable, or fell prey to their views and opinions and disagreed with each other; but the presence of the monks had a great effect in calming people down, and taking the heat out of any discontentment. At one point, the tour guide lost his temper with the group, because he was not making as much money as he would have liked. The man had never encountered restrained forest monks who kept the training rules strictly before. Some of his unprofessional business practices were exposed by the honesty and integrity of the monks and lay people, in our group. He directed his anger at Ajahn Anan the leader, who kept his cool and remained kind, friendly and forgiving of the man. That in itself was a fine example of how to practise the Buddhist teachings in daily life; and was reminiscent of some of the stories from the life of the Buddha.

By the end of the trip, every member of the group was exhausted but uplifted. It was also funny to note how, when travelling,

some people complained about the fatigue and difficulties they encountered; and even exclaimed how they would never do it again. On the last day, however, when everyone prepared to go their separate ways at Bangkok Airport, those same people said they wanted Ajahn Anan to arrange another tour the following year, because it had been such a good experience. In the end, both monks and laity seemed grateful to have had the chance to visit the holy places; and felt that their faith in the Buddha had been replenished and deepened.

Paying Respects To The Teacher's Relics

Soon after I returned from India, I travelled to Wat Nong Pah Pong for Luang Por Chah's Memorial retreat in January 1994. Since Luang Por Chah passed away, I have travelled to Wat Nong Pah Pong for this event, every year, to remember my teacher, pay respects to his relics at the Chedi; and to meet with the senior monks of the Sangha. Luang Por Chah always emphasised the benefits when the Buddhist community of monks meets in harmony. Visiting Wat Nong Pah Pong was an opportunity to recollect the teachings of Luang Por Chah and the qualities he embodied; to express my gratitude, and dedicate my practice to his memory. I also continued to attend the annual Sangha meeting in June, on Luang Por Chah's birthday. Meditating next to his relics, each year, has always been a cause for strength in my practice; and given rise to skilful reflections and insight. I have always found that my mind settles into *samādhi* whenever I meditate next to Luang Por Chah's relics, even when I am physically tired from travelling.

A Startled King Cobra On Drunkard's Mountain

Returning to Wat Marp Jan after the visit to Luang Por Chah's Chedi, I asked permission from Ajahn Anan to spend some time out in the forest at Khao Chamao National Park; while the weather was relatively dry in February. Khao Chamao is

a mountainous region about one hundred kilometres along the coast from Wat Marp Jan towards Cambodia, and the mountain was viewed by the locals, as an auspicious and unique place. The name means Drunkard's Mountain, and was given to the area because people became intoxicated after eating fish from the streams on the mountain. The locals described how it was the residing place of powerful deities, who protect the area. The Royal Thai Airforce had built a radar station on top of the rocky peak, at the summit of the highest mountain, to track all the flights in the region, because prior to that, aircrafts regularly disappeared off the radar, when flying over the mountain. This phenomenon only added to the mystery and the legends, about special deities in the area. The summit was so remote and rocky; and the ascending slopes very steep. Unlike the mountain of Wat Marp Jan, no road up the mountain had ever been constructed; and the soldiers who manned the radar station had to be flown in and out by helicopter.

The National Park was home to large forest trees; and many species of wild animals such as elephants, bears and tigers. Upon my arrival, I immediately found the atmosphere in the jungle conducive to arousing energy in meditation practice; and stimulated my contemplation of impermanence and the uncertainty of existence. Every time, I stayed in the deep forest, I found that the threat from animals, falling trees and diseases such as malaria, agitated my mind with anxiety and made me more aware of my attachment and self-identification with my body. In addition, I found that camping on the forest floor for long periods exposed any craving for comfort and convenience. I bathed in the mountain stream and ate simple food that I collected from the farmers who were kind enough to share something with me as I walked by their houses, each morning. I depended on cultivating my own inspiration in the practice, as I camped alone in the deep forest.

I could not expect any favours from anyone, as I did not know any of the local villagers; and had never stayed in the area before. Even though I collected enough food each morning to survive, no one knew me; or offered any additional help with other requisites, so I rationed my few simple possessions; to make them last as long as possible. My only sustenance was alms food and water from a stream. I meditated and slept on the floor of the forest; with the knowledge that if anything unfortunate happened to me, no one would know, as I was camping deep in the forest, away from tracks and paths. The sound of wild animals, at night, always meant I slept lightly because of the heightened alertness of the mind.

Two forest rangers were camped in bamboo huts, at the foot of the mountain. Upon arrival, I asked their permission to head upstream along a waterfall, to find a good place to camp. They were reluctant to let me go into the forest alone, but I promised I would check in with them, every morning; as I walked to nearby farms on alms round. Each morning, I walked about six kilometres round trip. They told me there were no tigers on that side of the mountain, but I got the impression that they themselves were merely hoping the information was true; and they did not actually know for sure.

The first night, I camped next to the stream, about one kilometre uphill in a beautiful shady spot. At about seven in the evening, I began to meditate and almost immediately, the sky opened and it began to rain; even though it was the dry season. The rain got heavier and heavier, as the night progressed; and only stopped the following dawn. As the rain continued, I put my main robes in my bowl for protection; but gradually I became completely soaked through to the skin. There was no way I could sleep, because I was sitting in a puddle of water, that grew larger as rain water ran down the hillside, onto my groundsheet. The one

positive thing from the experience, was that I had no choice but to meditate, all night long. At dawn, I collected my bowl and robes and headed down the hill, to find an opening in the trees, where I could dry my belongings in the sun. As I was crossing the newly flooded stream, I slipped on the wet rocks and fell into the water. I hurt my leg; and also had no robes or possessions left that were not dripping wet. It was as if I had been tested on the first night of my retreat; to see if I really wanted to stay and practice on the auspicious mountain.

My robes dried in the sun, while I ate my meal after alms round; and I then headed back up the hill. After the rain, the jungle seemed more beautiful than before, the dust was gone and the humid air was pleasantly refreshed. It was similar to when you experience some mental suffering, and patiently go through the emotional storm; and emerge feeling calm and refreshed afterwards. I returned to re-establish my camp; and settled down for some meditation in the afternoon. However, in the afternoon the flooded stream attracted some young villagers who walked up to the waterfall to enjoy the fast-flowing water. As I meditated, I heard shouts and screams of people playing around; and a little while later, three young adults came walking up to where I was sitting in meditation. There were two young women who were soaking wet and in high spirits; followed by a more sheepish male. The girls sat down in front of me, only a few inches away; and while they dripped water on my mat, asked me questions about who I was and where I was from. I was not annoyed but it seemed like another test of my equanimity; as the girls were laughing and trying to flirt with me; and appeared very sensual in their wet clothes. I talked to the group for a while, out of politeness; and when they left, I considered that I did not want to meet other villagers and decided to move my camp further up the mountain. I gathered my umbrella, bowl and robes together, for a second time; and walked up the mountain.

I walked until I was tired and wanted to stop; and then made myself walk a bit further, until I found a suitable camping spot that I was sure was secluded enough, that no locals would find me. I chuckled to myself about how the Thai girls, could be as much a threat to a monk, as the tigers.

From my new location, I had to walk a lot further to collect food, from the farms in the valley; but I gained greater seclusion which made it worthwhile. I still had a water supply, available from the waterfall; and thought I could survive a few weeks in that place. Every time you move into a new area in the forest, it is likely you will disturb some of the resident animals. This came true on the first afternoon, when I was peacefully sitting in meditation, on the forest floor. Having entered a state of concentration, an unusual vision came up in my mind. I saw many small frightened creatures running from fear, in all directions, through the leaves and undergrowth on the forest floor. I sensed that there was danger near me in the jungle even though I could not hear anything. I opened my eyes in time to catch sight of a very large snake approaching me.

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed the snake was almost upon me, so I turned my head to face it and get a better look and, unintentionally, startled it with my movement. The snake reared its head up over me; and observing how thick and how long its body was, I assumed it was a king cobra. The snake had about half its body raised up off the floor. It looked at me with fierce eyes, and swung its head from side to side threateningly. The moment I startled it, the snake lunged towards me and head butted my chest, but it did not try to bite me. I got the impression the king cobra was trying to push me away from its territory. The snake stayed with its head at the same height as mine looking me in the eye. It seemed appropriate to tell it that I meant no harm, and I gently asked why it was being aggressive.

It looked afraid and confused as it swayed back and forth, just a few feet in front of me. The longer I looked at it, the more compassion arose in my heart as I could see it was afraid, and I apologised for disturbing it. Suddenly the snake darted off into the forest. I never saw it again.

I returned to my meditation; and contemplated why the snake had lunged at me but not bitten me. A moment later, an unusual image of the snake moving through the jungle with a monk, Luang Por Tooat, sitting on its head, arose in my mind. Some teachers have mentioned how the *Devas* can protect monks when they are in the forest and encounter wild animals; and concluded that perhaps a *Deva* had protected me from the anger of the king cobra. Luang Por Tooat is a well-known monk who lived over two hundred years ago in Thailand. He is highly regarded as being both a wise scholar; and a meditation master and is revered for helping to revive Buddhism in Thailand, at a time when the society was facing many challenges. He is considered to be a *Bodhisatta* or a being who has made a vow to become a Buddha. Coincidentally, a few years before, Ajahn Anan had given me a small image of Luang Por Tooat; and I had kept it in my *kuti* for inspiration.

Recollecting the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha has always been an integral part of my meditation practice and cultivation of the path. The Thai Buddhist tradition has a wealth of good teachers who are *kalyāṇamitta* or Noble friends. When monks live on their own in the forest, they only have their faith in the Triple Gem and their practice of virtue, meditation and wisdom to rely on. I found that recollecting the admirable qualities of Noble friends; and determining to emulate them was a source of strength and nourishment in my practice, especially whenever I was alone. I regularly chanted the verses recollecting the qualities of the Buddha and verses of protection, and

recollected the qualities of the Triple Gem in my meditation to arouse faith, energy and patient endurance, when facing obstacles. When meditating alone in the jungle, one faces both external obstacles, such as wild animals, threatening people or ghosts and internal obstacles, such as one's own deluded and unwholesome thinking, and both kinds of obstacles can trigger mental states of suffering.

Following the meeting with the king cobra, I continued my practice, encountering more mundane obstacles such as lapses in mindfulness, sleepiness; and my own mental proliferation based on thoughts of the past and future. In general, I found staying deep in the jungle brought me a feeling of seclusion which supported my practice of letting go; and aided me in bringing my mind to unification in meditation. During the daylight, I used some time to work on a translation of a talk by Luang Por Chah; writing down notes on a pad held on my lap. I had no computer in those days, so I joked that my notebook was my laptop. Reading and translating Luang Por Chah's teachings in the seclusion of the forest really gave me a chance to absorb some of his profound wisdom. Translating from one language to another made me focus on each word and phrase, Luang Por Chah had used, as I tried to fully understand its meaning. The work had a good effect on my mind. It was later published as *'The Path To Peace'*.

One-Pointedness Prompted By A Tiger

Later on in my retreat, I was practising late at night, when unexpectedly I heard a tiger growling at me from nearby. I could not see it in the dark but it seemed to be walking slowly around me; and kept on growling for many minutes. I resolved to continue sitting in meditation; and not let the presence of the tiger bother me. I put effort into steadying my mind and aimed to maintain full awareness with equanimity. The sound

of the tiger growling continued intermittently, until about 11 o'clock. As I focused my mind on the breath, a vision arose in my mind, of me sitting inside a stone castle with thick protective walls. I realised that the vision was revealing to me how much importance my mind was attaching to the comfort and perception of safety provided by my umbrella, mosquito net, alms bowl and the small candle burning in a lantern next to me. Even though none of these items provided any physical protection against a tiger, I realised I was clinging to my familiar possessions, for a sense of safety and security. In my mind, these items were my 'castle.'

I decided to compel myself to relinquish the 'castle' by getting up; and leaving the comfort and security of my safe area, and walked closer to where the sound of the tiger was coming from. I walked about ten metres, and sat down on a rock next to the stream. At first, I felt calm and confident because my mind was firmly established in its awareness of the breath. Up to that point, I had subdued any fear by maintaining mindfulness on my breathing. As soon as I snuffed out my candle lantern, the dark of the night enveloped me. An intense feeling of fear crept up and took hold of my mind with an iron grip. I knew the tiger was close by and could see me, even though I was sitting in total darkness.

I was determined not to let the fear overcome me, however overpowering it was. So I focused all my attention on the breath. I thought that just as fear can stubbornly take hold of my mind, I will take hold of the breath tenaciously, and not allow even one moment of fear, to be created in my mind. As I sat in the dark, I maintained awareness on the breath. I allowed my mind to absorb the breath, while not giving any importance to thoughts about my safety; or what might happen. Ultimately, I let go of the unpleasant physical feeling associated with fear; and my

mind turned inwards as it let go of the body. I continued to sit with my mind completely unified in *samādhi*, experiencing no fear at all. It no longer mattered whether there was a tiger there or not. In my determination not to give in to fear, I completely lost track of time and ended up sitting on the rock, until dawn in a state of one-pointedness. I did not notice feelings of tiredness in my body or mind; and the fear had completely disappeared. The tiger had stopped growling during the middle of the night. As dawn broke, I felt exceptionally calm and peaceful whether sitting, standing or walking.

I had spent most of the night developing and keeping my mind in a state of stillness. When I began walking down the mountain side at dawn, I realised how deep my state of *samādhi* was. My body was so light that I could not feel the hardness of the ground with my feet. I could not feel any pain or tiredness in my body, even though I had been awake and meditating all night. I walked to collect alms food for a distance of nearly eight kilometres, but my body and mind felt weightless. It was as if I was floating all the way. The experience of unshakable peace remained for days. It became obvious to me why forest monks push themselves to go out and dwell in wild jungle areas and how, when the conditions are right and one makes an effort, the experience can prompt one's mind to gather together in *samādhi* and let go of attachment.

A strange coincidence occurred on my way back from alms round, when I met the two forest rangers breaking camp; and packing up their belongings into their truck. I asked them where they were going; and they replied that they had received orders to return to national headquarters to join a seminar on the management of tigers in the National Park. I told them that I had actually been visited by a tiger the night before; and they looked at me in astonishment.

Luang Por Jun Passes Away

I continued to practice peacefully on the mountain side, without further incident. My mind was buoyed by the effort I had put in to quell the fear of the tiger; and I practised sitting and walking meditation, with enthusiasm. One day, I had a vision of Luang Por Jun in my meditation. Luang Por Jun was the most senior disciple of Luang Por Chah and I had known him well, since I was a novice. In the vision, he was lying dead on a bed dressed in his robes; and a funeral ceremony was taking place. The vision did not surprise me as he had been seriously ill with cancer, for several years. I asked one of the villagers who had offered help, to assist me in making a phone call to Wat Marp Jan from a public call box, in the village. Ajahn Anan told me the news that Luang Por Jun was indeed close to death; and that he would send somebody to pick me up from the National Park.

Luang Por Jun died the day after I returned to the monastery. Ajahn Anan heard the news of his death late at night; and decided to drive up to Ubon straight away. He kindly came round to my *kuti* at 3:00am in the morning; and told me the news. In typical style, he told me I had 10 minutes to get my bowl and robes ready, before the car departed for Ubon. Usually, senior monks do not walk through the forest at 3:00am to visit junior monks, so I appreciated his kind consideration for me. In fact, Ajahn Anan often surprised people with the sincere way he expressed his compassion; and helped the monks under his guidance. We travelled to Ubon to assist with the funeral arrangements; and help receive visiting senior monks as we had done for Luang Por Chah's funeral. We also meditated many times spreading metta to Sangha and laity, throughout the period of the funeral.

Impermanent Physical Form

I lived at Wat Marp Jan for about ten years. Throughout that time, Ajahn Anan emphasised the practice of *asubha*

kammatthāna as one of the fundamental meditations for the monks to cultivate. *Asubha kammatthāna* refers to the meditation on the unattractive aspects of the body; and includes fixing the mind on the perception of unattractiveness in each of the thirty-two parts of the body; and also cultivating the ten corpse meditations. This meditation practice forms part of the first foundation of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) taught by the Buddha. The aim of the meditation is to develop mindfulness; and clear comprehension directed to the perception of the unattractive aspects of the body; and cultivating insight into the impermanent and non-self nature of physical form. It leads to knowledge, equanimity and dispassion. The practice undermines one's normal identification with the body, as something attractive, desirable and belonging to a self.

Ajahn Anan taught us to develop mindfulness directed to the thirty-two parts of the body, and cultivate the perception of the body as a corpse, in various phases of degeneration; and develop the recollection of death (*marananusati*). He taught us to analyse physical form, and break it down in to the four primary elements of earth, water, air and fire. Cultivating the perception of the unattractiveness of the physical body is to counter our normal delight in and obsession with the attractive characteristics of physical form, which is the origin of attachment to sense pleasure and sexual desire. I continued this practice as I had done while Luang Por Chah was alive.

Ajahn Anan shared with us his experiences in his own meditation; and he frequently encouraged the monks to practise and develop similar insights; because he knew it was a difficult meditation theme for anyone to cultivate regularly, with enthusiasm. He encouraged the monks to see the benefits of returning to these meditation objects over and over again, to develop calm, serenity and insight. Ajahn Anan also explained

the importance of cultivating one's strong faith in the Triple Gem; and a foundation in the practice of the meditation on the theme of the four sublime abidings (*brahmavihāra*), as a preparation for contemplating the unattractiveness of the body.

In general, the Thai forest monks have strong faith in the Triple Gem and the teacher; and are quite familiar with practising generosity, and serving the community. The cultivation of meditation on the body, however, is challenging for anybody. A skeleton hung in a glass case with pictures of autopsies and corpses is placed nearby in the dining hall, to remind the monks of the true nature of the body each time they walked past. In Thailand, it is possible to have these kind of photographs in the public areas of the monastery, because there is some social acceptance that it is part of the practice; and meditation training for monks.

From time to time, we were invited to visit the mortuaries of large hospitals in Chonburi and Bangkok, to observe autopsies. On some occasions, we received explanations from a pathologist or university lecturer, and we were able to ask questions about the workings of the organs and different aspects of human anatomy. At other times, we simply witnessed an autopsy in silence; and developed our own memories and perceptions, to be used in meditation. The visits to the mortuary of the police hospital were the most confronting, as we encountered the corpses of individuals who had died from injuries in accidents, suicides and murders. A large number of corpses were also in different stages of decay. Sometimes the smell was completely overwhelming.

The visual images, the smell and the memories of those corpses provided the raw material for our meditation. I valued the teachings I received from Ajahn Anan. The opportunities to

observe such autopsies were rare moments to contemplate the reality of our existence; and the relationship between mind and body. Contemplating the repulsiveness of the human body is hard work; and something most people avoid. I used the opportunities to internalise the images and smells, with mindfulness and clear comprehension. Viewing a human body during an autopsy gives you a powerful perception that you can bring up again later; and it supports clear insight into the finality of death. When I observed an autopsy, I did not speak to anyone. I merely watched and observed the internal organs, muscles and bone structure of the body; and then observed my own reaction and mental state. I tried to maintain detached awareness, as I absorbed the images and smells. Mindfulness of death is a sobering practice; and this can bring a deep state of calm, to your mind. Some monks find the corpse meditation leads to deep states of stillness and equanimity. As you investigate your own body, the clear awareness and insight that arises can lead you to experience dispassion, disenchantment and detachment.

We always appreciated the kindness of the doctors and pathologists who led autopsies; and gave us their valuable explanations. We meditated, chanted and shared merit with the deceased person we had observed. On some occasions we heard the background story on the circumstances of the person's death, whether it was from disease, accident, suicide or occasionally even murder. I always felt compassion arising for the person who had died, and for their family; and dedicated merit for them to attain a good rebirth. Over the years, I observed corpses of men and women, young and old and developed a strong perception of the universality of death. We once saw an autopsy of a twenty year-old woman who had clearly been beautiful, but had died from head injuries sustained from a car accident. The signs of former beauty and the smell and look of death were, side by side, in the one corpse.

Some of the senior monks who visited Wat Marp Jan also encouraged us to contemplate the unattractiveness of the body. Luang Por Maha Supong, one of the senior disciples of Luang Por Chah was quite close to and supportive of Ajahn Anan. Whenever I met him, he encouraged me to put effort into my meditation practice. On several occasions, he told me how impressed he was with Ajahn Anan's dedication to the practice of meditation; and in particular his willingness to use *asubha kammaṭṭhāna* meditation. Luang Por Maha Supong pointed out that most monks and lay people who want to develop a meditation practice prefer to use meditation objects such as the breath, loving kindness or the recitation of the meditation word '*Buddho*'. He said that the most common objects for developing insight into impermanence and the non-self nature of phenomena were either mental states, feelings or memories. He appreciated how challenging it was to direct mindfulness to the body; and contemplating the nature of physical form; and how rare it is to find someone who is consistent and dedicated in their practice of body contemplation. He reminded me that it is a key practice for each of us to develop. On a number of occasions, he confided in me that he had no doubt that this is the way to abandon the first three fetters (*saṃyojana*) of personality view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*), attachment to sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) and attachment to rules, rituals and external practices (*silabattaparamāsa*). He encouraged me to see that the contemplation of the body is a long-term investment of time and energy; and that it gradually pays off in helping to provide the insight to let go of sexual desire. He praised Ajahn Anan for the way he taught his students, and said that it was reminiscent of Luang Por Chah. He encouraged me to stay at Wat Marp Jan and learn from Ajahn Anan; and said that it was a monastery where I would really learn the way to abandon the first three fetters and attachment to sexual desire (*kāma rāga*). When we

discussed meditation practice, he said that contemplation of the repulsiveness of the body would lead me ultimately to the abandoning of all lust, fear and anger based on attachment to the body.

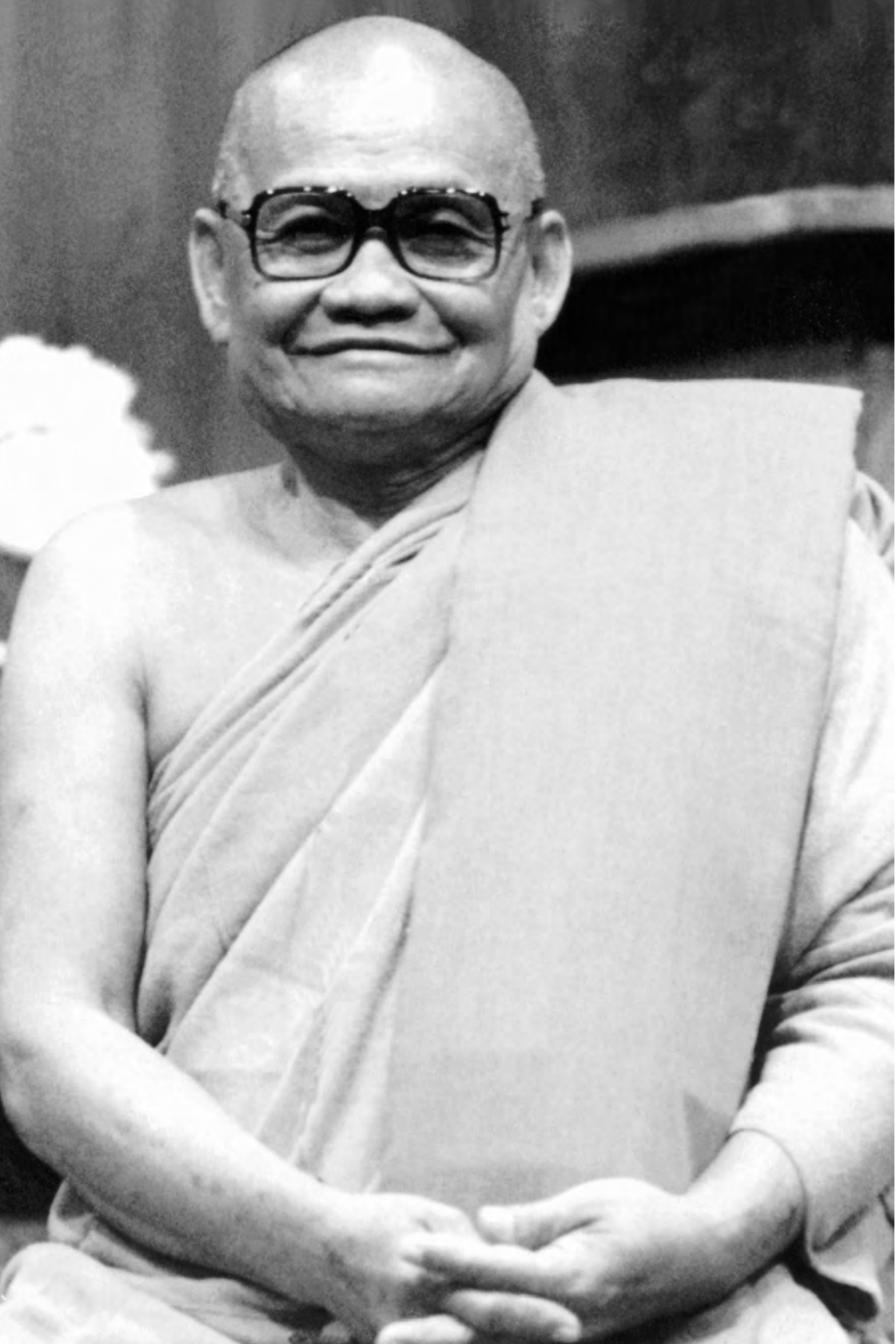
I found it helpful when such a senior disciple of Luang Por Chah displayed his *muditā* and appreciation for my teacher; and encouraged me to practise meditation in this way. He did this quietly when no one was around; and said that when you teach in public it is difficult for people to listen to teachings, encouraging them to reflect on the repulsive nature of the body. It is more common for monks to talk about the cultivation of the Dhamma in terms of the practices of generosity, virtuous conduct and recollection of the Buddha. When he taught insight meditation to a wider audience, he generally taught people to observe the impermanent nature of their thoughts and emotions, but in private, Luang Por Maha Supong encouraged the monks to focus on the perceptions of the impermanence and unattractiveness of the body with mindfulness. When he talked about these practices his eyes lit up, his face became radiant and he talked to the monks, without any sense of him being a senior teacher or an elder talking down to juniors. He was always very open, friendly and unassuming.

Gratitude To Teachers

Ajahn Anan also taught us the importance of cultivating gratitude to teachers and mentors. He took us to visit senior monks who had helped him in his practice such as Luang Por Liem, Luang Por Maha Supong and Luang Por Witoon, and he looked for ways to support them in their roles leading the Sangha. On one occasion, a lay friend and supporter offered Ajahn Anan a car for his use. Afterwards, he discussed with the monks the appropriate way to use the gift and decided to

offer the vehicle to Luang Por Maha Supong. Ajahn Anan explained that Luang Por Maha Supong was a senior monk who was getting older, and did much good for many different monasteries and the wider Buddhist community. By donating the car to him, we could help him discharge these duties. When I first arrived in Wat Marp Jan in 1988, the monastery did not own a vehicle and it was difficult to travel anywhere at all, other than on foot. Later, the monastery was offered a utility vehicle to assist the growing Sangha, but even though that vehicle was getting old and needed repair, Ajahn Anan decided to offer the new car to Luang Por Maha Supong. He always encouraged us to be humble; respect senior monks and look after them, in whatever ways we could.

At Wat Marp Jan, we continued to receive visits from different senior teachers because Ajahn Anan showed them great warmth, kindness and respect. He passed these qualities on to his students, in the way he trained them and always emphasised the importance of looking after our fellow Sangha members, even when they came to visit from monasteries outside our tradition.



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Peace is within oneself
to be found in the same place
as agitation and suffering.
It is not found in a forest or on a hilltop,
nor is it given by a teacher.
Where you experience suffering,
you can also find freedom from suffering.
Trying to run away from suffering
is actually to run toward it.

Luang Por Chah

Recollecting All The Buddhas

Tears Of Rapture

When Ajahn Anan began building the new Dining Hall at Wat Marp Jan, he received a gift of Buddha relics from a lay supporter. We invited Luang Por Uttama to install the relics in the head of the new bronze Buddha statue, that was cast in the grounds of the monastery in a ceremony held earlier in the year. The construction of the hall was nearing completion; and Ajahn Anan arranged for a foundry to bring their staff and equipment and pour out the bronze statue in the monastery grounds while a huge assembly of monks and laity chanted and meditated. I remember the atmosphere in the monastery and the positive energy on that occasion seemed especially inspiring. We chanted the verses of protection and various teachings from the Buddha, for over an hour to mark the auspicious occasion. During the chanting, I experienced a deep and profound state of peace.

The monks continued to chant, as the artisans began the process of pouring the molten bronze into the plaster mould to form the Buddha statue. As we chanted the *Āṭānāṭiya Paritta*, a verse paying homage to the Seven Past Buddhas, I recollected the accumulated spiritual perfections of all the previous Buddhas;

and my mental energy unified and I entered a deep state of *samādhi*. I experienced such strong rapture that tears began to roll down my cheeks. As my mind converged into a state of deep *samādhi*, I sat still in silence as the others continued chanting. When I emerged from the stillness, the monks were still chanting and the tears just continued to flow quite naturally. Gradually, the front of my robe became soaked from the moisture of the tears. A young girl who was sitting with her family in front of me and had been staring at me, stood up, pointed her finger at me and loudly invited everyone to look at the foreign monk who was chanting and crying, at the same time. I knew that tears were rolling down my face but had not noticed for how long and did not realise that there was so much tears that my robe had become wet. There was nothing I could do about it, so I sat quietly and endured the looks of surprise from the public. At the end of the ceremony, the other monks asked me what was wrong, and I explained that they were just tears of rapture arising out of my recollection of the special qualities and goodness of all the past Buddhas.

Throughout my life in the robes, I have experienced tears forming in my eyes whenever I meditate; and sometimes when I chant. Sometimes my eyes simply moisten, other times, tears flow down my cheeks. Tears are one form of *pīti* or rapture arising from the presence of mindfulness, directed inwards to a skilful object; and the mind settling down in *samādhi*. Rapture can manifest in different ways, when the meditator's mind becomes still in *samādhi*; or experiences a series of wholesome objects. For me, tears forming during meditation are quite normal. I also experience goose bumps, tingling sensations up and down my body, lightness of the body and also my internal breath body can expand in size. Sometimes even the physical sensations and heaviness of my body disappear altogether.

By the time I moved from Thailand to Australia, I was regularly experiencing dry eyes and I had to consult a doctor because the excessive dryness led to itching and stinging sensations. Living in the forest, I was regularly exposed to wind and dust which exacerbates the condition. I explained to the doctor how tears form in my eyes every time I meditate, partly as a result of rapture, partly through the cultivation of the meditation theme of compassion. The doctor said there is little to be done other than applying eye drops when the symptoms were severe. We joked that I had cried so much that my eyes had dried out.



Ajahn Kalyano in the Uposatha Hall at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery with the bronze statues of Venerable Ajahn Mun and Venerable Ajahn Chah in 2009.

Luang Por Uttama

Once the Buddha statue was finished and ready for installation, we lifted it onto the shrine in the eating hall; and invited Luang Por Uttama to install the Buddha relics inside the head of the statue. When he arrived at the monastery, he requested to chant the verses of protection in Pali, together with us. We took him up to the meditation hall and once all the monks had paid respects to him, he rang the meditation bell, indicating the time to begin chanting. Ajahn Anan later explained that at that moment, all the *Devas* gathered to pay respects to Luang Por Uttama and listen to the recitation of the verses of protection. After we finished chanting, Luang Por Uttama commented that Wat Marp Jan was built in an auspicious location where there were many *Devas* present; and the monastery was like a bridge between the human realm and the heaven realm. He said this was partly because of the location itself and partly because of the accumulated *pāramī* of Ajahn Anan.

After meditating together, we went down to the new eating hall for the ceremony to install the Buddha relics. Afterwards, the monks accompanied Luang Por Uttama out of the hall and as he walked past me, he paused, smiled and blessed me by tapping me a couple of times on the head. Everybody had a lot of *muditā* for me; and one of the monks commented kindly that my future looked good. As we stood watching his car drive out of the monastery, that monk said that Luang Por Uttama was a rare monk who had mastery of all the eight *jhānas* and that he had made a vow to cultivate the Dhamma until he became a Buddha. I replied that he had an unusually cool and peaceful presence; and the monk further pointed out that Luang Por Uttama no longer experiences anger. At that time, he was already eighty years old. We discussed how his accumulated *samādhi*, wisdom and spiritual perfections had reached the



Ajahn Kalyano receiving a blessing from
Luang Por Uttama at Wat Marp Jan in 1995.

point where they would no longer degenerate; and that even in his old age, Luang Por Uttama's *samādhī* and accumulated virtues just became stronger and stronger. The Dhamma is truly timeless.

A Gift For Mother

In Thailand, there is a belief that when you cast a Buddha statue out of bronze ore, any left-over scraps of bronze that spill out of the plaster mould, during the ceremony, have also been blessed with the good energy of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha; and the assembled monks. The Buddha statue for the new hall at Wat Marp Jan had been cast in a cleared area close to my *kuti*, in the forest; and after the event was over, I walked over and collected a few small pieces of the scrap bronze metal from the ground. I had been told that if you bury these pieces of blessed metal in the ground of a property you wish to sell, the good energy will affect the local *Devas* positively; and be a cause for the land to become attractive to new buyers. At that time, my mother was unhappy that she had been unable to sell the family home after her divorce, even though it had been on the market for more than two years. I thought there was no harm in putting the traditional belief to the test and mailed a few small pieces of bronze back to her in London, with instructions on how to use them. I chanted and meditated for a successful sale; and my sister helped my mother bury the pieces under a large oak tree at the back of the house. Sure enough, within two weeks the house was sold.

Reverence For The Footprint Of The Buddha Sri Lanka 1994

In 1994, Ajahn Anan led a pilgrimage to Sri Lanka. I still assisted him on a daily basis at the monastery, so I undertook to serve as his attendant monk, on the trip. To attend on one's teacher

is both an honour and a way of expressing appreciation for the help and advice he gives us, in the practice and through his good example. Taking on the attendant monk's duties also brings up mindfulness as one makes the needs of the teacher central to one's practice; and one has to be alert to those needs and willing to set aside other business and personal preferences. I helped him fill out his immigration forms, carried his bags, looked after the medicines he needed, washed his robes and bowl, made drinks for him and so on. I did whatever small acts of kindness I could, out of gratitude for his teachings and in gratitude for the care he had given me ever since I lived at Wat Marp Jan. Helping the teacher is also a way to help the community, as the teacher sacrifices his time, energy and knowledge for the benefit of the community of monks and lay devotees; and when you help the teacher it allows him the freedom to perform his teaching duties.

When we arrived in Sri Lanka, we sensed the tension in the society arising from the civil war between the Singhalese and the Tamils. We passed through army checkpoints many times. I helped explain to the soldiers who we were and what we were doing. Our itinerary included visiting the Temple of the Buddha's tooth relic in Kandy; and the Maha Bodhi tree in Anuradhapura; as well as other important holy sites. Originally, there had been no plan to walk up the sacred mountain of Sri Pada to pay respects to the Buddha's footprint. However, a few of us saw that it was a rare opportunity to visit the Buddha's footprint, on top of the mountain, and pay our respects. We encouraged the group to consider climbing the mountain on pilgrimage. We were able to set aside a day to climb the mountain, although some of the lay devotees knew they were unlikely to be fit enough to reach the mountain summit. Ajahn Anan had to consider everybody's well-being, but it was finally agreed that we would attempt the climb.

Visiting the Temple of the Buddha's Tooth relic in Kandy, was a special experience that boosted everybody's faith and energy, for the rest of the trip. We were fortunate to be invited inside the inner chamber where the relic is housed. Once there, we recited verses of salutation to the Buddha and meditated. As we meditated next to the tooth relic, I noticed the whole shrine room filled with a violet-coloured light. I assumed this was due to the radiant *pāramī* of the Buddha. In the past, I had witnessed the full rainbow aura emanating from Buddha relics, so I mentioned the violet-coloured light filling the shrine room to Ajahn Anan. He confirmed that the aura of the Buddha can appear as any of the individual colours of the rainbow, depending on the circumstances. I experienced great rapture and joy as I recollected the spiritual perfections of the Buddha during the silent meditation and, like many of the others in our group, I emerged from the shrine room feeling refreshed and uplifted. The fatigue of travelling was replaced by a peaceful and joyful feeling. The rapture continued to arise in my mind, as we offered flowers and walked in circumambulation around the tooth relic. Perhaps it was the strong link between the tooth relic and the lifetime of the Buddha, that led me to experience similar rapture and joy as I had in India.

In Anuradhapura, we paid respects and recited verses of salutation to the Buddha, at the Sri Maha Bodhi tree and at the main Chedis such as Ruvanveli. The faith and happiness arising made me enthusiastic to listen to the teachings, and practicing meditation. We chanted verses of homage to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, meditated and absorbed some of the intangible good energy in the various sites. I had a strong feeling of gratitude to the people of Sri Lanka arising in my heart, as I considered how they had practised and preserved the teachings of the Buddha, for over two thousand years. This reflection turned out to be appropriate preparation for the challenge of climbing the sacred mountain of Sri Pada.

The Summit Is Like *Nibbāna*

We visited Sri Lanka in November, before the main pilgrimage season when large numbers of pilgrims climb the simple path up to the summit of Sri Pada. Due to the civil war, the numbers of pilgrims were few. Starting our hike up the mountain early in the morning, we hardly encountered anyone else. We left our accommodation at 2:00am to travel to the foot of the mountain, but the early start meant that the monks and the laity who kept to the eight precepts had to forgo breakfast because of the rule that we cannot eat before dawn. This was one factor why some of the group became tired quickly, during the early morning ascent of the mountain.

We began to walk up the mountain before dawn. I enjoyed the cool temperature and the silence of the mountains. It was beautiful to watch the sun rise over the mountain peaks and pleasant to take our time to walk mindfully at our own pace and not put any pressure on the older members of our group. However, as we proceeded higher up the mountain, we eventually reached a point when some members of the group decided they had reached their limit and gave up any attempt to climb further. Those who stopped their hike spent the rest of the day meditating and chanting at a pleasant spot they found on the lower slopes.

I carried Ajahn Anan's shoulder bag for him, throughout the ascent, and also gave a hand to support one monk who was rather unfit, but whose strong faith brought forth incredible mental energy which supported his determination to reach the summit. The monk refused to give up because he had made an aspiration to worship at the Buddha's footprint. It was inspiring to see him use the power of his mind over his body and endure the pain and difficulty of the struggle up the steeper part of

the mountain. He pushed himself up the mountain driven by pure faith in the Buddha. Ajahn Mit, Ajahn Anan's younger brother who is also a monk, and I, took turns to support our friend with words of encouragement; and for part of the way we physically supported and lifted him up step-by-step. Everybody in the group understood how climbing up the mountain was like a metaphor for their efforts to cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path. We told each other that the mountain summit symbolised Enlightenment, as a way to keep everyone inspired to keep walking, and not give in to the tiredness in their legs.

A long way up the mountain, we encountered a stone hut that housed an old man sitting on a box next to a bucket, filled with bottles of Pepsi Cola. No one had eaten yet, so the lay people kindly purchased a bottle for each monk. We received the gifts with gratitude, put them in our shoulder bags and carried on walking as no one wished to break the rhythm of their walking, until they reached the summit. A few hundred metres further up the path, someone realised that no one had a bottle opener for the old-style bottle caps on the Pepsi bottles, but there were no volunteers to walk back down the hill to borrow one. Later, we found out that some of the monks knew how to open the old-style bottles without an opener anyway, so we had some welcome refreshment, and the contents of each bottle was also shared with the lay devotees.

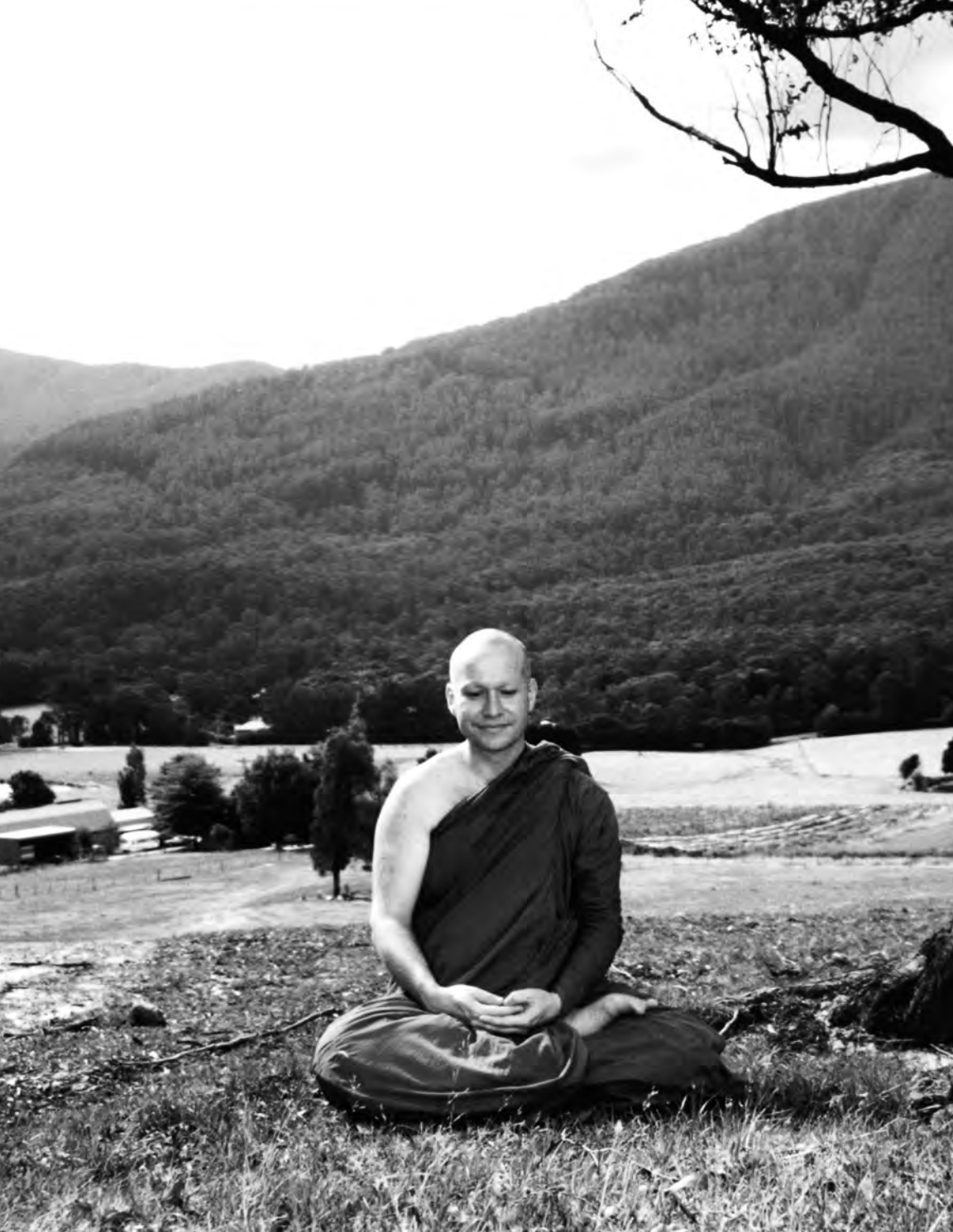
Ajahn Anan had declared earlier that we would not stop to eat our meal, until we reached the summit as a way to encourage everybody. Because of the slow walking pace, we did not arrive at the summit until 11:45am. We sat down to catch our breath and opened the lunch packs which had been purchased by the laity, back in the town. We discovered that there was very little food in each pack - my packed lunch had two pieces of fried

chicken, a small cake and a piece of fruit. I was used to having small meals as a monk, because it was common not to receive vegetarian food on alms round. I made some merit and gave away the chicken to someone who ate meat; and enjoyed the happiness on the face of the recipient as a reward. It turned out that some of the lunch packs had been forgotten, so to ensure that everyone gained sustenance, Ajahn Anan led the monks in sharing some of his lunch with the lay devotees, in true Buddhist style. Seeing Ajahn Anan share his small lunch with others, at a moment when he was tired and hungry, was not surprising. He always displayed kindness and compassion in situations when people were under pressure. He taught the monks how to practise mindfulness and non-attachment in daily life; and combine it with the practice of compassion in action. I later reflected that even though one sometimes does not eat much, the rapture and joy arising from the practice can provide mental food, that makes up for the lack of physical food.

After lunch, we paused and experienced the energy flow from the food and the exhilaration of having reached the mountain top. We went over to the rock where the Buddha's footprint was imprinted; bowed, paid respects and gathered to chant verses of salutation to the Triple Gem. Afterwards, we meditated and chanted the verses of protection. Some of the monks and laity had really struggled on the journey up the mountain; and two women had actually passed out with exhaustion, as soon as they reached the summit. They remained unconscious when friends attempted to wake them and they slept through lunch. Later, they described how as they slept, they were woken by the sound of Buddhist chanting, which was a surprise because they were sleeping in a location too far away to actually hear the sound of our group chanting.

The air temperature at the summit was cool and pleasant and the mountain top had a true feeling of seclusion. At that time, there were no other pilgrims; and only a simple small building constructed over the site. When we began the recitation of the verses of protection, many of the group began to experience a deep state of calm. Even though people were exhausted, the wholesome and radiant states of mind that arose when sitting next to the Buddha's footprint meant their aches and pains and feelings of tiredness disappeared. We subsequently discovered that most people had experienced deeper states of concentration than they would have normally in their meditation; and some even had visions of the Buddha.

Everybody experienced some profound joy and a lightness of body and mind, that would later make the descent down the mountain, easier for their tired legs. At the end of our time at the footprint, we made personal resolutions to follow the teachings of the Buddha and not give up until we reached *Nibbāna*. We stuck gold leaf on to the footprint of the Buddha. I resolved to use my life to practise and follow the Buddha's path to the end of suffering, for the good of myself and all beings. During my meditation next to the footprint, I observed a clear radiant light emanating from the footprint; and a vision of golden lotuses surrounding it. When we chanted the *Paritta* verses, I also had a clear vision of many *Devas* surrounding our group with golden rays of light coming out of the sky, like celestial rain falling down on our group of devotees.



Ajahn Kalyano at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2003.

A Gift From Heaven

As we began our journey down the hill, Ajahn Anan needed a handkerchief from his shoulder bag which I was still carrying. When he looked inside, he found the bag to be full of small crystalline relics the size of sand particles. I had looked after the bag since we left our accommodation; and confirmed that no one had interfered with it, during the journey. Ajahn Anan did not say much, but we both immediately recognised what appeared to be Buddha relics. We knew that they had manifested while we were chanting the auspicious verses, next to the Buddha's footprint. We paused our journey while we carefully emptied out the contents of his bag, picking out each relic and putting them in a sealed container. There were hundreds of relics, each one like a tiny crystallised grain of sand or small pearls. I concluded that the celestial lights I had seen descending from the sky was the arrival of the relics. Ajahn Anan and other monks mentioned that their experiences in meditation were similar.

On the last day in Colombo, we went to visit the famous Kelaniya Vihara Temple which was another site reputed to have been visited by the Buddha. Thousands of people had gathered for the Lunar Observance Day; and we had to carefully pick our way through the crowd, to spend some time circumambulating the main Chedi. Afterwards, the lay people arranged for us to spend the last night in Sri Lanka, on the upper floor of a large hotel in central Colombo. By chance, a wedding was taking place below us, in the main rooms of the hotel. We saw the guests arriving and heard the loud music and festivities continuing into the early hours. When we came out of our rooms and took the lift down to the lobby in the morning, it stopped at the floor where the main function room of the hotel was located, and the wedding party was being held. The doors opened to an interesting sight as we observed dozens of young

people in various stages of undress and disarray. Many of them were young females looking hungover and the worse for wear. Dozens of people were lying down asleep amidst the mess on the floor; and the entire function room was full of dazed and dishevelled-looking people. As soon as the lift doors opened to reveal eight forest monks, people gasped with embarrassment as the young party goers either tried to make themselves look decent; or scattered in all directions. It reminded me of the story of the young wealthy man Yassa, from the time of the Buddha. He had experienced strong disenchantment after seeing the revellers, snoring and dishevelled after his party; and wandered off into the forest to find the Buddha and became a monk.

We left Sri Lanka with a sense of gratitude to the Buddhist population who had preserved the teachings, the Maha Bodhi tree and the important Buddhist sites over the centuries. We appreciated the opportunity to climb up to the Buddha's footprint at the summit of Sri Pada; and for the arrival of the Buddha relics in Ajahn Anan's shoulder bag. We had much *muditā* for the population and a greater appreciation of the central role Buddhism had played in the history of the country.

Cold Water Cave Retreat 1995

Over the years, I had made friends with Ajahn Dick Silaratano, the senior American monk who lived with and attended on Luang Ta Maha Bua. He had recommended a quiet cave that he knew for a retreat. In January 1995, after Luang Por Chah's memorial retreat was finished, I travelled by road to Nam Nao District in Petchaboon province where the cave was located. The cave was at least four kilometres away from the nearest village with no proper pathway up the steep cliff face, below it. The rocky mountains with sharp and jagged peaks arose in an imposing manner, above the cave; and stretched off into the

distance. The cave was open and airy which made it pleasant to live in; although the water supply was very limited because it was the dry season. Strangely, the first day I hiked up to the cave I found that somebody had already swept the floor; and lit a fire in the small fireplace at the front of the cave. I was not sure who had prepared the cave or lit the fire. Perhaps a local villager heard that a monk was coming to stay and wanted to make merit and welcome me.

Inside the cave, the air temperature was a little warmer than outside, which felt really cold because of the winter wind howling all day and all night. The cold wind came southwards from China; and never seemed to let up. I felt cold even during the middle of the day, which is usually the hottest time in Thailand. The walk down to the village every morning was long, arduous and a little dangerous in parts because there was no proper path down the mountain. Some days I returned to the cave to eat; other days I ate my food in a small forest hermitage, at the foot of the mountain. I had no other drinks or medicinal items in the afternoon, but I could still boil water on the fire and drink warm water, to reduce the feeling of cold.

The remoteness of the cave meant that I was always totally alone during my time practising there. My only friends were birds and animals. I did pay respects to the senior monk living in the hermitage, at the foot of the mountains. I listened as he told me stories about Luang Por Pang, a disciple of Luang Por Mun, who had lived in the set of caves previously. He was considered to be a fully Awakened monk who dedicated his life to the study, and practice of the Dhamma and Vinaya. There were many stories of his battles with his own mental defilements of lust and attachment; and also stories of his encounters with *Devas*, *Nāgas* and other beings.

I relied on my patience and endurance to cope with the cold weather, as I practised in the cave. The food I obtained on alms round was adequate, but there was little vegetarian food. Unfortunately, I experienced mild dysentery again. I enjoyed many hours sitting and walking meditation in the cave, but there were some days I felt like I just could not warm up. It was the only place I have lived in Thailand, where I still felt cold, sitting outside in the full glare of the midday sun. Practising alone in the forest usually brings up some self-doubt; and if one is not careful, can lead one to lose inspiration in the practice. I continued to reflect on the uncertainty of the mind; and observe how whatever thoughts and moods arose, also passed away. I focused on the ending of each train of thought, rather than the beginning, to bring up the perception of impermanence clearly. The result of observing the passing away of thoughts was that the mind also stayed with the space between thoughts more and more; and became still and peaceful.

The cave certainly had an interesting atmosphere; and the rocky mountain range did inspire awe each day, as I climbed up to the cave. I experienced several visions of *Nāgas* in the cave; and these beings tend to bring a sense of danger when one encounters them, just like a real snake. One indirect benefit from that period of practice was that when I returned to Wat Marp Jan, I appreciated its hot and humid climate, a little more than before.

Sending A Buddha Statue To Dtao Dtum

At the beginning of the rains retreat of 1996, some lay devotees offered a large and beautiful bronze Buddha statue to Ajahn Anan. The statue was a replica of Phra Buddha Chinnarat, the most famous image in Thailand. As the rains retreat progressed, the statue sat on the floor under the main meditation hall and no home was found for it. I regularly walked meditation near



Ajahn Kalyano walking on alms round with
Ajahn Anan and the Sangha at Wat Map Jan in 1997.

the statue. Eventually, I thought that it could be an inspiration for the community at Dtao Dtum hermitage; and consulted with Ajahn Anan about offering it to them. I contacted Ajahn Pasanno with the offer, and in September, the brother of one of the junior monks who was a police officer, volunteered to drive us all the way to the hermitage, located on the border with Myanmar. We left one morning at 3:00am, as the other monks were beginning their daily meditation, and we drove for about 12 hours through ever worsening roads, to reach our destination. It was the monsoon season. We were not sure if the truck would even make it through the swollen rivers to reach the hermitage. Fortunately, everything went well.

Our drive took us through some police checkpoints; and the driver proved to be the right person to talk to the border police officers. He also could skilfully navigate the unmade and flooded tracks with our heavy but auspicious cargo. That day, a refugee from Myanmar who worked for the owners of the tin mine near to the hermitage, was planting flowering shrubs on the side of the track, in preparation for an upcoming visit from the Crown Princess. She was the patron of a number of environmental protection organisations and also a keen historian. Her visit to the area had been arranged to support efforts to conserve the forest; and preserve the area for Thai heritage. The hermitage contained many rare species of plants, animals and birds; and was located on one of the historic routes between Thailand and Myanmar.

The man planting the flowers and shrubs, on the side of the track, had previously lost a leg from stepping on a landmine. As he was working, he disturbed a large tiger which awoke from its daytime nap and wandered out of the jungle onto the track, next to the man. He could tell the tiger was drowsy and he moved as quickly as he could on his crutches back towards the small

hermitage kitchen. Luckily, the tiger was so sleepy, it wandered aimlessly along the track for a while; and then slowly headed back into the jungle without threatening the poor man. By the time our vehicle arrived with the Buddha statue, he was still in shock; and told us what had happened. Fortunately, he retained his sense of humour as he told us how events had unfolded; and smiled when he described his rather slow escape on crutches; and the even slower pursuit by the drowsy tiger. The tiger's presence seemed to be an auspicious sign that announced the Buddha statue's arrival.

We needed all the monks and lay volunteers we could find to unload the Buddha statue. It turned out to be too large and heavy for the small timber-floored eating hall, so eventually a small *vihara* was specially built on the hill, overlooking the entrance to the hermitage. The beautiful Buddha statue was a gift from Wat Marp Jan to the hermitage; and we hoped it would provide protection and inspiration for future residents.

Dtao Dtum Retreat - Ajahn Anan Visits

I returned to visit the hermitage at Dtao Dtum in the winter of 1996, for a time of personal retreat and began my stay by moving into a *kuti*, at the top of the hill. There were only a couple of other monks, in residence. I spent my time pleasantly, doing as much sitting and walking meditation as I could. My routine was to rise at 3.00am and practise sitting and walking meditation until 7.00am. Thereafter, I walked down the mountain to collect alms; and afterwards, returned to eat my meal alone at the *kuti*. I spent the rest of the day sitting and walking meditation into the evening, until I rested at 10.00pm or 11.00pm.

Every day, I noted the different kinds of mental hindrances arising; and investigated how ignorance and unwise attention

causes them to arise, and feeds and maintains them. I continued to note what methods I used to overcome them. I continued to contemplate the unattractiveness of the body to counter sensual desire; and goodwill to counter aversion. I had little to worry about in my life; so I refined my mindfulness by keeping my mind in the present moment. As I practised through the day, I used different strategies to overcome the hindrances; and built up an understanding of what works best with my own mind. I normally experienced little aversion, but I did have to keep establishing mindfulness and contemplate the conditioned nature of painful feelings arising in my legs, after many hours of sitting meditation. As usual, the observation of the uncertainty of feelings and thoughts, was a valuable reflection.

Feelings of muscle pain and tiredness, that arise after putting forth effort, can cause subtle aversion to arise when you are not mindful; so I contemplated over and over again, the impermanence of the feelings and grounded myself in the qualities of mindfulness, goodwill and giving proper attention to what was arising into my experience. I noted how painful feeling increases and decreases in its intensity; and how its characteristics change over time. Sometimes intense pain can suddenly disappear, and even reappear, in another part of the body. I noted my desire to look for distraction as a way to escape painful feelings; and how in the forest, the main distractions are sleep or endlessly creating stories and fantasies, with the imagination. Whenever my mindfulness slipped, I could easily begin to create another fantasy; so I kept countering this habit by reflecting on the uncertainty, and false nature of such fantasies; and continued to cultivate wholesome reflections to use up some of my mental energy.

When your mind is focused firmly, staying in a quiet forest location provides a supportive environment for investigation of

different attachments; and assists you to see more clearly, the way you identify with each of the five aggregates. Eventually, your thoughts about what is going on in the rest of the world, or projections back into the past or forward into the future, seem less important. Self-identity view is reinforced when we attach to the conventional appearance of the world, without wisdom. It manifests in one's unmindful interaction with other people; when we attach to work and other activities that we do; and through attaching to views and ideas of who we are or want to be. When you are isolated in the forest, the sense of self is naturally less inflated than usual. On retreat, I spent hours and hours bringing up mindfulness with the breath; and reflecting on the arising and passing away of subtle thoughts of aversion; and attachment. Every monk has to face the danger that they might run out of patience with their practice; or else can fall into depression which leads them to seek out distractions and more sense pleasures. I recollected Luang Por Chah and the Buddha to give me strength; and reflected on the impermanence of all types of worldly happiness, as an antidote to this.

I recollected the similes the Buddha used to describe the five aggregates; and observed how apt they are. He compared the body to foam forming on the surface of water, apparently solid but in fact, empty. Every day, I walked past the waterfall and noticed the small lumps of foam forming in the rock pools, reminding me of the insubstantial nature of my body. Feelings that are pleasant, feelings that are neither painful nor pleasant, and feelings that are painful are comparable to ripples, on the surface of water, that constantly come and go. Each day, I observed the ripples moving on the surface of the water in the same way as the waterfall keeps flowing; and reflected on the arising and cessation of feeling. The Buddha compared perceptions with a mirage created by the heat of the sun hitting

the ground; mental formations with the soft pulpy trunk of the banana tree that lacks any firm, heartwood; and the ever-changing sense impressions that stimulate sense consciousness as similar to a magician's conjuring trick. Each aggregate provides an object for investigation; and can lead to deeper understanding and insight into impermanence. The close examination led to a clearer awareness and detachment.

I observed how my blind and habitual identification with the five aggregates, always leads to suffering. Venerable Sariputta compared the five aggregates to an assassin who tricks a person into hiring them as a servant and having gained that person's trust, waits for the chance to murder them. I cultivated mindfulness and clear comprehension, in all postures; and noted how whenever mindfulness and the reflective ability of the mind drops away, one falls back into the unenlightened habits of wanting and clinging to the aggregates. It only takes a split second for desire or aversion to be triggered by sense contact and feeling; maintaining continuity of effort, in bringing up mindfulness, is the only sure protection for the mind. When mindfulness fades, I noticed how my mind returns to seeking refuge in the five aggregates; and suffering soon follows.

After several weeks camping in the forest, Ajahn Anan visited, bringing a few more monks from Wat Marp Jan. I put him in my *kuti* at the top of the hill; and I moved over to stay in the jungle near the waterfall with the junior monks, to give them a taste of what it was like camping in the jungle. Perhaps the influx of monks moving into the jungle stirred up the local animal population, because on our first night, a tiger came wandering around. At dusk, I was brushing my teeth next to my bamboo platform when I heard the familiar sound of dry leaves crunching, under the weight of the slow and careful footsteps of

a large animal. It is a well-known fact that tigers can appear to sound like humans as they walk through the jungle. I was unsure whether I was being approached by a refugee or a soldier, walking over the border from Myanmar; or a tiger.

I was still holding my toothbrush as I stood in the twilight, when the footsteps stopped in front of me. In the candlelight, I could just make out two green cat's eyes staring at me, from a stripy face. I shone my torch directly at the tiger to get a better look, and clearly saw the tiger's beautiful coat and whiskers; but I also noted that it was crouching and ready to spring at me. I had no fear and no plan to do anything, so I just waited patiently. The tiger slowly stood up and began walking around me. I took this as a good sign that it did not wish to attack me; and perhaps had merely found me blocking the normal route it took through the jungle. Once the tiger reached the other side of me, it started growling. I interpreted the noise more as a complaint that I was in its way, rather than an immediate threat. The tiger continued to growl and complain for the next few hours as it moved around not far away, on the other side of the stream.

In the morning, one of the junior monks came over and asked me if I had heard the distinctive growling noise the night before. He had never encountered a tiger before; and seemed quite shaken. I encouraged him to spread thoughts of kindness and compassion, to the tiger who seemed just as upset by our presence, as we were by his or hers. I realised I had come a long way in my own cultivation of the Dhamma, since the time I first encountered a tiger, many years before. My heart did not race with adrenaline and I could now sleep normally, even after encountering a tiger. No fear arose in my mind, although I was cautious. Sometimes other monks scoff at stories about encounters with wild animals, and write them off as simple

adventure stories; but when it happens, it can be a valuable and unforgettable teaching. On this occasion, I was calm and equanimous; and only felt compassion for an animal that was constantly exposed to danger and hardship itself. Meeting wild animals, in the jungle, gives you valuable insight into both how fear arises; and also how it ceases. The Buddha encouraged the monks to be ardent and alert, and if fear arises, to stay in that posture until the fear subsides. If one is sitting and fear arises, then one should remain sitting until it ceases; or if one is walking, to keep walking until the fear is gone.

When encountering an unknown situation, I tried to follow the Buddha's instructions to keep mindful and alert; and practise patience. These qualities give you the chance to observe the basis for your self-identification with the five aggregates; and any unskilful states of mind rooted in ignorance. Generally, the experience of fear can spur you on to put more effort, into training your mind to be alert and mindful; and find the wisdom to overcome it. Fear can be a direct cause for you to attain deeper states of stillness, than you have previously experienced. The suffering from the fear is so clear to you that it propels you to let go of the emotion; and mental proliferation stimulated by the craving and attachment to your body, as self. If you are able to let go of fear with mindfulness and insight, it is a chance to experience all the Seven Factors of Enlightenment arising together. The result is deep equanimity.



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Wander forth, O monks,
for the welfare of the manifold,
for the happiness of the manifold,
out of compassion for the world, for the good,
welfare and happiness of *Devas* and humans.

Samyukta Nikāya 4.5



Ajahn Kalyano chanting with the Sangha in the Uposatha Hall (named Ajahn Chah Memorial Hall in gratitude to the memory of Ajahn Chah) at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2018.



18

The Highest Gift

My Mother's Dhamma Journey Begins

In 1997, Ajahn Anan received an invitation to visit the UK, from some of his lay supporters who worked in London. It seemed an appropriate opportunity to visit my family and relatives in England, for the first time in thirteen years. At that time, my mother had remarried and was living in British Columbia, Canada. Some generous lay supporters kindly sponsored me to travel to Canada first, and then on to London. The flight from Thailand touched down in San Francisco. I also took the opportunity to visit Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Visuddhi who had just moved in to the newly-established Abhayagiri Monastery. Ajahn Visuddhi ordained as a monk with me at Wat Nong Pah Pong on the same day; and the visit gave me a chance to catch up with him, after many years of living in different monasteries.

The Abhayagiri Monastery had just opened; and the two resident monks only had a small farmhouse to use as a residence and dining hall. I spent a week visiting the new monastery; and Ajahn Amaro kindly gave me a long tour of the beautiful forested property. However, the walk also initiated me to the unpleasant effects of poison oak which is native to the forest. It was interesting to see a newly established monastery; and hear

from the monks about the different challenges they faced, in their new environment. Both Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Visuddhi seemed very positive and happy to take on the project; and I gave them my wholehearted support and *anumodanā*.

Ajahn Amaro also took me to visit the nearby Chinese monastery, the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, where we paid respects to the bone relics of Venerable Master Hsuan Hua who had recently passed away; and also to Venerable Bhante Dhammavara who was staying there. By then, he was 108 years old but still very much alive and well. Previously, I had looked after him when he came to Wat Nong Pah Pong to offer meditative healing to Luang Por Chah, using the power of his *jhāna*. It was pleasant to catch up with him again after so many years. We let him slow the pace of the conversation, in line with his advanced years. It was interesting to meet the elderly Bhante Dhammvara who was at the end of his life, but still lucid and expressing great wisdom; and at the same time, to meet the new Abbot of the monastery, Dharma Master Heng Lyu, who was a young monk with only four years' experience, with his whole monastic life ahead of him. He also appeared to have a good understanding of meditation, and I enjoyed talking about the practice of contemplating human bones with him, when we noticed a picture of a skeleton hanging up in his room.

From San Francisco, I flew to Vancouver where I visited Ajahn Sona and Venerable Piyadhammo, at the original site of Birken Forest Monastery, which was located at a stop on the railway line called Ten Downing Street. I had lived together with both monks at Wat Pah Nanachat; and wanted to offer my support for their new project. They welcomed me with kindness and gave me some first-hand experience of life as Buddhist monks, in the Canadian forest. They did not have much material support in

those days, but just enough to continue living and practicing as alms mendicants, in their small forest hermitage. I then travelled further north to Quesnel in central British Columbia where my mother was living with her new husband, in a small tourist town nearby called Barkerville. I spent a pleasant few weeks with them; and combined some sessions teaching Buddhist meditation to my mother and her friends, with excursions into the lakes and forests of the Canadian outback.

My mother had been through the suffering of a divorce and was learning to put the painful memories behind her. She had remarried and by the time of my visit, she was much more open to the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha. I had been a monk for twelve years; and was able to explain the teachings more clearly to her than I had when I was newly ordained. I could draw on my own experience in the cultivation of the Dhamma. My mother had retired from her teaching job but occupied herself with voluntary work for the local History Society in British Columbia. Her pace of life was relaxed and free from pressure, and she had plenty of time to talk with me about the Buddhist teachings and learn about meditation. Many of her Canadian friends were also interested in Buddhism and came to her house every day to talk to me about Buddhism, make offerings, and hear about my life as a monk. I noticed how my mother's views on my choice of lifestyle as a monk were softening as she had more appreciation of the goodness of the life. She had been through so much suffering that the teachings and central practice of generosity, compassion, meditation, and wisdom had given her some useful insights and practical methods to help her deal with her own mental suffering. She had less and less doubts about the value of the Buddhist teachings.

While I was in Canada, I also took the opportunity to visit Ajahn Punnadhammo at Arrow River Forest Hermitage, who, I knew from my time at Wat Pah Nanachat. It was a treat to stay in the hermitage which was set in a deeply secluded forest, and run with great patience in challenging circumstances by Ajahn Punnadhammo. He was helped by just one resident layman. It was interesting to see how monks could live and survive in such a remote hermitage; and it made me think that if monks like Ajahn Sona and Ajahn Punnadhammo can survive in the forests of Canada, monks can probably survive almost anywhere. Reflecting on my visit to Birken and Arrow River, I saw that as long as there are at least a few people with good hearts and respect for the Triple Gem in a neighbourhood, then Buddhist monks can gain material support to practice and teach the Dhamma.

Let It Be The Dhamma That Connects Us

I flew on to London in late June and arrived back in England for the first time in thirteen years. My wish was for my family and friends to come closer to the Dhamma and hence I arranged to host Ajahn Anan and my friends from Wat Marp Jan on this trip. I had few yearnings to see any place or obtain any material things from England, but I was happy to support the spread of the teachings of the Buddha out of gratitude to those who had helped me in the past.

I stayed with my father while we waited for Ajahn Anan and three other monks to arrive. My father had retired from teaching but was still very active writing books for students and organising exams in Biology for school students all over the world. He had always been a hard worker and I picked up some of that habit from him. I tried to apply it to my practice and cultivation of the Dhamma. By this time, he had become a lay

preacher at his local village church and gradually introduced me to the congregation and some other Christian ministers. He was not interested to follow the Buddhist path like my mother but was open-minded enough to support my practice; and was always generous in his material support of me and other monks he met. He hired a minibus and offered it to be used by Ajahn Anan and our group of monks and lay devotees while we were in the UK; and made an invitation to support Ajahn Anan and the monks with the four requisites.

My father and I received Ajahn Anan and the group at London airport and travelled to our accommodation in west London. I found it an interesting coincidence and inspiring that during the time Ajahn Anan was staying in London, both the Dalai Lama and also Nelson Mandela were visiting. It seemed like a truly golden summer for the people of London. I took the group to see my old home and school in Dulwich and a few of the sights in London. We visited the newly finished peace pagoda in Battersea Park and attracted a lot of attention from local youths who crowded around us asking if we were ‘real Buddhas’.

One morning when we boarded an underground train, a man got on and began shouting abuse at us loudly and aggressively. The stranger was obviously the follower of another religion, and he stood opposite us and shouted so loudly and continuously that the driver of the train refused to drive out of the station. Some passengers began to leave the carriage out of fear of what might happen. I pondered what to do, but my training as a disciple of Luang Por Chah meant that my first response was to sit quietly and endure the abuse with the other five monks. I remembered the Buddha’s words reminding us that if we do not take ownership of another person’s angry and unskilful words, they remain the property of that person. First, the security guards

came and asked the man to leave, but he refused. Eventually, the police arrived and took him away. All the time, our group of monks sat quietly and patiently minding our own business. In the end, nothing happened to us other than enduring some unpleasant shouting. I contemplated that perhaps this was some old *kamma* returning to me as I had shouted unmindfully a few times in my youth. I also thought it interesting that the aggressive looking teenagers who surrounded us in Battersea Park had actually been very friendly, pleasant and inquisitive about our lifestyle, whereas the well-dressed adult who shouted at us on a train seemed to be narrow minded, aggressive and holding on to extreme views.

We visited Amaravati Monastery, which was the last monastery I had visited before departing from the UK to travel to Thailand to become a monk; and it turned out to be the first monastery I visited upon my return. Luang Por Sumedho and Ajahn Attapemo welcomed us warmly and made our visit comfortable. A few months before, Ajahn Anan's supporters had sponsored the casting of a life size bronze image of Luang Por Chah to offer to Amaravati Monastery and when we arrived at the monastery, we discussed details of how to pick up the statue from London Airport. I had arranged for the statue to be flown over at no cost by Thai Airways. Ajahn Anan gave some teachings to the Sangha and laity during our visit, and I was grateful that my sister and her family also had a chance to visit the monastery and meet with Ajahn Anan.

After leaving Amaravati Monastery, we visited Luang Por Khemadhammo at the Forest Hermitage, near Warwick. At the same time as making a bronze statue of Luang Por Chah for Amaravati Monastery, we also made one to offer to Luang Por Khemadhammo which he happily accepted. Luang Por

Khemadhammo was a kind and generous host. During our visit, he took us to see the historic town of Stratford-Upon-Avon, before we drove to North Wales where we stayed in my father's cottage.

Since as early as I can remember, my father had first rented and later owned a small stone cottage in Llansilin Valley, North Wales. My grandparents came from that valley and I had spent long periods of my early life living there. I felt that bringing Ajahn Anan and the monks to meet with some of my relatives and friends from my lay life was the best way I could help them to understand the Buddha's teachings, and see the way I lived as a monk. On the first night in the cottage, all the monks unexpectedly experienced *nimittas* of a black cat visiting them. Ajahn Anan explained that the cat was a ghost that had been attached to the cottage for a long period of time and had a protective role. The cottage was hundreds of years old. After that experience, I related a story from my childhood that one evening my parents had gone out for a short while to visit neighbours and left myself, my brother and sister in the cottage. During that time, we clearly heard noises of an animal loudly running around inside the roof. We looked in the attic and could not see anything, but we could tell the footsteps were made by an animal the size of a cat or a dog. We kept hearing the sounds and began to feel uncomfortable. There was an unpleasant cold feeling in the cottage and the source of the sounds remained invisible. We became so frightened that we could no longer endure staying inside and ended up waiting for my parents in their car which was parked outside. When my parents returned, they were quite amused. On the first morning, the lay devotees offered the monks a meal; and we chanted a blessing and dedicated merit to the ghost of the cat with the wish for it to gain birth in a happy destination.

After saying farewell to my Welsh relatives and friends, we travelled south to visit Hartridge Buddhist Monastery in Devon. The monastery was small and not so well-supported in those days, so Ajahn Anan's lay supporters felt inspired to offer some funds and material requisites to the small community. We enjoyed looking around the monastery grounds and Ajahn Anan gave some teachings to the two monks and lay guests resident in the hermitage, and led us in meditation before we drove back to London.

During the final part of the trip, Ajahn Anan and our small group of monks were invited to visit Paris. Unfortunately, my high school level knowledge of the French language severely limited the amount of teaching we could offer to French speakers, but we could still give some teachings to Thai, Laotian and English-speaking people. Our group was taken on a brief tour of some of the sights of Paris which included a walk along the Champs Élysées. It was summer, and there were crowds of people everywhere. As we walked along, people kept stopping us and asking us questions about Buddhism and the monk's life; and at one point a small crowd gathered around me as I tried to explain the Four Noble Truths in French. I felt it hard to explain such profound teachings in English let alone in the French language, but it was an enjoyable time. Everyone was very friendly, even the French skinhead with his fierce dog who grabbed me and wanted to know why we wore 'skirts'.

We returned to Chithurst Monastery where Ajahn Anan was invited to give more formal teachings on meditation and Buddhist practice. While at the monastery, I recollected our teacher Luang Por Chah and his amazing contribution to Buddhism. I had seen him on TV twenty years before in the documentaries made by the BBC, and these had contributed to my original inspiration to travel to Thailand and train as a

monk. I reflected that I was now visiting Chithurst Monastery as a student of Luang Por Chah and it felt like there was still something of his presence there. Ajahn Anan felt, that because Luang Por Chah had actually visited the monastery on his second trip to England, that it was a significant place.

Just before we departed for Thailand, we were invited to receive a meal and give a blessing in a Thai restaurant in Guildford. When we arrived at the restaurant, one of the men in the crowd of devotees gathered there broke down in tears and Ajahn Anan asked him why. The owner of the restaurant explained that the man was a meditator, originally from India, and that he was psychic. The layman told us that when Ajahn Anan walked into the restaurant, he saw his radiant aura and began to cry tears of joy because he saw the same kind of bright aura as he had seen surrounding Luang Por Chah twenty years before when he visited Chithurst.

My first visit to England as a monk then came to an end. It seemed to have been an uplifting experience for my family and friends; and also for the monastics and lay devotees, and strangers we had met along the way. I had always wished to accompany a wise and true teacher of Buddhism when I returned to England; and I had achieved that goal. My family members who had not been to Thailand were touched by Ajahn Anan's kindness, friendliness and wisdom; and they had the chance to see me as a monk living and practicing with other monks. We had visited their homes and also brought them into the monasteries where they could see the Sangha interacting with lay Buddhists. I hoped that the experience helped improve my family members' understanding of the role of monks in society and observe some of the benefits that the Buddhist teachings bring to people's lives. We also established a good relationship with the English Sangha of Luang Por Chah which has flourished over the years.

Monastic Life Gives Insight Into The Four Noble Truths

Returning to Thailand, we prepared the monastery for the annual rains retreat of 1997. The number of monks residing at Wat Marp Jan continued to grow; and simultaneously, Ajahn Anan led the community in improving the facilities and infrastructure of the monastery. I moved into a newly constructed *kuti* on adjacent forest land, purchased from a rubber farmer. Previously, an elderly couple who were rubber farmers had lived on that land next to the monastery and they had always suffered from malaria. Every year, the mosquitoes brought the malaria parasites from the rubber farmers to the monks. Eventually, the monastery was able to purchase the land from the ageing farmer and after he moved out of the jungle, the number of monks contracting malaria finally began to decrease.

My new *kuti* had a bathroom and electricity and I appreciated the convenience. I continued to develop my meditation practice in as much the same way as I had for many years. I continued to attend morning and evening meditation sessions with the Sangha and often stayed on later in the hall to continue my meditation after the formal evening meditation sessions had finished. I continued to cultivate mindfulness of breathing as my main meditation object, both in the sitting and walking posture, and during the periods when my mind was still and the five hindrances were in subsidence, I contemplated the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and lack of self in the five aggregates. I continued to contemplate the bones and focused my mind on the emptiness of form. I had few worries and spent my time improving my mindfulness and my ability to enter states of stillness.

My mind continued to experience deep states of *samādhi* from time to time; and sometimes I experienced images of different parts of my body or visions of myself as a corpse quite

spontaneously arising out of the emptiness. In particular, I contemplated my skeleton and most often, my skull. Whenever I contemplated my skeleton effectively for long periods of time, it brought me a deep state of calm and detached equanimity which lasted for long periods. Occasionally, I had insight into the clear separation between mind and body. From these experiences, I gained confidence in my meditation and always returned to the contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body to pacify the mind from the mental defilements and empty the end of attachment. The emptiness I experienced through *samatha* meditation was profound, but the experience of emptiness resulting from clear vision of the three universal characteristics was even deeper.

As one of the senior monks in the monastery, I assisted in translating Ajahn Anan's teachings into English, when he had foreign visitors. Occasionally, I also gave teachings to both Thai and foreign visitors. Sometimes, when Ajahn Anan was away, I helped give guidance and advice to the new monks and novices who joined the community. One hot season, I was asked to mentor three temporary teenage novices whose parents had decided they should spend their school holidays learning about Buddhism and the monastic training. Generally, they did very well to keep the monastic training rules and stay in the jungle, but occasionally, their youthful moods got the better of them. One novice reacted with aversion to the multitude of insects and creatures in the forest. One day, he lost his patience and started setting fire to the many ants that were invading his *kuti*. I warned him that a novice had to practice patience and keep the first precept very strictly otherwise the negative *kamma* would come back on him. At about 1:00am that night, the jungle was filled with the sound of terrible screams coming from his *kuti*. Myself and a few of the monks rushed over to find the novice

crying in pain after a hornet had crawled under the door to the *kuti*, crawled up his leg and stung him while he was sleeping. The novice understood the term instant *kamma* very well after that. On another day, the novice was so hungry that he could not sit still in the meditation session during the period before the food was offered to the monks; and he began hitting his alms bowl like a drum to try and speed up the end of the morning meditation session. As a reminder to be more restrained, he was assigned to clean the communal toilets after the meal. When he walked into the first cubicle with his bucket and mop, he encountered a pit viper coiled up in the corner that chased him out. The poor novice ran outside screaming and gained his second lesson in instant *kamma*.

Monks also fall prey to their moods, desires and unrestrained behaviour. One time, a young monk who had ordained elsewhere asked to join the community and it turned out he had very strong opinions on the Dhamma and Vinaya. Normally, he kept them to himself, but on one occasion when Ajahn Anan was away from the monastery, the new young monk started arguing with some of the other resident monks. The argument became so heated that he and another junior monk began punching each other. I stepped in to separate them and talked to each monk individually to calm them down. I had little aversion to either of the monks and encouraged them both to meditate more and see the value in preserving harmony for themselves and the whole community. I reminded them that the way to achieve peace was by letting go of the conceit and strong attachment to self-view that was underlying their dispute.

My teachers taught me the value of cultivating patience and maintaining virtuous conduct even in the face of other people's aggression or provocation. Over the years at Wat Marp Jan,

I learned to forgive and let go of the unskilful conduct of other monks several times, as the monastic community grew in size and new monks joined. As I became more senior, I was sometimes left in charge of the monastery for short periods of time. On one occasion, Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Somchai visited southern Thailand for a week, and I was given responsibility for looking after the monastery. At that time, I sat in between two visiting senior monks who did not get on with each other. Each monk was seated on either side of me for the meal and evening meditation and it seemed like they took every opportunity to tell me about the faults of the other monk whom they disliked. I practised patience and tolerated their feud, but when I went back to my *kuti* to meditate I found that the voices of these two monks continued to arise in my mind.

I was determined not to take sides or get involved in their dispute, so I developed an unconventional meditation method as I walked meditation each day. I decided to establish my mindfulness at my ears and contemplate sound as merely sound all the time. I maintained mindfulness this way when I was with the monks and when I was alone. I contemplated sound as merely sound and thought as merely thought, rather than allowing myself to give importance to the meaning of the words from the conversations of the two monks that had been disturbing me. I was determined to maintain equanimity and not to become lost in any emotional reactions. I was so determined to maintain my own mindfulness and let go of the memories and my reactions to the conduct and words of the two monks, that when I was walking meditation at my *kuti* on the second day, my mind unified in a deep state of *samādhi* and I needed to stand still as my awareness turned inside. The rapture, happiness and one-pointedness of that state was so strong that all awareness of my body and the forest surrounding

me disappeared as my mind went inside. The state of emptiness I experienced was so profound that it lasted until after Ajahn Anan returned from his trip several days later. I had no more suffering over the two monks and the whole issue dissolved in my mind. This experience gave me a good lesson in how to preserve mindfulness in all situations, even when in a position of responsibility. I aimed to be able to completely let go of other people and their business, even though I still needed to interact with the monastic community every day.

A Buddha Statue For Abhayagiri Monastery

During the rains retreat Ajahn Anan was offered a large fibreglass statue of the Buddha sitting in meditation by the family who supported Luang Por Uttama and had looked after us when we were practising in the caves near his monastery. When people looked at the beautiful golden statue it brought them to a state of serenity and they found it inspiring, but the statue remained on the veranda of the meditation hall without a proper home for many months. At the end of the rains retreat, I consulted with Ajahn Anan and he agreed that the statue might be an appropriate gift for the newly established Abhayagiri Monastery in California. We contacted Ajahn Amaro and he agreed to receive the Buddha statue and the sponsors of the statue were happy to arrange for the statue to be shipped to San Francisco. When the statue was unpacked upon its arrival in the monastery, a layman took some photographs and sent them to us with apologies for the different coloured lights that appeared surrounding the statue in many of the pictures. He assumed that the lights arose from a technical error in the photographic development process.

Family

I continued to receive visits from my family during the time I lived at Wat Marp Jan. My brother and his wife visited me on their honeymoon after they had seen some of the more normal tourist destinations in Thailand. I introduced them to Ajahn Anan and also took them to visit some of the wise and compassionate teachers that lived in the region. Luang Por Somchai lived further along the coast in a mountain monastery called Wat Kao Sukhim and when I explained to him that my brother was newly married, he was kind enough to chant a blessing and spread *mettā* to our group. Even though my brother does not meditate he said he could feel the warm and peaceful energy emanating from Luang Por Somchai during the blessing. Also, I took the couple to meet Luang Por Puth who gave them a Dhamma blessing. His wedding gift to them was a short teaching exhorting the couple to practice generosity and undertake the five precepts. These were the best wedding presents I could manage to provide for them as a monk.

My mother visited me several times at Wat Marp Jan and each time took more interest in the Dhamma. I took her to join a meditation retreat in Chiang Mai with Luang Por Sumedho and to visit some of the different meditation teachers in Thailand. By then I spoke fluent Thai and had been a monk for many years, so it was not uncommon for people to request teachings from me when I travelled together with my mother. I arranged for my mother and her new partner to stay at a resort near Wat Marp Jan and to her surprise, when I visited her at lunch time one day, a huge crowd of resort customers gathered around our table and asked me to tell them about my life as a monk and give them some teaching. These occasions gave her a new perspective on the roles monks fulfil in Thai society.

This is Not Mine. I Am Not This. This Is Not Myself.

On one occasion during the rains retreat, a group of monks arranged to visit a large Bangkok hospital to view an autopsy. Normally, I found it beneficial to join such outings, but as my efforts in cultivating mindfulness were bearing fruit, I did not wish to interrupt my daily meditation routine with a long journey to and from Bangkok, so I decided not to join the group and stayed in the monastery to continue my meditation. During alms round that morning, I walked along the main street in the nearby town of Bahn Phe and noticed a dog barking at a trash bin on the sidewalk. Inside the trash bin was an injured rat that the dog had bitten and almost severed its small body in half. The unfortunate rat was bleeding profusely, its entrails were exposed, and its back legs were immobile. The terrified rat could only move its front legs and was just barely able to crawl in a circular direction on top of the pile of rubbish as it attempted to flee the fiercely barking dog. There was nowhere for it to go and it did not have the strength to jump out of the trash bin, so it moved around and around in circles as it slowly bled to death. I paused and wished it well before it died, but as I observed its extreme suffering and sent out thoughts of compassion my mental energy gathered together and I entered a state of deep *samādhi*.

I had contemplated the fragility of form, whenever human or animal, and the repulsiveness of the body as I observed the entrails and blood of the injured rat. I continued to reflect on the suffering of all living beings and a strong thought of compassion for all beings arose and then my mind entered into a deep state of stillness. This happened as I stood still next to the litter bin on the street. My mind turned inwards, became completely still and let go of my body. As soon as my mind withdrew from the stillness, I needed to continue walking to collect alms, but at that time my mind was pervaded by a profound weariness with the

suffering of existence and stayed with the detached awareness and equanimity. I was clearly aware of the simultaneous arising and ceasing of physical and mental phenomena; and the understanding that both are insubstantial and totally unreliable. My mind experienced emptiness for the rest of the day.

The disenchantment, letting go, and separation of the mind from the body that I normally automatically identified with, stuck with me for many days. I considered that when the conditions are right and one's spiritual faculties are mature, even the sight of a dying rat can prompt the mind to enter *samādhī* and gain clear insight into the impermanence and suffering of conditioned existence. It was as if I had participated in the autopsy and contemplated the impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self nature of the body without travelling to Bangkok. I returned from alms round with a clear insight that this body is not a self and does not belong to a self.

Much of practice through the rains retreat consisted of repetitive efforts in cultivating mindfulness of the body through paying attention to my breathing, my posture and examining the thirty-two parts of the body. Sometimes the mindfulness was strong and continuous, and I slept less, and practised many hours of sitting and walking meditation. Sometimes, mindfulness was weak and physical tiredness took over my mind and body. At those times, my insight into the three characteristics was not so clear and I relied as much on patient endurance in my practice as other qualities. But the overall efforts I made with my meditation meant that there were moments when the mind gathered together in stillness, and mindfulness was strong, and then insight into the true nature of phenomena could be profound. With insight came a profound experience of dispassion and my mind turned away from attachment and preferred to be with equanimity.

One of the blessings of living as a monk in Thailand is that one meets with many great meditation Masters. Around that time, Luang Por Puth Thaniyo was spending the rains in Chonburi, not far from Wat Marp Jan, and because he was near the end of his life, we took the opportunity to visit him. We had met him many times over the years, and he was always kind to us and willing to discuss the Dhamma with students of Luang Por Chah. Ajahn Anan and myself asked Luang Por Puth some direct questions about Luang Por Chah's personal practice; and although he pointed out that it was not his place to give opinions about the practice and level of Dhamma of another senior monk, he did open up a little more than usual. We asked him if the description Luang Por Chah gave of his mind unifying in *samādhi* three times in the Dhamma talk, *Unshakable Peace (Key to Liberation)*, that I had translated, referred to Luang Por Chah's development of *samādhi* alone, or did the experiences he described mean he also attained wisdom and insight at that time. Luang Por Puth confirmed that it was a description that applied to both the attainment of *samādhi* and insight into the Noble Path and Fruit. The conversation was truly inspiring for everyone present.



Ajahn Kalyano meditating under a rock at
Bodhipala Monastery, South Australia in 2019.



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The Buddha said that *Nibbāna* is cessation.
Where does that cessation take place?
Well, it is like a fire.
It is distinguished wherever it springs up
wherever it is burning.
You cool something at the point where it is hot.
It is the same with *Nibbāna* and *saṃsāra*.
They lie in the same place.

Luang Por Chah



Ajahn Kalyano at the ceremony led by the Thai Ambassador to confer him the title of Chao Khun at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2016.



Same Truths. New Location.

Sowing Dhamma Seeds In Melbourne

In June 1998 Khun Nappasee, a Thai Buddhist living in Melbourne, invited me to visit Australia and teach Buddhism. I declined the invitation because I did not consider myself a teacher, but I said I would be happy to translate for Ajahn Anan if he agreed to go. A group of five of us were then invited at the end of November to travel and teach in Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Perth. We flew on a Qantas jet to Sydney and due to the more relaxed regulations and attitudes in those times, the pilot invited us into the cockpit to watch the view when the plane flew over Uluru and the central desert of Australia. He also wanted to ask us some questions about Buddhism. While we chatted, I found the view of Australia's spiritual centre from the high altitude unexpectedly serene as I watched the desert moving slowly and silently beneath us. The captain and co-pilot were interested in meditation and we compared the similarities in mental training we each received in our respective career paths. It seemed an auspicious way to arrive in Australia for the first time.

In each city we visited, groups of Buddhists and non-Buddhists interested in meditation met us and invited us to teach. We

visited Buddhist centres and city temples and much of our time was spent engaged in activities that were not so different from our life in Thailand. However, the surrounding culture, society and climate were very different from Thailand where monks are treated with great veneration and people are generally very happy when they meet monks. In Australia, our group was treated well, but sometimes when we were with non-Buddhists, we noticed that we were initially an object of curiosity for people; more than a cause for faith or happiness; and occasionally people displayed confusion or awkwardness; and said that they did not know how to relate to monks. When we were in public, we even encountered a few people who tried to convert us to Christianity, or told us that we had made a wrong life choice; but in general, people responded positively to our presence.

In Melbourne, we met Jeffrey Tan and Bee Lian Soo who invited us to visit their home and by coincidence, when we entered their meditation room we immediately noticed a photograph of Ajahn Anan, myself and many other monks from our community, sitting on their shrine table. The photo had been taken at the cave monastery in north-east Thailand where Luang Por Tate spent his last years. On that day in 1994, Ajahn Piak, Ajahn Anan, myself and many other monks travelled to pay final respects to Luang Por Tate because we knew he was getting close to the end of his life. By coincidence, another famous forest teacher, Luang Por La, and a large group of his monks also arrived to pay respects to Luang Por Tate at the same time.

When Luang Por La arrived, he gave a Dhamma teaching to the assembled monks in the largest cave. He talked about how the life and practice of a forest monk has to embrace difficulties and challenges, just as Luang Por Tate had. He praised Luang Por Tate for practising sincerely and overcoming his own mental

defilements of greed, anger and delusion by cultivating the path of morality, *samādhī* and wisdom. After the talk we moved into the smaller cave where Luang Por Tate lived and after bowing in respect to him, Luang Por La lay down completely prostrate on the ground and placing Luang Por Tate's feet on his head, gave another Dhamma teaching. As Luang Por Tate sat silently, Luang Por La praised him and confirmed that Luang Por Tate had realised the path and the fruit as taught by the Buddha. Luang Por La remained lying down with Luang Por Tate's feet resting on his head the whole time.

Jeffrey had spent many months living and practising with Luang Por Tate in the cave monastery and that day, he photographed the auspicious occasion when all the monks met together in the main cave. He did not know our names at the time, but our photographs ended up on the shrine next to the Buddha statue in his home. We all had a good chuckle when we walked in to the room and noticed the photograph waiting for us.

On 11 November, Jeffrey and his family took us around the Botanical Gardens in Melbourne and by coincidence, we walked up to the Shrine of Remembrance just before 11:00am when the politicians and dignitaries had gathered to hold the Service of Remembrance for servicemen and servicewomen who had lost their lives. We walked up to join the assembled crowd in front of the shrine to spread thoughts of kindness and compassion and dedicate merit to the dead and, perhaps because it was unusual for a group of five Buddhist monks to attend the service, all the news cameras panned around to include us in their footage. Later that day, we were seen by many surprised viewers on the national news.

In between teaching sessions at the Buddhist Society of Victoria, Jeffrey invited us to visit the Ada tree, a historical site deep in the state forest near Warburton. On the return journey, our group

of two vehicles got lost on the unmarked gravel roads and we ended up spending three hours driving around before we finally found our way out of the state forest. The monks suggested that the reason we had been lost for so long was that the forest *Devas* did not want us to leave the area. We did not know at the time, but two years later Jeffrey and his family would purchase a piece of forest land on the edge of the same state forest not far from the Ada tree and donate it to the Sangha.

By the time we departed from Melbourne, we had made many new friends in the Buddhist community and, without realising it, we had set in motion a train of events that eventually culminated in the Soo family offering seventy-five acres of forest land in East Warburton to the Sangha of Luang Por Chah. I had travelled with Ajahn Anan to England in 1997 to help provide Dhamma to my family and friends, but that was the only previous experience I had teaching Buddhism outside Thailand. On this trip, I had travelled to Australia to help Ajahn Anan teach Dhamma out of compassion for Buddhists in Australia, but I had no previous connection to the people or country of Australia. In 1998, I had no plan or aspiration to leave Wat Marp Jan or start a monastery anywhere else, so even though the lay devotees in Melbourne briefly discussed their aspiration to begin a forest monastery, none of us saw it as a realistic possibility at that time.

The Value Of Seclusion

Since the time of the Buddha, monks have gone out into quiet and secluded places to practise as a way of minimising their involvement with other activities and people, and also to test their resolve and level of mindfulness and wisdom when in a challenging environment. After returning from Australia in December 1998, I travelled to Dtao Dtum hermitage for a winter retreat. A Dhamma friend drove me all the way from

Bangkok to the border police post about four kilometres from the hermitage where the dirt road deteriorates badly, and we waited there for a more suitable four-wheel drive truck to come out from the nearby mine and pick me up. We waited several hours and during that time, four large army helicopters flew in and landed at the check point. By coincidence, the head of the Thai army was inspecting the border areas that day; and all the border police and soldiers at the checkpoint lined up to greet him. I moved well away to meditate under a tree, but someone pointed me out to the group of generals and officers and they eventually walked over to me. Apparently, at that time there were some officers who were not happy with the presence of monks in the hermitage. The forest sat right on the international border, and they were concerned about the risk to border security. I reassured them that the monks were only there to practise the Dhamma, preserve the forest, and do good. Unfortunately, there was one officer who continued to express his negativity towards the hermitage and took the chance to make his case to his commanding officer that monks were in the hermitage for the wrong reasons and should leave the area permanently. I peacefully stood my ground and explained that we did have permission from the National Park and all other relevant authorities; and we were pure in our intention. Eventually, the head of the Thai army and his column of soldiers realised that I would not be backing off and they had nothing more to say, so they slowly retreated from me to go about their duties. I went back to my duty of meditating under the tree while I waited for a lift.

When I arrived at the hermitage, there were just two monks in residence in the permanent *kutis* on the hill, but my intention was to camp out in the open jungle near the waterfall. There were many fresh elephant footprints along the banks of the stream that year and with no other monks camping in the

jungle, it seemed like a good opportunity to practise in seclusion. The presence of elephants brought heightened uncertainty to my time of practice, because they could be aggressive and destructive. Camping alone in the forest always taught me the need to arouse heedfulness and energy in my practice, due to the danger and uncertainty, and also because there was little external inspiration and few activities to distract me from my own moods and emotions. The only way to find peace when alone in the jungle is through the cultivation of mindfulness, the recollection of wholesome Dhammas and by reflecting on the uncertainty of physical and mental phenomena.

Saving A Cow Or Sacrificing A Cow

When I arrived at the hermitage, I found a large cow wandering around the jungle because some devotees from a city temple had wanted to make merit by purchasing the cow before it was slaughtered and releasing it in the hermitage. I thought the lay devotees had chosen the wrong place to release the cow, because it was clear to me that the cow was frightened, being alone in the jungle and I was concerned for its safety. There were no fences to protect it; and a domestic cow is vulnerable and defenceless against predators out in the jungle. It spent its time shuffling around near the small bamboo-framed building used as a kitchen and always looked ill at ease. Eventually, one night she was chased, brought down and killed by a mother tigress and her offspring. The tigers were scared off by workers from the nearby mine before they could devour the poor cow. The death of the cow was both a sad reflection on the uncertainty of life and also a good lesson in how well-intended actions that are carried out without wisdom can do as much harm as good.

I practised alone at the back of the forest right on the border with Myanmar for several weeks enjoying some retreat time. The peace and quiet was conducive to training in one-pointedness

and contemplation of the four foundations of mindfulness. Being close to nature and leading such a simple lifestyle highlighted the suffering inherent in my body which is always subject to aches and pains, susceptible to insect bites and prone to feel too hot or too cold. The only way to find contentment was through developing patience and establishing mindfulness and insight into the uncertainty of mental states. I noticed that when I was less reflective, the discomfort of the body fuelled craving and deluded fantasies or else states of irritation. When mindfulness was strong and I could maintain a state of *samādhī* I felt good, but when the ease and contentment in the mind faded away, in a short space of time, it was replaced by discontent. Staying in the jungle, there was always plenty to endure internally and externally.

One morning, I was walking meditation when two bears ran straight at me from out of the jungle. I paused and only had enough time to resolve in my mind that if I had made any bad *kamma* with the bears in the past, then I accepted whatever happened without anger or fear. In the end, the larger bear stopped right in front of me and stared at me for a few moments, sniffing and checking me out; and then, suddenly turned and ran away again as fast as it had come. I had nothing else to do in that situation other than to observe my breathing and the mental states arising and passing away and continued my walking meditation. I had no aversion for the bear, and I contemplated that it was just an animal following its instincts for self-preservation. The bear did not know it was called a bear. That was just a label I put on it. The bear probably moved between the countries that are designated as Myanmar and Thailand without ever knowing the name of the country it was in. Cultivating mindfulness in the jungle always highlighted any attachment I had to the labels and concepts of conventional reality and how I suffered, when I attached to it without any

investigation or insight. Another day, I was pacing up and down peacefully when a viper slowly moved up to my foot from the undergrowth. The snake was looking for food but also wanted to check me out. I paused and waited as it approached my bare foot and stuck its tongue out to taste the skin and then recoiled. I assumed it did not like the way I tasted, and the snake slowly continued on its journey.

After a few weeks practising in solitude, a group of monks from Wat Pah Nanachat arrived and once they had settled into their camping spots, they invited me to give some meditation instruction because it was the Observance Day. At the end of the discussion, the monks asked to hear some tiger stories. I warned them to be careful what they wished for, because there is an old saying in Thailand that if you start talking about tigers you will meet one. I told them some of my personal stories and also some stories from our teachers; and we then stayed up chanting and meditating until late.

At midnight, many of the monks dispersed back to their individual campsites. As one new Australian monk was walking back along the narrow mountain path, he encountered a large tiger coming from the opposite direction. The monk froze with fear as the tiger crouched in front of him and was ready to pounce. The monk later said that his knees started shaking as he was paralysed with fear. Fortunately, he thought that he could steady his panicking mind by reciting the verses recollecting the qualities of the Buddha and he slowly and softly began chanting them to himself. The monk felt that if he had not begun chanting those auspicious words, he might have gone crazy with fear.

As the monk chanted, the tiger moved, one step at a time, very slowly past him. He said the tiger was so close to him that he could hear its heavy breathing and smell the stench of dead meat on its breath. The tiger turned and resumed its crouching



Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Kalyano at
Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2007.

posture behind the monk. He remained petrified, but the chanting in praise of the Buddha improved his mindfulness and steadied his mind enough for him to realise at that difficult moment, that the way ahead was now open. The tiger was now behind him and he began to walk slowly ahead while he continued chanting. As he got further away, he observed that the tiger was not following him; and so he began walking and chanting more quickly. When he finally got a long way from the tiger, the monk simply ran for his life. Later on, he came to my campsite to see me and quietly told me what had happened. He had been really shaken by the experience. I praised his quick thinking in a challenging situation and encouraged him to see that he had won an important victory over the fear in his mind.

Anumodanā For The Amaravati Temple

In June 1999, Luang Por Sumedho invited Ajahn Anan and myself to visit Amaravati Monastery to participate in the opening ceremony of the new *Upasatha* Hall. My mother had returned to live in the village of Olney with my sister, not far from Amaravati and it was a good opportunity to visit her as well. Ajahn Piak was also invited to the ceremony and so we made arrangements for a group of monks and lay followers to travel to England for the ceremony and we also arranged to visit some of the branch monasteries. I combined another visit to my family with my duties assisting Ajahn Anan as his translator and attendant monk.

Fortunately, my mother, sister and nephews were able to join us on the day of the opening ceremony at Amaravati which brought them closer to the Sangha; and allowed them to hear some teachings from many of the senior monks who attended the event. Sitting in the *Upasatha* Hall with my family members to chant the blessing with the huge number of monastics who had gathered for the occasion, seemed like the culmination of a journey to bring my family closer to the Dhamma.

I noticed how each time I visited England, my family members grew more familiar with the monastic lifestyle and the teachings, and had the opportunity to assist the monks and practise generosity in different ways. My mother was very happy to attend the opening ceremony for the new hall; and by then she knew Luang Por Sumedho well and had great respect for him. She and my sister were also familiar with many of the monks and nuns at Amaravati. My mother had been attending meditation workshops on Saturday afternoons and even, residential meditation retreats. She and my sister also invited monks and nuns to receive food at her home from time to time.

After the opening ceremony, I accompanied Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Piak to visit Harnham Monastery in Northumberland and we taught meditation in Edinburgh for a few days. After a long drive around Scotland and England, we finished the two-week long visit to England teaching at Chithurst Monastery. As on the previous visit, Ajahn Anan was very open to giving meditation instruction to the Sangha and laity which was very much appreciated. In western countries, it is hard to find genuinely experienced meditation teachers who have knowledge and skill in the training of the mind in the more refined aspects of *samādhi* and insight.

Keep Practising

Returning to Wat Marp Jan for the rains retreat after the overseas trip, Ajahn Anan continued with the construction of the new *Upasatha* Hall. Over the subsequent years, the building had a transformative effect on the monastery. The monks occasionally assisted with work tidying the area around the construction site, but the main construction work was undertaken by professionals. Meanwhile, my own practice and development of calm and insight meditation did not alter. I kept to Luang Por Chah's advice to keep practising whatever

the external conditions and whatever the internal moods of the mind. As he said, whether you feel lazy or energetic, you keep practising. When mindfulness was strongest, I contemplated the impermanence of my thoughts and feelings and let go of craving that fuelled self-identity view.

From Despair Back To Hope

In December 1999, I returned to Dtao Dtum and stayed in a permanent *kuti* at the top of the hill as there were only a couple of monks in the hermitage. My time there was spent pleasantly, doing as much formal meditation as I could. I arose each morning at 3:00am and practised sitting and walking meditation until 7:00am, and then walked down the mountain to collect alms food. I returned to eat at my *kuti* followed by a short rest. I spent the rest of the day sitting and walking meditation into the evening until I rested at 10:00pm or 11:00pm.

In the solitude of the forest, I had a good opportunity to observe the different mental hindrances and negative mental states arising and ceasing as usual and continued to find different strategies to overcome them. I experienced little aversion, but when I did, it was usually associated with the painful feelings of the body. My legs were becoming particularly painful due to the many hours of sitting meditation. Painful feelings in the body give rise to aversion when we give them unwise attention, so I endeavoured to maintain mindfulness and continuously contemplated the impermanence of feelings. I periodically cultivated the meditation object of *mettā* to ensure that I could abandon any ill will arising. When my mind unified in *samādhi*, I experienced the temporary cessation of painful feelings, but withdrawing from states of stillness I tried to carefully observe if any desire or aversion arose and practised letting go. When I maintained equanimity, I reflected that the pain was just the way it is and not a being or a person. I always aimed to

maintain equanimity and a wholesome state of mind. Regularly experiencing states of stillness and cultivating wise attention supports and maintains wholesome states of mind, but I had to be vigilant because I knew it was easy to drop my guard.

Over the years, the slash-and-burn style of farming carried out by the villagers had led to forest fires encroaching on the national park surrounding Dtao Dtum. That year, we employed some migrant workers to clear a fire break around the border of the hermitage to help protect the unspoilt forest of the inner area from any encroaching bushfires. The group of workers moved slowly up the mountain side clearing jungle as they went and ended up walking many kilometres away from the monks and further into the hills. During the day, one of the workers got separated from his co-workers and ended up completely lost in the jungle. He was alone for many hours and became increasingly desperate as he became lost and could not find his way back. No one could locate him.

By sundown, his friends returned to their camp at the nearby mine, about five kilometres away from the hermitage. They assumed their friend would eventually show up. Just before last light, I was meditating in my hut when I heard the sound of someone sobbing in the bushes nearby. I went out to investigate and found the man who had become separated from the main group. He was kneeling on the ground and crying uncontrollably. He was quite close to my hut and the path back to human habitation, but before he had actually seen my hut, he had encountered some fresh tiger tracks on the ground. He had been lost in the mountains for most of the day and was tired and frustrated already. The sight of fresh tiger tracks brought him to the point of total despair. The man had fallen to his knees and began sobbing with the thought that he was certain to die on the mountain that night.

When I walked up to the man, he was shocked and stunned when I asked him how he was in Thai. Eventually his shock turned to joy when he realised that I could show him the way home to safety. It was a good lesson in how events can change so quickly from good to bad or bad to good. The man told me that he had relied on his faith in the Buddha to uplift himself when he faced being lost; and it give him the strength and endurance to keep going through the day. I reflected that even when you reach the point of despair, if you still recollect the Buddha, you can gain some strength of mind to keep going. It was a great teaching on the power of resilience and faith.

Worse Than A Mangy Dog

In January 2000, Wat Marp Jan hosted a visit from Luang Ta Maha Bua, as part of his ‘Help the Thai Nation Project’ which was dedicated to supporting the Thai economy, after the financial crisis of the previous years. Members of the Soo family from Melbourne visited Wat Marp Jan at that time and were fortunate to be able to pay respects to Luang Ta Maha Bua and listen to his teachings. During Luang Ta Maha Bua’s Dhamma teaching to the assembled crowd, he spoke in praise of Ajahn Anan and described him as a highly attained and well-practised monk which was a cause for great joy in the hearts of everyone present.

After giving his talk, Luang Ta Maha Bua rested at Wat Marp Jan and while we offered him a foot massage, we requested permission to question him, at length, about his personal practice and cultivation of the Dhamma. We also asked him more general questions about his teacher Luang Por Mun; and even about the life and practice of Luang Por Chah. Ajahn Anan was keen for me to ask Luang Ta Maha Bua his opinion on the progress of Luang Por Chah’s insight as he trained and practised; and also wanted me to ask him directly at what point

he thought Luang Por Chah had attained the different stages of the Noble Path. I was massaging one of Luang Ta Maha Bua's arms; and Ajahn Anan kept nudging me to ask the great teacher if he thought that Luang Por Chah had attained *sotāpanna* or stream entry, the first stage of Enlightenment, soon after he received teachings from Luang Por Mun. We knew from Luang Por Chah's own words that he had declared that he had no more doubts about his cultivation of the Dhamma after meeting with Luang Por Mun. Luang Ta Maha Bua smiled at me after my unusually direct question and commented that I was worse off than a mangy dog. He said that when a mangy dog itches, at least it knows exactly which part of its body to scratch, but I was scratching in the wrong place. In other words, I was asking my question to the wrong person and only Luang Por Chah could properly answer that question.

I explained that I was only asking him very direct questions about Luang Por Chah's life and practice because it was such a rare opportunity to spend time in private with him, and I praised him saying that of all the students of Luang Por Mun, he was the monk closest to Luang Por Mun; and he had understood and preserved most completely Luang Por Mun's way of training. Even though Luang Ta Maha Bua did not answer my question directly, he acknowledged that he understood why I was asking and quite spontaneously, he sat up and began talking about the night he himself attained *Nibbāna*. At that point in his life, he had rarely opened up in quite such detail about his own personal development and attainment of the Noble Path, Fruit and *Nibbāna*. It was an inspiring revelation to hear him speak so openly about his meditation on the night he finally abandoned the last five fetters (*saṃyojana*) at Wat Doi Dhamma Chedi in Sakhon Nakhon province. He also described to us how, having experienced full Awakening, he spent the rest of the night bowing in gratitude to the Buddha, his teacher.

A Dhamma Premonition

Luang Ta Maha Bua's visit was uplifting for both monks and lay devotees. Afterwards, I took the group of lay devotees from Melbourne on a short trip to visit some other senior monks of the forest tradition. We visited Luang Por Jia and then Ajahn Piak in Pathum Thani, Luang Por Plien in Chiang Mai, and Luang Por Tui at his monastery in Nong Kai province. We invited Ajahn Nyanadhammo to join us for part of the trip and spent a few days camping together in the jungle at Khao Yai National Park. As I was familiar with the area and I knew the park rangers, it was fairly easy to get permission to camp in the forest. We found a suitable place for Ajahn Nyanadhammo to hang his umbrella tent amongst some rocks on the summit of a hill, and discovered a huge discarded dead skin from a king cobra a few metres from his spot. We put his assistant monk at a place slightly down the hill where we had encountered fresh tiger faeces, so both monks had a good atmosphere to stimulate their meditation.

Our group spent a couple of nights quietly meditating in the forest, and at about 10:00pm on the last night, Ajahn Nyanadhammo and myself had a chat about the Dhamma while we were standing on a mountain ridge overlooking the centre of the park below. At one point, we noticed a beautiful golden light hovering over the trees in front of us. We assumed it was made by an aircraft, but suddenly the light split into two spheres each of different shades of green and blue, and one radiant sphere floated away in a north-easterly direction and the other sphere floated southwards and disappeared. I suggested that it was an auspicious *Deva* light. It turned out that a few years later, I moved to the south of where we had stood and began Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in Melbourne, Australia and Ajahn Nyanadhammo moved to the north-east edge of the Khao Yai National Park and established the monastery Wat Ratanawan.

In fact, following that trip to Thailand, the group of lay devotees from Melbourne returned to Australia and began looking more earnestly for land to begin a forest monastery near Melbourne.

Indra's Light

In late January 2000, myself and a small group of monks were invited to stay in the jungle in San Kampaeng District in Chiang Mai. A supporter of Ajahn Anan owned some forested land there and supported us with food as we camped at the foot of a hill named Doi Indra. The hill was named after Indra, the Chief God of the Heaven Realm of the Thirty-Three, as described in Buddhist cosmology. Originally, I had planned to spend time at Dtao Dtum hermitage, but I was experiencing serious and continuous pain in the calf muscles of both my legs and was aware, that if I stayed at Dtao Dtum I would need to walk up and down the steep path next to the waterfall every day; and that might make the condition of my legs worse. At that time, I was regularly visiting a specialist doctor at Phra Mongkut Hospital in Bangkok, and he advised me to be careful not to strain my legs unnecessarily. Staying in the forest in Chiang Mai meant a shorter and easier walk to collect daily alms food and therefore, less strain on my leg muscles.

Obhāsa Nimitta

The forest was not so lush or densely vegetated as Wat Marp Jan, but the climate was pleasant and with few mosquitoes. We used the nearby stream to provide us with a water supply and the quiet valley was secluded from traffic and people. Every night, I sat in meditation until about 10 o'clock and then began walking meditation on a flat area at the foot of Indra's Hill near the stream. On the third night, I was especially calm, my mindfulness strong, and I found it easy to contemplate the arising and passing away of pleasant and unpleasant feelings and sensations in my body without distraction. As soon as I stepped



Ajahn Kalyano doing walking meditation at Dtao Dtum Hermitage, which is in a large area of protected forest.

out from the place where I sat meditation, and began to walk meditation, I noticed a white-skinned old monk sitting on a dead log next to the walking path. The moon was full and bright so I could see details in the landscape around me quite clearly. I was surprised to see the old monk sitting in meditation only a few metres away from me. I established mindfulness and composed my mind, but soon the image of the monk disappeared. At the moment, the monk vanished, a beautiful green-white light slowly arose in the forest towards the top of Indra's Hill above me. The radiant light expanded upwards and outwards to fill the night air and covered a huge portion of the hill top. After a brief interval, the light gradually faded away. I concluded that the old monk and the light were linked, and I interpreted them as auspicious signs. A few days later, I was able to talk to Ajahn Anan on the property owner's phone. He confirmed that he had encountered the old monk when he meditated at that place; and that he was a *Deva* known as Phra Khru Thep Lok Udon.

In February, I moved to a new area on the other side of the same hill. At first, I found it challenging because the forest was extremely dry, more exposed to the hot sun and a long way from the stream which was my water supply. Despite the heat and the less than ideal external conditions, I was surprised to find that my meditation developed well. It was another reminder that challenging conditions can sometimes stimulate good meditation. Perhaps it was because I was inspired by the auspicious sign of seeing the old monk and the radiant light, or perhaps it was because the severe pain in my legs caused me to put more effort into maintaining mindfulness; but either way, my mind settled down in concentration quicker and to a much deeper level than usual. I put my heart into maintaining mindfulness, from moment to moment, on the breath; and I was able to contemplate and let go of unwholesome mental states easily despite the physical pain.

A kindhearted local farmer had made a bamboo platform for me which made sitting meditation a little less challenging than when I was sitting on the ground. One evening, I was forced to stay under my umbrella because a thunderstorm arrived and brought with it heavy rain. Because of the rain, there was nowhere for me to go, and I decided to sit in full lotus posture to see how long I could sit without moving. Normally, I could only sit for about one hour before the pain became too intense to endure, but because it was raining and there really was nothing else to do, I sat meditating on the breath and letting go of everything else without getting up or changing posture. The storm intensified and I had to boost my own effort to continue sitting in the full lotus posture, without moving. I ended up sitting for over three hours in the full lotus posture; and my mind became bright and radiant even though the pain in my legs was intense. I eventually experienced a clear separation between the mind and the pain as my mind entered and withdrew from stillness.

It was one of those occasions when I felt strong enough to let go of all forms of wanting from my mind and the extra effort required to continue sitting in full lotus. The solid, continuous state of mindfulness that arose meant that I was able to let go of any identification with painful feeling as self or belonging to a self. In the previous months, my leg muscles had become so painful that I was willing to pursue my meditation, let go of the pain and focus my mind solely on the breath until it disappeared. Once the mind entered a deep state of stillness, it became bright and radiant and painful feelings no longer bothered me. Around me the wind was blowing, and the rain fell heavily for a couple of hours, but I could not hear it. I sat for many hours without pain and observed the mind itself. By the time my mind withdrew from the state of stillness, the storm had passed and the evening sun had disappeared behind the hill.

My mind was radiant and clear. I contemplated the suffering of clinging to the body and experienced strong detachment and equanimity as I focused on the thirty-two parts of the body and witnessed them as sensations and elements rather than a self. Later, I contemplated why my legs had become so deeply painful over the past year and suddenly, out of the stillness of the mind, a clear image arose of me as a soldier attacking another man with a sword. I gained the knowledge that I had previously been a soldier in northern Thailand and had hurt another man in a battle. I felt a deep sadness arise as I considered that I had once been a soldier and harmed others and I dedicated the goodness from my life and practice as a monk to any beings I had harmed in the past. I continued to recollect my lay life before I entered the robes and considered how my faith in the Buddhist teachings had grown and led to my decision to become a monk. Out of the stillness of the mind emerged the knowledge that I had been a monk over a series of many lifetimes but that at one point in the many successive lifetimes I had been a monk, I had spent one lifetime as a soldier. Because my mind was so stable and radiant in my meditation at that time, I was confident that I was not simply lost in my imagination. However, I always reflected on Luang Por Chah's teaching that any visions and knowledge that arise out of states of *samādhi* are uncertain. I contemplated my experience but taught myself not to cling on to it.

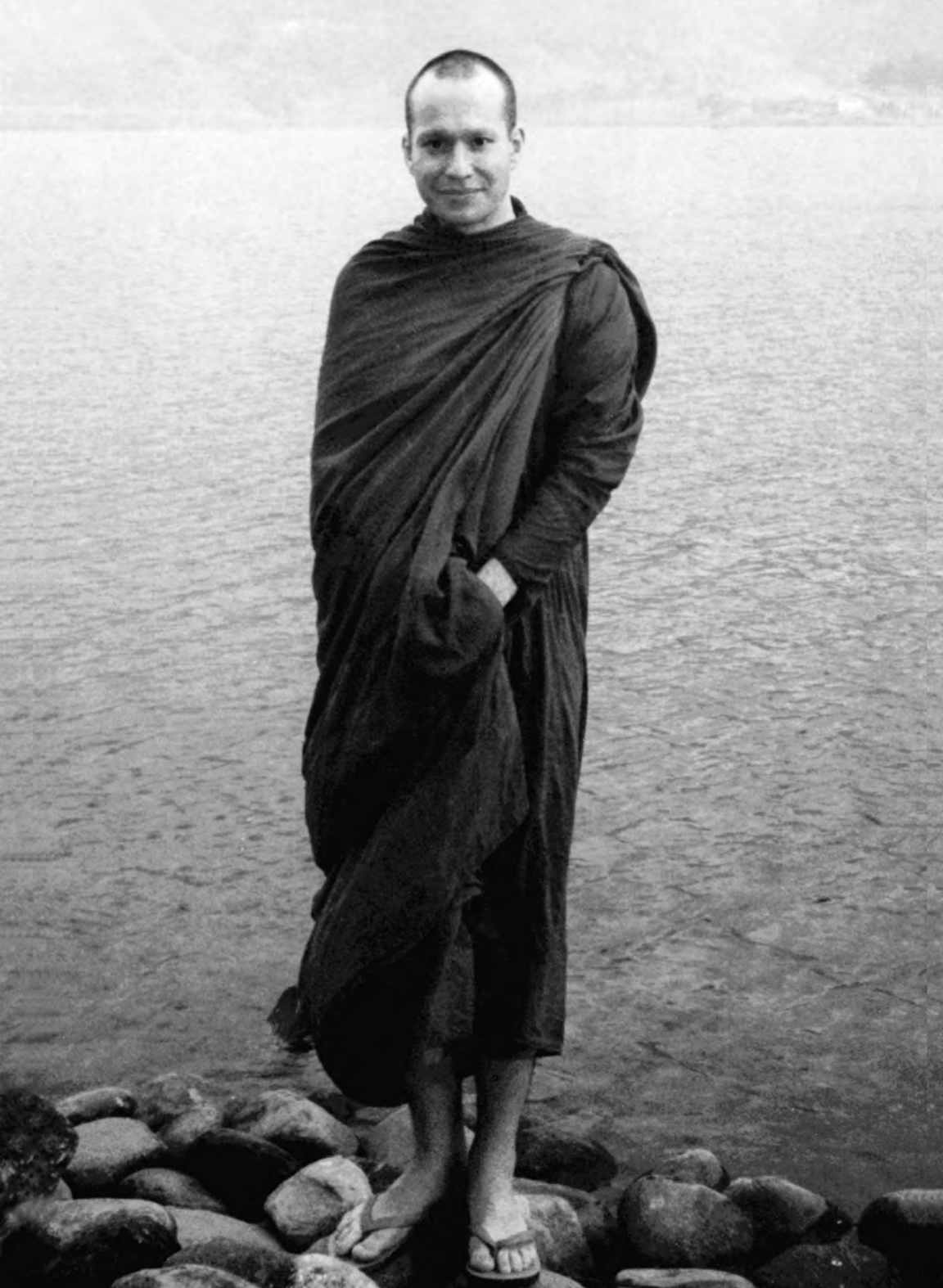
The Higher Knowledge

In May and June 2000, I was invited to study the *Abhidhamma* (Buddhist Psychology) study course offered at Wat Maha That in Bangkok. I thought it was a good way to improve my knowledge of the Thai language and discover more about the *Abhidhamma* texts that form one part of the Buddhist canon. I was aware that Luang Por Mun and many wise forest teachers had studied the *Abhidhamma* following the Burmese texts and I was curious to see how it was taught and the way the knowledge

links to the other two baskets: the Suttas and the Vinaya. I was offered the *Abhidhamma* text books for the first level of the study course and mainly studied in my own time at Wat Marp Jan. In the end, due to limited time, I only took exams in the first two of the seven levels of the study course. In the first level exam, I achieved fifth place, but after that I understood a little better what the examiners were looking for; and in the exam for the second level of studies, I achieved first place in the whole of Thailand.

I had been training in *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation long enough that I did not feel I would become lost or deluded by the theoretical knowledge I gained from studying this part of the Buddhist Tipitaka. I did meet some students who seemed to be strongly attached to their theoretical knowledge of the texts and I considered how scriptural knowledge can become an obstacle to progress in meditation, without mindfulness and reflection. I was curious and interested to study and gain understanding of Buddhist psychology and had not identified with any strong opinions about its value or lack of value. I found that the knowledge contained in the *Abhidhamma* texts certainly shed light on some deeper aspects of the Buddha's words in the Suttas and in the description of the Vinaya rules of training. My brief period of study improved my use of the written Thai language and stimulated my general contemplation of the Dhamma. In general, I spent more of my time meditating than studying and I kept an open mind when people discussed the question of whether the *Abhidhamma* texts come directly from the words of the Buddha or were recorded by monks in a later era.

One weekend Luang Por Recan Varalabho, a senior disciple of Luang Por Mun, was invited to teach at Wat Marp Jan. He was considered to be a fully Awakened *Arahant* and I enjoyed the time we spent discussing the Dhamma with him. He told us about the progress of his own meditation practice since his



Ajahn Kalyano in Nepal in 1993.

ordination and some of his insights into the impermanent, non-self nature of the body which led to his realisation of the truth and ultimate transcendence of the mental defilements rooted in greed, anger and delusion. I told him a little about my own meditation practice and he heard that I was studying *Abhidhamma* at that time, but did not make any comment. Later on, he gave a Dhamma talk to the assembled practitioners in the meditation hall and began his talk by discussing the background and traditional origin story of how the Buddha taught the *Abhidhamma* to his mother in the Heaven Realm of the Thirty-Three. To some people's surprise, he talked with confidence as if the events related in the traditional story had truly taken place and that the *Abhidhamma* teaching really was the word of the Buddha.

Compassion For A Black Widow

In May 2000, I was invited to stay in some undeveloped jungle right next to the Andaman Sea in the Khao Lak area of Phang Nga province in southern Thailand. The landowner wanted to support forest monks and knew that I was experiencing inflammation of my leg muscles which prevented me from walking long distances. His land was covered with thick jungle but only about one kilometre from a village and beautifully located next to the ocean and a deserted sandy beach. These days, it is rare to be able to camp in the jungle right next to the sea with access to a quiet beach. The jungle was dense and full of wildlife. The beach was empty of people most of the time because it was not the tourist season. The area was a long way from any tourist resorts. I found it stimulating and an unusual experience to sit on the beach in meditation and contemplate the water element and the vast emptiness of the ocean. Facing westwards meant that we saw brilliant sunsets every evening. The jungle itself was a challenging place to camp as it was thick, lush and damp, and full of malarial mosquitoes, insects, creatures and snakes.

I stayed at Khao Lak for a few weeks with a couple of Dhamma friends from Wat Marp Jan. We spent our time meditating quietly. I spread *mettā* to the local people who supported us with food every day and they invited us to dedicate merit to the ghosts and spirits in the area, which they assured us were numerous. One afternoon, a huge storm moved in from the ocean and reminded us how uncertain the weather and the natural elements can be. As the wind picked up and brought with it thunder, lightning and then heavy rain, I rushed back to my umbrella tent to collect up my robes which were hanging on a line. As I was rushing through the jungle, torrential rain began to fall and as I moved along through the undergrowth, I felt something wet sticking to my leg and assumed it was just a wet leaf sticking to my skin. The ‘leaf’ continued to stick to my leg even after I had walked quite a distance; and when I reached my campsite I looked down and realised that the wet leaf was actually a large black widow spider. I stopped and carefully tapped my leg on the ground to ease it off. It left me reluctantly and even when it was finally on the ground, it sat still looking at me. Rather than experiencing fear or aversion, I felt sorry for the huge spider that seemed more disturbed by the ferocity of the storm than me. I did not think much of the incident until the next morning when a villager collecting bamboo walked past me and stopped for a chat. He warned me about the danger from the black widow spiders which were common in the area; and explained how deadly their venom was and, with concern, let me know that they had a history of biting the villagers. A few months earlier, a villager had been bitten and died while collecting bamboo close to the very spot where I was camping. I smiled and thanked him for the warning and said that I would keep an eye out for any spiders.

Another day, some hunters who had walked through the mountains paid us a visit and showed us some unusually large

water lily pads they had brought down from a pond on top of one of the mountains. The hunters were very proud of their find and said that it inspired them to believe in the legend of the *Bodhisatta* that after his birth he walked seven steps on large lotus leaves and then declared that he was the foremost in the world. I encouraged them to really put their faith to good use and undertake to give up hunting and follow the Dhamma. They agreed that following the Buddha's path was their true aspiration; and they made a commitment to keep the precepts more strictly. On the last day of our retreat, we were sitting observing the peaceful view from the beach when a school of dolphins began playing near us. We took it as a farewell from the Andaman Ocean and the next day we began our journey back to Wat Marp Jan.

Last Rains Retreat In Thailand

Entering the rains at Wat Marp Jan in 2000, the number of resident monks continued to grow and the construction of the *Upasatha* Hall was drawing to a close. I offered whatever help I could to Ajahn Anan with translation and administration, otherwise I continued with my own meditation practice. During the retreat, we were contacted by Jeffrey Tan from Melbourne who informed us that his family and friends had found a piece of suitable forest land to the east of Melbourne that had been put up for auction. He explained that if his family managed to successfully purchase the land, they would offer it to Ajahn Anan to begin a monastery. In the end, another purchaser acquired the land at the auction, but Jeffrey and his family and friends were undeterred. They formed the organisation called the Victoria Sangha Association with the purpose of purchasing land to offer to the Sangha of Luang Por Chah and continued looking for properties.

At the same time as the members of the Victoria Sangha Association were looking at purchasing a property to begin a monastery near Melbourne, the group of Buddhists in Chiang Mai who had supported me when I stayed in the forest at Doi Indra earlier that year, were also looking to purchase land to begin a monastery. At the end of the rains retreat, the donors purchased some land in the Mae Daeng district outside of Chiang Mai. They contacted me to invite me to accept the offering, but I told them that it was more appropriate to offer the land to Ajahn Anan as my teacher and head of the Sangha at Wat Marp Jan. I explained that he had many monks under his guidance who could spend time on the land and help take responsibility to develop it as a monastery. I offered to travel to Chiang Mai in the New Year and spend some time practising on the land and to give them some teachings but explained that I could only stay there temporarily.

Around the end of the rains retreat, the Victoria Sangha Association purchased seventy-five acres of forest land in East Waburton and Jeffrey Tan travelled to Thailand to offer the title deeds to Ajahn Anan at the beginning of December. The land for the monastery in Melbourne was offered on 5 December 2000, the King's Birthday, and I explained that we would take the title deeds and offer them to Luang Por Liem at Wat Nong Pah Pong on 16 January 2001.

In February, I travelled to Chiang Mai to visit the group of lay devotees and look over the newly donated land. The land was on a hillside mostly cleared of forest and overlooking a reservoir. It was quiet and located only a couple of kilometres away from a village, so it seemed an appropriate location for a monastery. Trees could easily be planted on the cleared areas, and it was only a forty-minute walk to the nearest village to collect alms

food. The donors built a bamboo *kuti* and I spent some time in it practising peacefully in February. The new monastery was offered to Ajahn Anan and became a branch monastery of Wat Marp Jan. Many well-known forest monks lived nearby such as Luang Por Plien, Luang Por Prasit and Luang Por Opat; and over the years they have provided guidance and inspiration to the monks living there.

In March 2001, I returned to Wat Marp Jan for Ajahn Anan's birthday and to make travel arrangements to visit Melbourne and see the newly offered land. The *Upasatha* Hall construction project was almost finished and there were many monks helping Ajahn Anan. I had finished my studies in *Abhidhamma* and my latest translation of a talk by Luang Por Chah, so I had no pressing commitments to hold me back from travelling to Australia. I was still receiving treatment for the inflamed muscles in my legs, but I had been given useful exercises by a physiotherapist, and the pain had been partially reduced. Just before I left the monastery, after paying final respects to Ajahn Anan, I had an unusual visitor to my *kuti*. I was meditating quietly when I heard a loud noise and opened my eyes to see a huge wild boar running out of the jungle. It ran around my *kuti* and then attempted to run up the staircase. I assumed it had been disturbed by hunters and spread *mettā* to it. The monks thought it was a representative of the animals from the mountain coming to wish me well before my travels after spending ten years living at Wat Marp Jan.





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The monk who abides in the Dhamma,
delights in the Dhamma,
meditates on the Dhamma,
and bears the Dhamma well in mind
- he does not fall away from the sublime Dhamma.

Dhammapada 364

Birth Of Buddha Bodhivana Monastery

Search For The Monastery Land Continues

During the rains retreat of 2000, the Soo family and their friends and relatives from Melbourne, grouped together to form the Victoria Sangha Association for the purpose of donating land to establish a branch monastery, in the tradition of Luang Por Chah. This organisation was set up specifically to donate, support and manage a forest monastery and invite disciples of Luang Por Chah to reside there. After failing to secure a piece of land at an auction in August, they continued to search for suitable properties and in September they found a 75-acre piece of forest in East Warburton that had been on the market, unsold, for ten years. The successful purchase of the land in East Warburton by the Association was the culmination of many years of practising Buddhism; and searching for land to build a forest monastery for monks.

Prior to the unexpected invitation which Ajahn Anan and I received to teach in Australia during 1998, I had no previous connection with Australia. I had no plans to start a monastery in Australia or anywhere, but events seemed to develop organically from the initial meeting with lay Buddhists in Melbourne. The sincere faith and commitment of the land donors were clear.

As soon as they put a deposit down to purchase the land in September 2000, they informed Ajahn Anan and myself. From then on, we felt a responsibility to respond positively to the lay Buddhists' sincere faith and intention to donate land. At that time, I had only visited Australia once before in my life; and had only visited the UK twice as a monk; so I had little experience building monasteries or teaching Buddhism in a non-Buddhist country. I did not have any strong missionary zeal to spread the teachings of the Buddha or any strong wish to leave Thailand. My faith remained with the Buddha, Luang Por Chah and Ajahn Anan. I reflected that if events had brought me to the point where I was invited to live and practise on a newly offered piece of land near Melbourne, then it was appropriate to travel there and take up residence, out of compassion, for the lay devotees.

When Jeffrey Tan, the President of the Victoria Sangha Association, formally offered the title deed of the newly purchased land to Ajahn Anan on 5 December 2000, it seemed like a foregone conclusion that I would have to travel to Melbourne to look into the possibility of setting up a monastery. I had no idea how to do it or how easy or difficult the task would be; but I did have confidence in my own training and understanding of the Dhamma and Vinaya. I considered the prospect of living in Australia; and decided that as long as I kept to the principles of good practice I had gained from my sixteen years training as a monk, then I would have the necessary qualities to meet the challenges. I could use the Dhamma and Vinaya to solve any problems that might arise. I had been a fully ordained monk since 1985 and actually studying and practising Buddhism earnestly, as far back as 1979. Ajahn Anan was positive in his support for me to travel to Melbourne, to try it out, to guide the lay devotees, but in the end the decision had to be mine.



Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Kalyano with Jeffrey Tan and Peter Kwan at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2007.

Ajahn Anan and I decided it was appropriate to offer the land title deed to Luang Por Liem, the leader of Luang Por Chah's Sangha, in honour of the wishes of the lay donors. We already planned to travel to Ubon, in January, for the annual memorial retreat at Wat Nong Pah Pong. When Luang Por Liem received the land title, he asked which monk would be willing to go and take up residence in Melbourne. The assembled monks all assumed it would be me. I did not refuse, but I did humbly explain that I had little experience and it would be best if we went to Melbourne, on a trial basis.

During our visit to Melbourne in 1998, we met many kind and generous Buddhists, so I assumed that I was unlikely to be left to starve in the forests of the Yarra Ranges. I had previously seen some of the large areas of secluded forest around Melbourne; and assumed that even though I had not actually seen the land that had been offered to the Sangha, it would probably provide a suitable place for Buddhist monks to live and practise. I asked Venerable Anando, who was staying with Ajahn Anan at the time, if he would be willing to accompany me to Melbourne, as an assistant and Dhamma friend. Generally when travelling to a new place, two monks are considered better than one. Venerable Anando kindly agreed to travel with me; and stay in Melbourne temporarily. By March 2001, we had a simple plan to travel to Australia, after Ajahn Anan's birthday, at the end of March. Meanwhile, while waiting for our arrival in Melbourne, Jeffrey showed the newly acquired land to a few senior monks like Luang Por Boonyarit, Ajahn Ian Ariyesako and Ajahn Thiradhammo. They agreed that it had the potential to be developed into a forest monastery.

While I had stayed on retreat in the newly offered land in Chiang Mai, I had the chance to contemplate what living overseas away from Wat Marp Jan might involve. I considered that in the

same way as I had encountered obstacles and challenges, when going out from Wat Nanachat in the early years of my training and more recently Wat Marp Jan, I would have to rely on my training in the Dhamma and Vinaya to solve any obstacles that arose in Australia. I had been in places before where the material support was uncertain, and the physical and social conditions were unpredictable, but I had always found a way to learn from and practise with the situations I encountered. I had no doubt about the path of Dhamma practice or that the Four Noble Truths are a vehicle for liberation.

Venerable Anando and I flew to Melbourne on 4 April 2001. After offering us a meal, Jeffrey took us to see the new land on the very first day. The autumn weather was still warm. The first thing I remembered was getting out of the car, in the forest; and smelling the strong scent of eucalyptus oil that filled the air. The mountain air was warm and fresh which made the atmosphere of the forest pleasantly refreshing after our long trip and it was also peaceful and silent. We searched around and soon realised that there was almost no flat land available to build accommodation, but we considered that Wat Marp Jan also had little flat land; and Ajahn Anan had simply managed the best he could with the available conditions when building the monastery. We felt the important thing was to uphold the practice of the Dhamma-Vinaya and the way of training we had received from Luang Por Chah and Ajahn Anan. The forest was peaceful; and the lay supporters were sincere, so the topography and landscape of the forest that had been offered, although challenging, was not our most important concern.

Jeffrey and his family agreed that we should look for a rental property in East Warburton within walking distance of the monastery land. I knew it would take time to plan and construct buildings and infrastructure, so we agreed that the lay devotees

should rent a small two-bedroom cabin that they found about one kilometre away from the monastery. Every day, we walked up the hill to explore the new land and make some simple plans for its development. On one of these first walks exploring the forest, we were slowly pushing through the undergrowth, when we noticed two huge birds sitting on a low tree branch nearby. As we got within a few metres of the tree, they slowly glided off their perch revealing to us how enormous their wing span was. We had never seen such large and powerful-looking birds in Thailand. They were wedged-tailed eagles and it seemed like they were giving us a welcome to the mountain.

Whether I meditated in the rented cabin or on the new land, one reflection that arose during that time was the knowledge that the future was completely unknown. I could not be certain about my future in Australia; and whether a monastery could be successfully established. Ever since I became a monk, I was familiar with contemplating the uncertainty of conditions and I had learnt to live with the reflection on uncertainty until it was normal for me. My refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha was certain. The insights I had gained from my training and practice were certain, but how future events would unfold; and what obstacles we would encounter were still unknowns. The challenge was to maintain clear awareness of the difference, in my heart, between the Dhamma and the uncertainty of worldly conditions.

Paper Work. Paper Work. Paper Work.

We began making plans to apply to the local Council for permission to build a monastery. At the same time, we made new friends in the Buddhist community near and far; and amongst our neighbours. The local community's first reaction to seeing monks was sometimes one of suspicion, sometimes one of pleasant surprise. One lady told her friends not to put

food in our alms bowls when we walked past their houses in the morning, because she thought we were lazy; and just trying to scrounge a free meal without doing anything to earn it. When she found out that we arose at 4:00am every morning to meditate and chant, gave regular teachings and meditation instruction and did our own building and maintenance work, she changed her mind. She was soon coming out of her house to offer us food with her neighbours. A local Christian hermit monk, Father Michael Mifsud, visited us and was very positive in expressing his support for what we were doing. He was very open-minded about Buddhism and even mentioned that he thought he might have been a Buddhist monk, in a previous life. He kindly arranged for me to meet the spiritual leaders in the local community; and to give a talk to a local church group. His kindness went a long way to helping us become accepted by the local Christian groups.

As long as we lived in a rented house, it was hard for people to visualise building a monastery; or become very enthusiastic about the project; so we prepared an application for permission to build *kutis* and a meditation hall in the forest. The local Yarra Ranges Council required what seemed to be endless plans and documented information on the building design and infrastructure, bushfire protection, vegetation removal and environmental management plans, wastewater management plans, cultural heritage management plans and so on, before they could consider our request. It was nothing like building a monastery in Thailand where you can pretty much go ahead and build, without any restrictions or oversight from the authorities.

We understood why the local planning laws required us to provide so much detailed information, but it was challenging for monks and volunteers to prepare such comprehensive information; and explain to the Council how monks live and

practice in a way that made sense in planning law. We prepared as much information as we could ourselves or with volunteers. Occasionally, professional consultants were hired. Without prior experience in planning and design, I looked at the task as similar to the other chores, and work projects I had done as a monk. Even simple tasks such as sweeping leaves and chopping firewood require skill that one gains through applying mindfulness and clear comprehension. Luang Por Chah had taught us how he learnt to sew new robes by studying and observing the pattern and style of his old robes; and giving mindful consideration to the task in his meditation, until he had visualised and worked out the technique for cutting and sewing a new robe. We used our training in mindfulness and wise reflection; and applied it to the task of preparing documents and plans for the monastery planning application.

We needed to explain the details of monastic life to the planning officials; and justify why we needed nine separate *kutis* spread around the forest, in secluded locations. The Council officers thought we should build one single accommodation building with nine bedrooms. We described the meditative lifestyle and training rules of monks; and said we needed our nine bedrooms located individually in the forest. We pointed out that monks do not cook, drive cars or earn money; and every day we depended on kind people to offer alms, either out on the street or by bringing donations of cooked food to the monastery. We expressed our preference for minimising the clearance of trees and vegetation as we aimed to live simply in the forest; and benefit from being close to nature. Generally, the government officers were sympathetic and supportive. They also welcomed the friendliness and goodwill displayed by the monks and our lay devotees; as some officers told us it was not uncommon for them to encounter negative feedback from the public, as they carried out their duties.

The uncertainty of whether we would successfully gain permission to build a residence for forest monks meant that each day, I contemplated the uncertainties and practised letting go of any expectations, desires or attachments, relating to the future. I reflected that the building of the monastery would ultimately depend on the amount of good *kamma* of the local Buddhists; and the *Devas* helping them. One evening, after attending a meeting in town to make some decisions on the documents needed for submission to the local Council; I was travelling in a lay devotee's car back to the monastery, from Melbourne, I saw a beautiful sheet of white light arise into the sky, from the direction of the monastery. I had seen a similar light in Thailand and at the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya, India, where the Buddha experienced his Awakening. I took the vision of the white light briefly filling the night sky, above the monastery, as a positive sign for the future.

We submitted our application for permission to build a monastery in June 2001. While waiting for the processing of the application, we visited some of the other monasteries in Australia and New Zealand. We wanted to get to know the local monks and nuns, and see how they had built and organised their monasteries. I also visited Thailand briefly to attend the annual meeting of the Luang Por Chah Sangha where I paid respects to the senior monks; and gave them an update on how we were living and practicing in Australia. At the meeting, I formally made a request for Buddha Bodhivana Monastery to become an official branch monastery, in the Luang Por Chah tradition. It seemed appropriate to take this step because we had applied to the local government, in Australia, for permission to build a Buddhist monastery; and we wanted the monastery to be supported by both the local government and the Sangha in Thailand.

When I returned to Melbourne, we were ready to enter our first rains retreat in Australia. It seemed that the lay community were genuinely keen to support monastics. From that time onwards, we never ran short of volunteers willing to put food in our bowls on alms round; or drive out to East Warburton to offer us food for our daily meal, at the monastery. The first couple of weeks we stayed in East Warburton, we had relied for our daily meal, on a small number of visitors from town; and also our first resident *Anagārika*, Mr Soo. However, after celebrating the Buddha's Awakening on the full moon of May, we never had to rely on a resident cook for meals again. We took it as a good sign for the future of the monastery, that there were always people volunteering to offer food to the monks, even though we never asked anyone to do this. We continued to walk on alms round to local houses each day; and in addition, lay devotees drove out to the rented cabin to offer food. Some devotees were local, some were from Melbourne, and even further away; and we were grateful for the support. Our neighbour had a pet pig in their back yard. Everyday, any food scraps not taken home by lay visitors were fed to the friendly pig. The pig became so attached to us; and the food we shared with it. After a while, it dug its own tunnel under the boundary fence; and each morning turned up at the kitchen door, at the correct time, to join our meal. If no one noticed her, she walked right into the house, with a grunt of happiness, announcing her arrival and welcoming the monks.

Luang Por Boonyarit's Reminder

Not To Be Born Again

Before the rains retreat, Luang Por Boonyarit from Ratanapradeep Temple in Adelaide visited us and gave some words of encouragement. Jeffrey and his family hosted him, in Melbourne, before they brought him over to see the land and meet us. It was an honour to have such a senior and highly respected monk visit. He encouraged us to put all our effort into

our training in meditation, until we had developed firm *samādhī* and clear insight into the empty nature of the mind. Luang Por Boonyarit had lived in Australia for almost twenty-five years. He was a good example of a forest monk who had come to Australia to cultivate the Dhamma; and teach Buddhism to the community. He explained that living in a non-Buddhist country might bring up some *dukkha* or suffering for us, but he said that *dukkha* was useful, because it makes us sick and tired of craving and becoming. That would lead us to *Nibbāna*. He reminded us that if we understand suffering and its cause, we do not need to be born again.

Before the rains retreat, we also hosted a brief visit from Tan Chao Khun Maha Samai and Ajahn Jayasaro who kindly gave us some teachings and words of encouragement. We visited Ajahn Viradhammo at Wat Buddha Dhamma in Sydney before he headed back to Canada and shared stories about building monasteries and teaching Buddhism in western countries. We were always happy to host visits from senior monks who gave us encouragement and shared their experience with us.

Our first rains retreat, in East Warburton, gave us an idea of the typical winter weather conditions, including how much rain the area received. We relied on a wood stove to heat the whole cabin. We had to chop our own firewood on the monastery land; and transport it down to the cabin, with the help of the volunteers who offered the daily meal. As we walked around the property, we noticed that outsiders were regularly trespassing on the monastery land; and cutting down trees to steal the timber for firewood. We were unable to stop this until the monks moved into the newly constructed *kutis* on the land, the following year. We maintained our daily routine of morning and evening meditation, throughout the rains retreat. We continued to explain different aspects of the monastic training and the

Buddha's teachings to the daily visitors; and taught meditation each Saturday night to a small number of people in the rented cabin.

At the end of the retreat, I travelled to England to visit my family and gave them news of how the monastery was progressing in Melbourne. My mother was disappointed that I had decided to build a monastery, on the other side of the globe, but happy that I could still travel home to visit and guide her in her Buddhist practice. She and my sister were visiting Amaravati Monastery, regularly, to offer food to the Sangha; and participated in meditation workshops and retreats. As my mother became more familiar with the monks and nuns who lived at the monastery, she could discuss the teachings and gained more insight and understanding of the truths the Buddha was pointing to. This had always been an aspiration of mine. She even began inviting monks and nuns to receive food offerings at her house; and used the occasions to discuss the Dhamma. She learnt how to use terms such as mindfulness, wise reflection and letting go in her normal vocabulary.

The other reason I visited England was to receive the blessing of Luang Por Sumedho and the senior monks, from the European branch monasteries, for Buddha Bodhivana Monastery, to become a branch monastery in the Luang Por Chah tradition. Luang Por Sumedho was always very supportive of our efforts. We invited him to visit us in Melbourne. On the way back, I visited some of the senior monks in Thailand; and then returned to Melbourne to prepare for our first Forest Cloth Offering (Pa Ba Ceremony), on the anniversary of the birth of the monastery, on 5 December 2001. We held the ceremony in the forest to give members of the Buddhist community the chance to view the monastery land for the first time; and offer support for the new project. The event was held in a traditional way, with everybody sitting on mats on the ground of the forest,

in the open air. The event provided inspiration for our first working bee where volunteers helped clear the vegetation, from the old logging track, which ran up the hill through the centre of the monastery.

We erected a simple, open-sided, tin-roofed shed in a clearing in the forest and it became our first accommodation. In December, it became the site for the recitation of the *Pāṭimokkha*, when we had four monks resident for the first time, in the history of the monastery. The chanting of the *Pāṭimokkha* only takes place when four or more monks are resident together; and was another sign that the monastery was more permanently established. The event was a cause for great happiness to arise in the hearts of the monks; and a positive sign for the future. In January 2002, more monks came from overseas to join us, and local Buddhists from Melbourne were requesting to take up the monastic training, so we accepted an offer to use an additional cabin, further along the same street as the first rented cabin. We also received the donation of an old caravan.

Luang Por Plien's Prediction

In February, we hosted a visit from Luang Por Plien who kindly spent much of his time walking around the monastery land; and giving us words of encouragement, to continue with our plan to build the monastery. One night, after we meditated together, we discussed the planning application with him and explained that the nine local Councillors would soon vote on whether or not to approve our application. We invited Luang Por Plien to spread *mettā* to everyone involved; and also to the local *Devas*. All the local Councillors had visited the monastery and seemed genuinely supportive. A few months earlier, a man from Melbourne had purchased a property adjoining the monastery and taken a dislike to the idea of living, next door to a Buddhist monastery. There was no house on his land. He

had purchased the land knowing that the monastery was his neighbour, and yet he still exercised his right to object to our planning application. The man quickly built up a strong dislike for the monastery; and made concerted efforts to turn the local community against us on many fronts. To his frustration, his efforts only seemed to foster more support for the monastery from people near and far, because he drew their attention to our application; and most people thought it was a good idea. At first, we hardly knew any locals other than our immediate neighbours, but Alan, a local cafe owner, felt that the presence of a Buddhist monastery would be an asset to the community; and he began encouraging people to write letters of support for our application to the Council.

By the time we reached the day in February, when the local Council voted on the application, they had already received nearly 500 letters of support for our proposal. It became one of the most popular planning applications, in the history of our local government area. The Council officers were obliged to file each letter they received and write a response; so eventually they contacted me to request that I ask our supporters to stop writing letters, on behalf of the monastery's planning application. Answering those letters had become a full-time job for them! I replied honestly, that we only knew a few of the people who had written in favour of our application personally; and that we had not asked a single person to write a letter in support of our application. All the letters of support had arisen out of the local population's genuine goodwill and enthusiasm for the monastery; and also in response to hearing that the neighbour was opposing it on unreasonable grounds. The Council officers were surprised to hear that we did not actually canvas any support in the local community and that the local support was all spontaneous. The Council and its planning department continued to support the application, as they said there were no

legal grounds to dismiss it.

When we asked Luang Por Plien, how he thought events would unfold at the planning meeting, he said with confidence that the Council members would vote in favour of the monastery, eight to one. On the night of the vote, it turned out exactly as he had predicted. After the Council's vote in favour of the monastery, the monastery committee members visited me to let me know of the result. That night an unusually heavy summer rainstorm fell on East Warburton. The rain continued all night; and eventually washed away the surface of the access track to the newly approved monastery. Strangely, so much rain fell in such a short space of time that the weather event made a brief headline on the national news; and was even noted in some newspapers in the UK. My mother, who had become familiar with the name of Warburton township, read about the record rainfall a few days later and sent me a copy of the news article. Heavy summer rainfall is rare but not unknown in the area, but the preferred explanation for the extreme weather event chosen by many people associated with the monastery was that the *Devas* and *Nāgas* were celebrating the planning approval.

Luang Por Plien kindly gave us his time to look at each location chosen to build a *kuti*. After he sat in meditation on one of the sites, he made the prediction that at some time in the future, a practitioner would reach Awakening on that same spot. From his special knowledge gained in meditation, Luang Por Plien also pointed out where the important *Devas* and *Nāgas* were living in the forest. He also made a surprising suggestion that even though we had a positive outcome from the Council vote approving the planning application to build the monastery, ultimately, we would not construct the main buildings on the locations we had specified in the plans. We had received permission to build a meditation hall on the only bit of flat

land on the property, but Luang Por Plien suggested we would actually build our hall in a different location which was close to water.

A Blessing

After the approval of our monastery plans, the neighbour objected to the monastery's permit and took the Yarra Ranges Council, who were the responsible authority, to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to dispute the permit. It took a few more months of legal debate to confirm the monastery's building approval in court. The neighbour had no solid reasons to object to the monastery; and this was borne out at the tribunal where the judges ruled in favour of allowing the monastery to proceed. Before they ruled in favour of the monastery, I was pondering what the outcome would be when one day I saw a silver-coloured *Deva* appear inside my room, in the rented cabin that we still use. The heavenly being appeared dressed in traditional Thai style clothing and head dress; and had followed us from Thailand, to give support.

From Winery To Place For Liberation

While we were waiting for the outcome of the neighbour's appeal against the Council's decision, we visited our other neighbour, Mr Gordon Valentine, who owned the winery and farm that adjoined the eastern boundary of the monastery. One Sunday lunchtime, we walked up to his house and Jeffrey took the opportunity to ask if he was interested to sell his winery. To our surprise he said yes; and immediately wrote down a price for the winery, on the back of an envelope. That day we agreed to buy the land which contained the house, winery shed, grapevines and about one hundred and twenty-five acres of beautiful forest. The small house had a power supply and water supply; and a large brick warehouse that could be renovated into a simple hall and kitchen. In the end, Luang Por Plien's



prediction about building the monastery next to water seemed quite possible as the new property contained several ponds.

Mr Valentine kindly allowed us to move into the property six months before the purchase was settled, which meant that five monks were able to spend the rains retreat of 2002, using the old farmhouse, a caravan and a couple of hastily constructed timber *kutis*, for accommodation. We spent the rains retreat keeping up a programme of morning and evening meditation; and stayed up all night practising meditation on the Observance Days, as we had done in Thailand. We began renovating the farmhouse to provide for the needs of the resident monks, *Anagārika* trainees and lay visitors. The winery contained thousands of grapevines which needed to be removed; and fields with about one hundred cows on them. Each day, the monks had to wade through mud and cow dung as they walked to the forest where we built the new *kutis*. Sometimes we slipped over in the mud, and some monks even got chased by the cows.

The monks quickly became used to life in the forest; and the resident birds and animals had to get used to us. During the spring months, the mother magpies and swamp hens who were not yet familiar with the monks, chased us out of instinctive protection for their offspring. We learnt how to stay warm in the winter by preparing firewood; removed the fallen gum trees; and we continued to build the monastery with minimal funding and little infrastructure. The monks had to rely on the Buddha's words to inspire us through any hardship arising out of the lack of facilities or from the climate. The Buddha reminded us that patient endurance is the supreme destroyer of defilements; and the words became our mantra. Each *kuti* we built was insulated to reduce the cold temperatures we experienced at night, but the monks had to use outdoor pit toilets, which were basically a hole in the ground covered by boards. It was not unusual for a

monk to squat down and use his pit toilet, in the forest, only to find a wombat or wallaby bouncing by. The monks worked with volunteers to construct *kutis* and toilets. We were grateful for every bit of assistance we received from the lay community, and it gave volunteers the chance to make merit.

Luang Por Tui Offers Inspiration

In 2002 we invited Luang Por Tui to visit the monastery. He encouraged us to look after the forest; and saw it as a great asset for the Buddhist community. He reminded us how the forests of Thailand and many other countries were disappearing rapidly, and that Australia had a great potential to provide places for monks to live and practice. We took him out to see the large forest areas in the national parks near the monastery and he noted that there was so much natural forest available with only a small population occupying it, that it should last for a long time into the future. Luang Por Tui emphasised that building the monastery depended on us developing our own strong foundation of *kammaṭṭhāna* or training in meditation for abandoning the mental defilements. If our internal cultivation of the Dhamma was firm, then the external construction of accommodation and infrastructure for the monastery would be more straight-forward. Having lived with him previously, I was familiar with his style of training and the way he talked about the cultivation of the Dhamma. It was inspiring to walk on alms round with him in the morning; and show him around the forest. He thought that as we lived a long way out of the city, we would not have so many visitors; and that meant we would have more time and less distractions for our meditation practice. Everyday, Luang Por Tui reminded us to be frugal in our use of the basic requisites in the monastery so that we would not be a burden to the laity; and to focus our efforts on cultivating mindfulness and wisdom.



Walking on alms round with Luang Por Tui and the Sangha
at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2004.



Before the rains retreat in 2002, I travelled to Thailand to join the annual meeting of Luang Por Chah Sangha, where I gave an update to the assembled senior monks on how we were practising; and how the monastery was developing. I received many positive words of support; and expressions of understanding, when I described some of the challenges we faced. Some of the senior monks had already visited the overseas branch monasteries; and were aware of the obstacles of building a monastery in a non-Buddhist country; and the practical differences between training as a monk in Thailand and overseas. Most of the advice reiterated the message that monks should find strength in training in the monastic discipline; and cultivating a foundation of mindfulness and insight, the way that Luang Por Chah had encouraged. Over and over again, the senior monks reminded us of the simple guiding principle that if a monk looks after his practice, then the practice will look after him. The emphasis always comes back to training in the monastic rules and cultivating the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path for the realisation of the Four Noble Truths.

I stopped in Thailand, on the way back to Australia, and I invited Ajahn Anan and other senior monks to preside over the casting of two new bronze Buddha statues for the new monastery. The first was a Buddha in the walking pose, which was modelled on the large Buddha statue at the National Buddhist Centre at Buddha Monthon, near Bangkok. This seemed an appropriate image to take to Melbourne where we were introducing the Buddhist teachings as it symbolised the Buddha spreading the teachings to new areas and populations of people. The other statue was a replica of the Buddha sitting in meditation protected by a *Nāga*, which was modelled on the statue in the *Upasatha* Hall at Wat Marp Jan. Having spent ten years under the guidance of Ajahn Anan this also seemed an appropriate image to bring to the new monastery. Furthermore, Luang Por

Plien had mentioned the presence of *Devas* and *Nāgas* in the forest and their role in protecting practitioners since the time of the Buddha.

Freedom From Old Debts

In October 2002, the neighbour who owned land next to the monastery lost his appeal against the Council's decision to grant us a permit to build the monastery. A few weeks later, I was walking up the gravel driveway of the monastery with Venerable Anando when I spontaneously experienced a wave of rapture arising out of my heart that was so strong it led to a feeling of complete weightlessness in my body. For the next few hours, it felt like I was floating rather than walking; and the normal heaviness and tiredness of my body completely disappeared. At the time that I experienced the profound rapture and joy, I noticed a car parked at the corner of the main road and it turned out that the occupants were real estate agents beginning the process of selling the neighbour's land. The man had lost his appeal and so he quickly decided to sell his property and move on. The neighbour had made quite a few provocative and untrue statements to the monks, the local residents and the Council officers, so no one was surprised to see him leave.

The neighbour's extreme behaviour had tested our own patience, restraint and integrity as he exposed the monks and monastery committee members to a continuous stream of false accusations, lies and provocative speech. The whole episode became a good lesson that proved the value of cultivating these virtuous qualities; which in the end, can lead one to overcome even the most stubborn adversaries. We never meant the neighbour any harm and tolerated his anti-social behaviour, on many occasions. We were happy to forgive him when he sold his property. In another quirk of fate, the man who purchased the neighbouring land turned out to be related to a professor

at Melbourne University, who I had previously helped when he was translating some Dhamma teachings by Luang Por Buddhadasa from Thai into English. The new owner was very happy to be living next to a Buddhist monastery.

Building A Monastery. Upholding A Good Heart.

Once the lay committee acquired the old winery for the Sangha, we had a choice whether to build the main monastic buildings, on the original forest land, according to the approved permit; or to switch locations and build on the newly acquired property with the farmhouse. We decided to build the nine *kutis* for the monks on the original land, as it was secluded forest and suitable for monastic accommodation; and to develop the main monastery facilities on the newly acquired land which had a better access road, electricity, telephone, and water supply. In January 2003, we took full possession of the new property and from then on, we used the winery shed as a meditation hall and kitchen; and the farmhouse as a dining room for the monks.

Some lay supporters in Bangkok had the faith to offer a beautiful bronze Buddha statue and Venerable Thanuttaro, who was visiting from Chithurst Monastery, constructed a small timber *vihāra* at the front of the monastery, to house it. Once Venerable Anando had finished making a carved timber sign for the monastery, the Buddha statue and the monastery sign became the first thing visitors saw, when they arrived at the monastery gate. It gave them the feeling that they were entering a monastery, rather than a farm.

Almost every week, we arranged working bees for the laity, who courageously gave up their time, to help the Sangha remove the grapevines, posts, wire and irrigation pipes. Many of these items were recycled into new building projects and some things were given away. A few people, who were unfamiliar with the monks' rules, questioned our decision not to continue growing

grapes and producing wine for sale like in European Christian monasteries. The monastic discipline did not allow that. The aim of the monk's life is for realisation of *Nibbāna*, not selling wine. Even the former owner of the winery informed his customers that the monks would be using the land for a higher spiritual purpose. He was very happy with the development of the monastery.

We continued building basic accommodation for the resident Sangha; and developing facilities for the growing number of lay visitors. Every senior monk whom we invited to visit us and to give teachings, understood that in a new monastery, things were not easy or convenient and they never complained about the simple accommodation. Each teacher reminded us to uphold the heart of the Buddha's teachings and to continue the practice of cultivating the path of letting go of greed, anger and delusion. Luang Por Chah had periodically led the Sangha in work projects at Wat Nong Pah Pong and as building and labour costs are high in Australia, it was natural for myself and the monks to offer our time, energy and skills to help with the building and maintenance projects, and minimise the burden of costs on the lay community.

Friends In The Dhamma

From our first year in Australia, we endeavoured to invite monks from other branch monasteries to visit and spend time in the monastery as they have experience in monastic training and meditation, and a unique set of knowledge and skills to share in the spirit of friendship or *kalyāṇamitta*. This is especially helpful for both newly ordained monks and lay practitioners, who are learning the teachings for the first time. I was invited to start the monastery to facilitate the teaching of Buddhism and to provide an opportunity for Australian Buddhists to train as monastics. Once the local government had given us permission



Sangha members making forest pathways
at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2006.



to proceed with the building of the monastery, it seemed to be a sign that the wider community was ready to support the regular presence of Buddhist monks; and that we had moved on from the initial period of uncertainty when we were testing out how feasible it was to live and train as alms mendicants, in Australia.

We had permission to build the monastery; and had acquired additional property. Hence it seemed appropriate to focus on building an ordination hall; and establishing a proper *Sīmā* boundary for *Bhikkhu* (monk) ordinations; and other formal transactions of the Sangha. The Buddha once pointed out that only when local people had enough faith to renounce the worldly life and come forward to request *Bhikkhu* ordination could you say that the Buddhist teachings had really become established in a new area.

In May 2003, during the full moon of *Visākhā*, we arranged our first *Pabbajjā* or novice ordination ceremony; and held it in a rented marquee. The monastery had no formally established *Sīmā* or boundary for carrying out the ceremony to bring new monks into the Sangha, or any proper meeting hall where the laity could join with the Sangha, to meditate and receive teachings. The monastery's first *Kāṭhina* cloth offering was also held in a marquee and, perhaps because the *Devas* were so happy, a fierce storm began blowing as the monks chanted the *Paritta* verses of protection, with such strong wind that it almost blew the tent away. Events made it obvious to everyone that the monastery needed a more permanent structure to hold ordinations, monastic events and for teaching meditation to the public.

Another Branch Grows From The Large Tree

In June, I travelled to Thailand for the annual gathering of senior monks. At that meeting, Buddha Bodhivana Monastery was recognised as a full branch monastery in the tradition of



Ajahn Kalyano in the forest of
Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2016.

Luang Por Chah. I had been a monk for eighteen years; and was content in my practice of the path to Awakening, so I did not feel burdened by the responsibility of looking after the new monastery in a non-Buddhist country. I had *muditā* and appreciation for the laity who had sacrificed, so much time and material support, to establish the monastery; and were able to witness the success of their aspiration to support a branch monastery, in the tradition of Luang Por Chah.

At the beginning of the rains retreat in 2003, we were using the old winery shed as the kitchen; and for alms round on rainy days; but it was obviously not designed as a meeting place for large numbers of people, and had certain limitations. On the first day of the rains retreat, Jeffrey, president of the monastery committee, took some photographs of the monks receiving alms from the laity, inside the old shed; and some unusual images of light appeared on the pictures. When the photographs were shown to different teachers, the general view was that the lights appearing were an auspicious sign for the new monastery.

What makes something auspicious? You might say a combination of several factors. When the Sangha and laity have faith in the Triple Gem; and revere and uphold the training in the Dhamma-Vinaya. The monks and lay devotees were united in their wish to sincerely preserve the way of training that they have received from their teacher, Luang Por Chah. These factors can make a place auspicious. The more the monastics and lay devotees cultivate correct understanding of the Dhamma, in their hearts and minds, it is auspicious. A third factor might be the presence of *Devas* and beings with merit, supporting the Sangha and laity; and giving their *anumodanā* or appreciation for the good that is done.

We used the old farmhouse as an eating hall; for teaching Dhamma and meditation to visitors. From the first year, it regularly became overcrowded with the increasing number of people who wished to offer food to the monks and receive teachings. The farmhouse was renamed the *Bhikkhu Vihara*. We had no choice but to continue using the house while we renovated and improved it. The monks had to be patient and tolerant of the limitations of the physical surroundings; and keep all expectations to a minimum. Even the most simple tasks such as washing and drying robes were not easy, until we had built proper facilities. One night, I lost my towel when it was dragged off the simple clothes line by a wombat who was living in a hole, under the farmhouse. The wombat habitually picked up the monks' possessions and left them lying out in the open. The wombat dragged my towel off into the night and I only found it by chance, a year later, in another wombat hole on the edge of the forest. Foxes stole our shoes, birds and rats chewed our robes; and possums lifted the roof tiles and moved into the roof space of the old house; seemingly aware that the monks would not kill them. We heard them snoring above us, during the middle of the day, which was a reminder for us to be diligent in the practice. When we sealed the roof, the possum moved into the tool shed, and slept in a bucket. When the monks cleared out the shed and picked him out of the bucket, he casually strolled over to another bucket and settled into that for a sleep.

The monks continued to practise in their new surroundings. We maintained our patience and good humour when meeting with any difficulties. We continued to uphold the practice of meditating, all night on the weekly Observance Days, even though the winter weather was cold and damp; and the conditions in the old farmhouse were cramped. The Sangha just got on with their practice and no one complained. It was obvious that it would take some time to improve the facilities



Chanting with Luang Por Plien (first on the right)
at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2003. The 'light' by the
Buddha statue was deemed an auspicious sign.



so none of the monks made a problem out of the situation. Luang Por Chah encouraged his students to participate in frequent meetings, respect the elders of the community, practise mindfulness and restraint, and contemplate the Dhamma. These were the principles we tried to uphold; and they allowed us to adjust to our new environment, without creating suffering. Luang Por Chah taught monks to live in contentment with the basic requisites that are offered; and not give in to the endless human desire to accumulate more. He praised monks who learnt how to adapt to changing conditions. Contentment comes through cultivating an attitude of moderation; and knowing how to practise restraint in the face of one's desires. When developed, this quality allows the mind to settle down easily in meditation. It is a beautiful quality to see. We tried to cultivate kindness and compassion for each other, the laity who supported us, and the wildlife we shared the forest with. We relied on continuous effort to develop the qualities of renunciation, loving-kindness and restraint. The result was that in general, we lived in an atmosphere of peace and cooperation; and our meditation practice could progress.

Reverence For Elders

By the time the *Kāṭhina* season arrived, the farmhouse renovation had progressed and we had another new *kuti* available, in the forest. We invited senior monks from Thailand, including Ajahn Kampong, Ajahn Jundee and Ajahn Nyanadhammo to join us for the *Kāṭhina* cloth offering. The presence of senior monks from Luang Por Chah's tradition gave us a chance to hear their perspectives on the Dhamma; and show them how we lived and practised in Australia. We were happy to receive guidance and advice from the visiting monks; and they gave encouragement and teachings to the lay devotees.

After the *Kaṭhina* offering, we hosted a visit from Bhante Gunaratana, the well-known Sri Lankan elder with vast experience from teaching Buddhism, in the USA and around the world. He was happy to share stories and reflections from his own life and efforts establishing monasteries and teaching Buddhism, around the world. He explained to us that the purpose of the Buddha's teaching is to provide the one direct path that leads people to overcome suffering, and the realisation of *Nibbāna*. He also reminded us of the Buddha's teaching contained in the *Bodhirājakumāra Sutta*; and the importance of maintaining the five factors of faith, good health, honesty, energy and wisdom, for success in meditation.

In February 2004, we invited Luang Por Liem to join us for the Buddhist festival of *Māgha Pūjā*. It was an honour for the monastic community and a great boost for the lay devotees. Most of the monks, living in the monastery, had trained in Thailand; and had great respect for Luang Por Liem. He was appreciated for his personal qualities of wisdom and compassion; his vast experience gained from many years of teaching the Dhamma; and overseeing the branch monasteries of Luang Por Chah. He was also the preceptor for some of the monks.

Each visiting teacher brought their own perspective on the practice of Dhamma; and provided a living example of how to apply and practise the principles, contained in the Buddha's teachings. Those teachers who were direct disciples of Luang Por Chah gave their unique insights into his teachings. We invited them to offer feedback and advice, based on how they perceived our practice was going in the monastery; and if anything they saw, was not in line with the teachings of Luang Por Chah. One of the challenges of living in a country, with only a small Buddhist population, is that there is little collective knowledge or understanding of the Buddhist teachings or

monastic training rules; and, in particular the role of monks. Visiting teachers play a central role in educating both monks and lay devotees, to understand the aims of monks in their training, and how the laity can support and benefit from that.

The Suffering Of The Animal Realm

The monastery is a place where we study and train in the Buddhist path; but in the beginning, we still lived, side by side, with a working farm and cows roamed the grassland at the lower part of the new monastery land. The cows kept the grass short for bushfire protection. Animals are conscious beings. They are trapped in the animal realm as a result of their old *kamma*. Their minds are dull, dark and full of fear, but their minds have the seeds of Dhamma present, and they aspire to happiness just like humans. One night, not long after moving into the new property, I dreamt that the cows were encircling me; and calling for my help as they cried tears of sadness; because they knew they were destined to be slaughtered. We considered raising funds to buy all the cattle from our neighbour, so that they could live out their time, in the monastery, until they died of old age. Unfortunately, it was not a practical option as the cows would become a long-term financial burden on the Sangha and lay community. There are also many rules and regulations to be followed in looking after animals in Australia. I did make the aspiration that one day, I would end the raising of cattle for the meat industry, in the vicinity of the monastery, as a response to the cows' wish to live.

We began planting trees on some areas of grassland; and at the same time, I drew up architectural plans to build an *Uposatha* Hall, for the monastery. Soon, a sponsor came forward to offer a second-hand tractor for mowing the grass; and eventually we no longer needed to accept the neighbour's cows into the monastery land. For another fifteen years, the cows lived

next door on the neighbouring farm, which meant that every summer large numbers of flies descended on the monastery, and swarmed around visitors at mealtime. Only when the monastery purchased the remainder of the neighbouring grassland in 2018, and the cows finally disappeared did the number of flies drop significantly, making the summers more pleasant for residents and visitors.

Once the grapevines were gone, we planted hundreds of trees and native shrubs. Gradually more native birds and animals returned to the area. We kept fire breaks of cleared grassland, around the buildings. Over time, these became areas grazed by native animals. The monks learnt to sidestep kangaroos, wallabies, wombats and deer when they walked backed to their *kutis*, in the forest at night. We continued to build more *kutis* with the help of volunteers and occasionally, professionals. We built a *kuti* at the top of the monastery hill, one kilometre away from the Dining Hall, which was popular with the monks because of its quiet and peaceful ambience. Some monks said that during the time they lived in that *kuti*, they had their deepest and most profound insights and meditation experiences of their life.

I found that, in between managing building projects and teaching visitors, I still had plenty of time available for my personal cultivation of the Dhamma. I followed Luang Por Chah's instruction that a monk should never forget to teach himself, as he teaches others. I aimed to use the forest that had been offered to the Sangha as was intended: for monks to cultivate the *Samaṇa Dhamma* or the spiritual qualities of a recluse. The Victorian forest is quite different from the Thai jungle. The trees are generally taller in Australia. There are more of them; and one encounters birds and animals regularly. Most of the time, the forest here is quiet and peaceful; and very suitable for cultivating mindfulness and deep states of *samādhi*.

The word forest comes from the root meaning to be ‘outside’. We found that living in the forested mountains, outside Melbourne, gave us a true sense of seclusion. We were secluded from the large urban population; and their activities in Melbourne. In reality, we were secluded from the rest of the world. I encouraged the growing number of residents, in the monastery, to focus their hearts on training in the monastic discipline and meditation; because the monastery provides such a rare and excellent opportunity to do this in an undisturbed fashion. As we entered the rains retreat in 2004, we continued with regular meetings for meditation, chanting and Dhamma teaching. With more *kutis* available in the forest, we allowed individual Sangha members to have time for personal retreats.

Preserve The Forest For Future Monks

After the rains retreat, we invited Luang Por Tui to visit the monastery for the second time. He continued to encourage us in our efforts to uphold the way of training we had received from Luang Por Mun and Luang Por Chah. He was very positive about our efforts to plant trees and expand the areas of forest, in the monastery. He said that preserving the forest is a gift for future generations of Buddhists. He also praised and encouraged the discipline and frugality of the Sangha; and explained that these qualities provide nourishment for spiritual growth. The small and simple *kutis* we used did not have running water or electricity; and our use of pit toilets was similar to many of the *kutis* in his own monastery.

Luang Por Tui enjoyed walking around the forest looking at the trees, birds and animals and contemplating the Dhamma, as he went. He often gave brief teachings about Dhamma practice. He reminded us that living in the forest minimises the amount of sense contact one’s mind has to deal with, as well as the mental food that stimulates distraction. He used the things of

nature as a basis for teachings, such as when he compared strips of ribbon bark that had fallen to the ground, from the gum trees, to the unkempt and unfolded robes of a monk that were sometimes left lying around the monastery. He encouraged us to walk for alms; and he happily walked barefoot on the sharp stones of the rural gravel roads with us. He reminded us how Ajahn Mun had practiced and encouraged the monks to live simply and meditate a lot. He kindly presided over the *Kāṭhina* cloth offering, which we again held in a large tent.

Why Are You So Far From Home?

Later in the year, my father and then my mother, visited the monastery. Both were happy with the physical setting of the monastery, the abundance of animal and bird life, and the natural beauty of the eucalyptus forest and mountains. The Buddhist community treated them with great kindness; and I gave them some Dhamma teachings when they participated in the daily monastic programme. They both expressed disappointment that the monastery was so far from their homes in England, as they realised that I would probably be resident in Australia, for a long time to come.

My mother was quite familiar with monastic life as she had attended Amaravati Monastery regularly to hear Dhamma teachings, make offerings and join meditation retreats. She was happy to stay in the monastery, while in Australia; and participated in the daily activities. While my mother was with us, I gained the chance to look after both her material and spiritual needs; and to give something back to her, out of gratitude and appreciation, for everything she had given to me. Each day, I gave her Dhamma teachings and guidance in meditation, as she joined in the evening *pūjā*. We had no specified accommodation for women, so it seemed appropriate to let her stay in the senior monk's guest room where I could keep an eye on her; and made



Planting trees with Luang Por Plien and preserving the forest for future generations, at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2007.



sure she was comfortable. In the monastery, I had the chance to take care of my mother more fully and give more attention to her physical and spiritual needs, than ever before.

Luang Por Plien

In February 2004, we invited Luang Por Plien to visit a second time. With more monks living in the monastery and better accommodation, we felt more confident to receive him. He displayed his usual kindness and compassion; and gave the Sangha and laity, many hours of his time to hear his teachings, meditate and discuss the Dhamma. We recited *suttas* and other verses every night together; and blessed the old winery shed with a recitation of the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*. Luang Por Plien said afterwards that there were many *Devas* present for the chanting. Throughout the day, he taught the laity; and after each evening meditation session, he taught the monks until one or two in the morning. Luang Por Plien always shared with us his insights into the Dhamma and these included reflections from his own practice and general teachings; and he was always ready to answer the multitude of questions people had for him. With the special knowledge he gained from the deep levels of *samādhi* he experienced, he was able to give some rarely heard insights into *kamma*; and also explanations about beings living in other realms.

Deciding The Right Location

We had begun working on plans for the *Upasatha* Hall. Luang Por Plien gave his support to the project and approval of the proposed location. The Thai Ambassador, Khun Bandit Sothipalailit, was also very supportive of the project. He visited us regularly; and was aware of the growing number of candidates coming forth to request training and ordination. We received a planning permit to build the hall, from the local government, in July 2004. However, we amended the plans twice, to move

the location of the hall. Each time, we relocated the proposed hall, it was moved higher up the hillside. Building the *Uposatha* Hall was to be an important development for the future of the monastery, and I was willing to take some time adjusting the location of the building, on the map, until it seemed right. It seemed that the more elevated location we finally chose, gave more prominence to the hall, in the monastery, which was appropriate for its purpose.

In the early days of the monastery, I took all the candidates for *Bhikkhu* and novice ordination to Wat Nong Pah Pong where Luang Por Liem acted as preceptor. We told him of our plans to build the *Uposatha* Hall; and he was positive about the development. He understood that it was difficult for a preceptor to travel to Melbourne; and also difficult for candidates to travel to Thailand, for ordination. He had many commitments and could only travel to Melbourne occasionally. He agreed that the future of Buddhism required local preceptors, in each country, where the Sangha was growing; and would benefit from a suitably established *Sīmā* boundary to hold ordinations.

Two New Buddha Statues Created In One Day

In June 2005, I travelled with a small group of monks to Thailand, for the Sangha meeting on Luang Por Chah's birthday. Afterwards, we arranged for two bronze Buddha statues for the monastery, to be cast in separate foundries. It was an unusual and particularly fortunate day because we managed to arrange two casting ceremonies, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon, at completely different locations a hundred kilometres apart. In the morning, we went to Khun Pyrote's foundry in Nakhon Pathom to cast the main standing Buddha statue and statues of his leading disciples Sariputta and Maha Moggallāna for the new *Uposatha* Hall. We were blessed to have Luang Por Opart preside over the ceremony together

with Luang Por Liem, Ajahn Anan, and many senior monks from Luang Por Chah Sangha.

The casting of a Buddha statue is a joyful occasion when the monks and laity come together in harmony, out of faith in the Buddha; and chant and meditate while spreading *mettā* at the same time, as the statues are cast. Coincidentally, as we were leaving the foundry after the first ceremony, a thunderstorm began which brought a terrific downpour. Many participants commented that they felt it was a sign that the *Devas* were rejoicing with us. A couple of hours later on the same day, Luang Por Plien joined the same group of senior monks for a ceremony at the foundry of Khun Laem Singh in another province, to cast the Dhammacakkha Buddha for the future Dining Hall. This statue was designed by Khun Vilai and modelled on the beautiful ancient stone Buddha in Saranath, India. It was a truly auspicious day to hold two such ceremonies, with so many senior monks attending.

Making the Buddha statues was an important confirmation of the community's firm intention to build the *Upasatha* Hall. It took a few months for the polishing and finishing of the main statue to be completed; and then it was shipped to Melbourne. The statue arrived, before construction work on the hall had begun. Following an old Thai tradition, the statue of the Buddha was put in place first; and the hall constructed around it. Buddhists believe that the accumulated *pāramī* and goodness of the Buddha will inspire and energise the lay community to complete the construction of the hall, to protect the statue.

Throughout the early years of the monastery, we had few buildings or facilities, but we relied on the determination and sincerity of the monks and lay supporters, to continue developing the monastery. Every time, we received a visiting teacher, it

was a boost for the community to hear the Dhamma and gain some wisdom to keep us heading in the right direction, in our personal practice, as we built the monastery. I saw building the monastery; and training the monks and laity akin to taking a sailing boat across the ocean. Each time a new gust of wind came, it took us further towards our goal, but because the wind comes from different directions, we had to know how to adjust the sail to make use of the wind. Many senior monks visited us during the summer months and included Luang Por Kam, Luang Por Sawaeng, Luang Por Dtumrong, Luang Por Sophon, Luang Por Toon, Luang Por Sopah, Ajahn Thiradhammo, Ajahn Munindo, Ajahn Subin, Ajahn Kampong, Ajahn Dtun and many others. We were honoured and blessed by each of these visits.



Luang Por Plien (centre) and the Sangha under the first building at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2002.

Making A Resolution Under The Bodhi Tree

In December 2005, we invited Luang Por Liem, to be preceptor for another *Bhikkhu* ordination ceremony, held at Wat Nong Pah Pong. Following which, a small group of monks and lay people from Buddha Bodhivana Monastery joined Ajahn Anan on a pilgrimage to India. Each time I visited the important Buddhist sites in northern India, I found the experience uplifting; and I encouraged the lay devotees who travelled with me to keep the eight precepts; and meditate wholeheartedly while travelling in India. We practised meditation all night long at the Maha Bodhi Vihara in Bodh Gaya; and chanted and meditated for many hours, at each important location we visited.

On this occasion, as I sat under the Bodhi tree, the same place where the Buddha himself experienced his Awakening; I made a clear, mental determination to continue cultivating the Dhamma, until I had completely abandoned the mental defilements and reached the Deathless; and also to complete the construction of the *Uposatha* Hall for the success of the monastery and the benefit of Buddhists, in Australia. Following this, I had an auspicious dream in which I was escorting an ageing Ajahn Anan, around a monastery that was complete with many buildings, including an *Uposatha* Hall. The monastery glittered as if it was in a heavenly realm. The message seemed to confirm that the monastery is already built, meaning that the causes and conditions were in place for the monastery to be completed.



Ajahn Anan opened the Naga staircase
at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2014.



It doesn't take a lot to proclaim the Dhamma.

Some of the Buddha's disciples,
like Ven. Assaji, hardly spoke.

They went on alms round in a calm and peaceful manner,
walking neither quickly nor slowly,
dressed in sombre-coloured robes.

Whether walking, moving, going forwards or back,
they were measured and composed.

One morning while Ven. Sariputta was still
the disciple of a Brahman teacher called Sanjaya,
he caught sight of Ven. Assaji and
was inspired by his demeanour.

He approached him and requested some teaching.

He asked who Ven. Assaji's teacher was
and received the answer,

'The Revered Gotama.'

'What does he teach
that enables you to practise like this?'

'Not so much.

He simply says that
all dhammas arise from causes.

If they are to cease, their causes must cease first.'

Just that much.

That was enough.

He understood.

That was all it took for Ven. Sariputta
to realise the Dhamma.



Luang Por Liem giving a Dhamma talk
at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2016.



An Old Tooth And A New Hall

Sharing Merit And *Mettā* In New Neighbourhood

We arrived back in Melbourne, after the pilgrimage to India, just before the large standing Buddha statue was delivered from Thailand. We built a new shed to store the statue safely, during the beginning of the construction process. In March 2006, earthworks began for the new hall; and in April, construction on the foundations began. We invited Luang Por Liem to visit the monastery the same month; and he laid the foundation stone for the building and blessed the ground. Coincidentally, one of his front tooth dropped out while he was staying with us; and we agreed to bury the tooth with a monk's bowl and robes in a time capsule, under the foundation stone. The earthworks for the hall were quite extensive. We were aware that the earthworks and construction process would be disturbing to the neighbourhood and any beings living in the area, so during the chanting and meditation for the foundation stone ceremony, we shared merit with departed relatives; and spread *mettā* to all beings living, in all realms associated with the land.

After laying the foundation stone for the new building, I invited Luang Por Liem to visit the giant rock formation called Uluru, which lies in the desert at the centre of Australia. This was the first part of the Australian landscape I had seen in 1998 when



Luang Por Liem led the ceremony to install the foundation stone for the *Dhammacakka* Hall at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2014.



I flew over the country. The indigenous people see the rock as an important spiritual centre for their culture and land. We felt Luang Por Liem's great kindness and compassion would connect well with the place. On returning from Uluru, we invited Luang Por Liem to be the preceptor at an ordination ceremony for a new monk, at the monastery. The ceremony had to take place in the old winery shed, which we used as a temporary *Sīmā* or designated boundary. The Thai Ambassador, Khun Bandhit Sothipalailit, visited and expressed his continued support for the project to finish construction of the *Uposatha* Hall. He expressed his belief that properly established monasteries and trained Sangha members are needed to spread the Buddhist teachings effectively; and that providing a place for Buddhists to train and receive ordination as monks would be invaluable for this.

Throughout the rest of that year, the construction of the hall continued which turned the monastery into a large construction site. The monks had little to do physically with the construction, but we put our efforts into keeping the monastery clean and tidy; and assisted the committee with the administration of the building contract. Every night, after the construction workers went home, the monks did any additional cleaning up required; and then practised meditation and chanted in praise of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. The construction workers naturally became more mindful of their own conduct and speech in the monastery, as they interacted with the monks; so we hoped that they benefitted from the experience.

In June, I visited Thailand, with a small group of monks, to join in the annual Sangha meeting at Wat Nong Pah Pong. We listened to Dhamma from Luang Por Liem, Ajahn Anan and other senior monks. We also travelled to Udon Thani to pay respects to Luang Ta Maha Bua; and took the opportunity to invite him to visit Buddha Bodhivana Monastery. He declined,

saying that he felt that he would be a burden on us and the lay devotees if he visited, but he wished us well. He stressed that as long as we kept up the monastic training standards of Luang Por Chah, we would continue to progress in the Dhamma, and reminded us to develop strong mindfulness through either the recitation of the meditation word '*Buddho*', or by cultivating mindfulness of breathing. He reminded us that a monk's job is to develop insight, into the impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self nature of the body, to break through the delusion of self-view.

Build The Hall. Create Causes For The Path.
Grow The Fruit In Your Heart.

Each rains retreat is an opportunity for monks to stop travelling, reduce the amount of teaching and other projects, and focus more intently on their practice of meditation. Although in 2006, the construction of the hall continued throughout the rains retreat, the monks continued to cultivate the Dhamma. On Observance Days, we stayed up all night meditating; and on other days practised meditation as a group, for many hours each day. Progress in meditation is not always easy to measure; and tends to come in small incremental improvements in one's virtue and understanding. For me, it was important that I continued to put effort into my own cultivation of the Dhamma, even though I was overseeing the construction project simultaneously. My goal was to apply the same insight into suffering and its cessation, as I used in all other aspects of my training; and not to create a problem out of the building project for myself or others. I continued to practise in this way as I managed the construction project.

All the monks supported the project, through their efforts, in their monastic training and meditation. Once the concrete foundation had been poured, we chose an appropriate day and

lifted the standing Buddha into place, using a crane. It was a joy to see the Buddha slowly floating through the sky, and down onto the concrete plinth, inside the hall. Once the statue was properly installed, it was protected with plywood and the hall was built around it as we had envisaged. Things turned out in the way that many teachers had predicted would happen. It is always inspiring to see how even non-Buddhists respond to the goodness of the Buddha; and the construction workers were careful and respectful of the statue, until the construction of the building was completed.

At one stage, a family of swallows made a nest inside the roof of the hall. As the carpenters were closing up the eaves on the roof of the building, I asked the foreman to leave a gap for the mother to get in and out to feed the chicks; but it seemed the carpenters were in a hurry to finish their work and move on to their next job. They sealed the young birds inside the roof while the mother was away collecting food. After the carpenters went home, we saw the distraught mother flying around the hall, crying out loudly while her newly imprisoned chicks called out to her, from within the roof cavity. The monks decided unanimously that we needed to help, so we quickly constructed a temporary birdhouse and placed it on a stand near the hall; and then we scrambled over the building site fencing like commandos, climbed up the scaffolding onto the roof and opened the timber ceiling boards with our own tools. We carefully removed the chicks, handing each chick, from monk to monk, until they were all inside the new birdhouse, outside the hall. After that, the mother continued to feed them until they grew stronger; and were able to fly away by themselves. We had to close up the ceiling boards again without leaving any blemishes or traces of our work. In the end, this became the only construction work on the hall undertaken by the monks; and was initiated by the need to save lives.

That year, we gained permission to hold the *Kathina* ceremony in the unfinished shell of the *Upasatha* Hall, using temporary mats for the Sangha and laity to sit on. I invited Luang Por Dtumrong and Luang Por Sopah to join us from Thailand; and immediately the size of the hall already seemed too small for the number of people attending the ceremony. However, no one complained and everyone was happy that we were no longer sitting in a tent. The solidity and quietness which the building provided served to support the practice of meditation when we were inside.

In January 2007, I led a group of Sangha members to visit Wat Nong Pah Pong for Luang Por Chah's Memorial event. We visited a number of different teachers to receive gifts of Buddha relics. The relics were offered for enshrinement in the new hall. The first senior monk to offer Buddha relics to me was Somdet Buddhajahn, the Abbot at Wat Saket in Bangkok, who was always supportive of our new monastery. Many years before, Luang Por Chah had entrusted him, with the task of guiding and advising the large and growing numbers of his disciples, before he passed away. We also visited Luang Ta Maha Bua and Luang Por Opart at Wat Jong Kam monastery in Lampang. After we paid respects to Luang Por Opart, he told us that he was not sure how many Buddha relics he had left to give to us; and disappeared into his room to look for some. When I opened the small reliquary I had brought with us, in preparation to receive his offering of relics, I found that three Buddha relics had already manifested inside and were sitting there waiting for us. Luang Por Opart said that it was a sign that I had good *vāsanā* and good *kamma* accumulated from the past. Ajahn Anan also offered us relics from the collection that had manifested in his monk's bag during our pilgrimage to Sri Lanka. Other senior monks kindly made offerings of relics, so that by the time we returned to Australia, we had a large collection of Buddha relics to be installed in the statue.



First *Kathina* Ceremony at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2003 was held in a rented marquee.



Final Visit To Dtao Dtum

Before returning to Australia, I led the monks to visit the hermitage of Dtao Dtum, on the border with Myanmar. I had stayed there many times over the years, but it was a new experience for the junior monks from Melbourne. They learnt how to camp out in the jungle using an umbrella tent; and how to put up with the cold nights; and any anxiety about catching malaria, dengue fever or concerns about meeting with wild animals. Even though no monk actually encountered a tiger, it was similar to them taking a practical examination after training in mindfulness, precepts, and wise reflection. Each monk had to reflect on their refuge in the Triple Gem; their commitment to the monastic discipline; and bring up patience to endure any negative emotions such as fear, aversion, or loneliness that camping in the deep jungle tends to stimulate. We become Buddhist monks because we are not perfect; and wish to train ourselves to abandon mental defilements. Sometimes that training requires putting oneself in challenging situations; and learning from what is stimulated in the mind. One gains courage and strength of mind from the training in monastic discipline, mindfulness, and wise reflection, which becomes one's refuge, when living out in the deep forest.

The Bones Of The Buddha

By February 2007, the main construction work by the professional builders was complete, however, the decoration of the shrine and area behind the Buddha statue was not. Ajahn Anan visited Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in February to preside over the installation of the Buddha relics inside the head of the Buddha statue. The day before the relic installation ceremony, there was an earthquake, east of Melbourne, which shook the monastery for a minute or two, but did not leave any damage. Earthquakes are rare in this part of Australia and the event drew everybody's

attention. We took it as an auspicious sign coinciding with the installation of the relics. That evening, the Sangha gathered together with Ajahn Anan to bathe the relics which had been offered for the occasion. This is an ancient tradition and involves slowly and carefully placing each relic into water. Genuine relics of the Buddha float on the surface of the water. As more and more relics were placed in the water, they moved closer together under their own invisible energy, until there were hundreds of relics joined together on the surface of the water. The relics slowly began moving together in a clockwise direction around the surface of the water. The Sangha chanted in praise of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha to commemorate the occasion. The next day, the relics were enshrined inside the head of the Buddha statue, bringing joy to everyone who was present.

Revoking The Old *Sīmā*. Establishing The New *Sīmā*.

The *Uposatha* Hall is the place for ordinations and meetings of the Sangha. According to the monastic rules, the monks need to formally determine a *Sīmā* or boundary through a Sangha transaction, following specific rules. Before this can be done, a procedure has to be followed to revoke the old *Sīmā*. Of course, there was no historical record of any other ordination halls built in this area, but the procedure is carried out anyway and is seen as having a purifying effect on the land; and the minds of everyone involved in the construction and use of the hall. The recitation of the verse is thought to help remove any old negative energy remaining in the minds of beings associated with the place; and the land is considered cleansed and prepared for its designated use for Sangha transactions. Strictly speaking, Buddha Bodhivana Monastery is not the first Buddhist temple in the locality. During the Gold Rush era of the 1870's a small Chinese Buddhist temple was built out of timber and used by Chinese miners just over the hill from East Warburton in Big Pats Creek.

We spent the first few weeks of the rains retreat, following the procedure, to revoke any old *Sīmā* or boundary, from the area in the hall and its surroundings. The requirement in the monastic discipline is that a certain Pali verse is recited by the monks, standing together over every square metre of the proposed new *Sīmā*. That year, there were ten monks spending the rains retreat in the monastery, which meant that the group had to stand and recite the formula to revoke the old *Sīmā* 136 times; to cover each of the hundreds of square metres of floor area designated to be within the boundary of the new *Sīmā*. For the first two weeks of the retreat, the monks gathered and recited the special Pali verses ten times per day, gradually moving to a new part of the floor after each recitation, until the total floor area of the *Sīmā* had been covered.

Once the revocation of the old *Sīmā* was complete, we were ready for the ceremony to bury the nine spherical granite *nimitta* marker stones which designate the borders of the new boundary. In Thailand, the ceremony in which these heavy stones are buried is considered one of the most auspicious occasions in the history of a monastery; and usually the land determined as the *Sīmā* is given to the Sangha in perpetuity, by Royal Decree, from the monarch. That does not happen in Australia, but as long as the land legally belongs to the Sangha, the determined boundary remains in existence and is considered suitable for Sangha transactions, such as ordinations and the bi-monthly recitation of the *Pāṭimokkha*.

The Shrine

The professional builders had left the monastery, but there still remained the task of finishing the main shrine area. This work was completed by the Sangha and volunteers working together to create a timber shrine out of Australian hardwood which was

the base to receive the main statues. The team also fixed the decorative teak auras to the wall, which had been carved by a craftsman in northern Thailand and shipped over to Melbourne. The monks arranged to fix 3,600 handmade clay tiles, over the rest of the wall. The tiles were designed and made by the monks in the monastery; and the process of designing the tiles and pressing local clay into the moulds to individually make each tile, took over a year to complete. Most of the tiles represented an image of the Buddha teaching the first sermon known as the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*. The tiles fixed to the lower part of the wall were designed with an image of a *Deva* showing respect to the Buddha. Each tile produced by the monks had to be transported to the home of a nearby ceramic artist, but due to limitations of space, we could only fire a few at a time in the small kiln. Before fixing the finished tiles to the wall, we invited sponsors to write their name and a dedication, on the back of each tile. Sponsors who were present were allowed to fix their own dedicated tile to the wall. It was a way to allow both Sangha and lay Buddhists to have a small but spiritually significant role, in the actual construction of the *Upasatha* Hall.

To complete the shrine, we travelled to Thailand, to make four bronze statues of revered teachers that we felt would provide inspiration to Buddhists, in Australia. In January 2009, we invited senior monks to participate in a ceremony where four life size bronze statues of Luang Por Mun, Luang Por Chah, Luang Pu Tooat and Somdet Dtoh Brahmarangsi were cast. After the finished statues arrived at the monastery in March, we were ready to hold the ceremony to bury the marker stones and recite the verses to determine the new *Sīmā* in April.

Opening The Doors To The Deathless

I invited Luang Por Liem and a large group of senior monks, from Thailand, to join us and preside over the event in honour of

the occasion. Luang Por Plien who had such a strong connection with the monastery was invited, but unfortunately had to cancel his visit, at the last minute due to his doctor's concerns about his deteriorating health. Khun Chailai, the wife of the Thai Ambassador, represented her husband, as he was unexpectedly engaged on urgent government business. She kindly agreed to perform the traditional ritual of cutting the rattan holding the ceremonial marker stone, in the centre of the hall, during the ceremony. The other eight stones were lifted down into place by monks and marked the outer perimeter of the boundary. We finished the three-day event with the ordination of three new monks. One of the new monks was from the local town of Warburton, which was a cause for much joy in the community and together with the completion of the *Uposatha* Hall, was a positive sign for the growth of Buddhism in Australia.

The ceremony to determine the new *Sīmā*, involved a beautiful interaction between the Sangha and lay members of the community, as they recited verses together in the ancient Pali language. Both Sangha and lay devotees determine the *Sīmā* together which depends on the readiness and faith of the lay community to support the Sangha, in upholding their practice of the Vinaya. The gathering of over thirty monks coming together in harmony and with respect for the Buddha, Dhamma and Vinaya or the Code of Monastic Discipline that he left us as our teacher, and preserved intact for over 2500 years. The construction of the hall, and the determination of the *Sīmā* boundary symbolised the commitment of the Buddhist community to support the monastic Sangha; and uphold the way of training that we have inherited from the Buddha and Luang Por Chah. We considered the doors for cultivating the Dhamma to reach the deathless fully open for those with little dust in their eyes.

Another aspect of the event was that it was an offering made in gratitude to the memory of our teacher, Luang Por Chah; and hence the hall was named the Ajahn Chah Memorial Hall. The completed hall is intended as an offering for use by current and future generations of Buddhists. The engineers who worked on the project were asked to design the building with the structural strength to last twice as long as normal specifications required. Even though the additional concrete and steel used in construction increased the overall costs, I aimed to build a hall that might last for many decades; and is strong enough to provide a refuge, in the midst of a bushfire, which is the biggest natural danger to the monastery. Designing the hall to last a long time is also a gift to future monks, so that they do not have to rebuild it so quickly.

Upajjhāya - One Who Watches Over His Students

After the *Uposatha* Hall was completed, Khun Bandit, the Thai Ambassador, encouraged me to apply to the governing body of the Thai Sangha, the Supreme Sangha Council, to become a preceptor. He was keen that the monastery had a properly established *Sīmā* and *Uposatha* Hall; and that I became the resident preceptor to officiate at the ordination of new monks or *Bhikkhus*. I was granted the title of preceptor or *Upajjhāya* by Somdet Buddhajahn at Wat Saket in January 2008.

The word *Upajjhāya* means ‘to watch closely’. The duty of the preceptor is to watch over his students. The procedure, for admitting new monks into the Sangha, requires the preceptor to check that the candidates are suitable; and they have been trained and prepared for their life as a monk. The preceptor presents each candidate with his bowl and robes which are the symbols of his life as a monk. Once the candidate has shaved his head and is wearing the robes, he has to train in virtue, meditation and wisdom. Luang Por Chah reminded us that we



Novice Ordination Ceremony at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2021.



have to cultivate the internal ‘monk’ in our hearts, as well as, learn how to conduct ourselves as monks on the outside.

In May 2009, I was the preceptor for the first novice ordination in the *Upasatha* Hall. Later in the following year, I was the preceptor for a *Bhikkhu* ordination ceremony using the *Sīmā*. By that time, we were using the hall regularly for the normal activities of the monastery, such as listening to the recitation of the *Pāṭimokkha* rules of discipline, ordination of new monks and novices, morning and evening meditation sessions and the annual ceremony to offer the *Kāṭhina* cloth.

A Place To Cultivate The Dhamma

In July, ten monks and one novice, entered the rains retreat together. On each Lunar Observance Day, we kept up the practice of meditating throughout the night, in the hall; and monks could walk meditation quietly, at the back of the hall or on the veranda. With a large hall available, the Sangha could practise meditation conveniently for long periods of time; and sometimes we sat together for three hours non-stop, during the evening meditation sessions. This practice was undertaken to increase each monastic’s effort; application in cultivating mindfulness; clear comprehension and insight into letting go; and to boost their practice of endurance. Even though it is hard to sustain continuous effort in meditation, generally, the monks found that this style of practice brought some good results. Some monks experienced deeper state of stillness, than they had before; and some gained new insights and understanding of themselves; and their ability to let go of craving as they sat in meditation for extended periods of time. At the end of the retreat, we invited many of the Abbots and senior monks from temples and hermitages, around Melbourne, to join us for the *Kāṭhina* Ceremony. Afterwards, we hosted a visit from Luang Por Tong Daeng from Chiang Mai in northern Thailand.

Luang Por Sumedho

Luang Por Sumedho had been unable to attend the official opening ceremony of the *Uposatha* Hall in April, but kindly accepted our invitation to visit the monastery in December 2009. In a small ceremony, he unveiled a plaque naming the new hall in honour of our teacher, Luang Por Chah. Hosting Luang Por Sumedho was a blessing for the community. He has so much experience, from his personal cultivation of the Dhamma and teaching Buddhism that monks and lay devotees always find his presence inspiring. His generosity and wisdom have inspired his students to start many monasteries in different parts of the world; and he has tirelessly helped to further people's practice of Buddhism; and understanding of Luang Por Chah's teachings. I first met him at Chithurst Monastery in 1983 and have appreciated his teachings ever since. His visit allowed myself and the Sangha, the rare chance to offer him a peaceful place to rest and quietly meditate, as well as, show him some of the natural environment and scenery of Australia.

Luang Por Sumedho shared recollections of the early years of his monastic life living with Luang Por Chah; and shed light on how he dealt with some of the obstacles he faced during his personal practice; and later on when teaching monastics and laity. I always found his emphasis on observing and understanding the Four Noble Truths in daily practice helpful for my own contemplation; and particularly his reflection that suffering arises when we make a personal problem out of our experiences. When you build a monastery, you inevitably learn how to deal with the challenges of living and cooperating with other people in a monastic community; and how to interact with the wider lay community who often have uncertain understanding of monasticism and the path of training. There are difficulties and obstacles you must face which become your teachers; and sometimes you have to solve problems alone;



Luang Por Sumedho (left) visited Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2010.



sometimes together with the community. Luang Por Sumedho always encouraged us not to take things too personally; or create suffering out of the normal ups and downs and difficulties that arise in day-to-day practice in the monastery. He liked to quote Luang Por Chah who reminded him to establish mindfulness and reflect on his experience. Luang Por Chah encouraged him to investigate the experience of suffering in his mind, to see if it was due to external conditions, such as the monastery or other people; or actually created from ignorance, conditioning, his own craving and attachment to mental states.

After the completion of the *Uposatha* Hall, the monks and lay community did not sink back into complacency. The monastery received more visitors than before, which put pressure on the existing facilities, making it necessary to continue improving the infrastructure. The community joined together to build a *vihara* to host visiting senior monks and construct new public toilets. We improved the roads, car parks and street lighting and built a proper front gate for the monastery. Previously, visitors had used the simple toilets built for the old winery, but there were not enough of them to cater for the increasing numbers visiting daily. Once the new toilet block was finished, we could receive the public more comfortably. Without a proper front gate, the monastery had been subjected to intruders entering the forest to hunt or fish; or simply joy riding at night.

In 2011, we invited Luang Por Liem to visit again. During his stay, he was invited by lay Buddhists, in Adelaide, to visit and give some teachings for the first time. I had been invited to visit Adelaide several times to teach and visit Luang Por Boonyarit while he was resident in the city; and many of the lay Buddhists had faith in Luang Por Chah and his teachings. Over the years, I continued to visit Adelaide regularly; and whenever there was an opportunity, I took senior monks to visit and give teachings.

Thai Buddhist Culture

From the initial period that I began living at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery, I had received support from the kind generosity of the Thai Buddhist community in Melbourne. Every year, I was invited to give teaching and preside over the annual Thai Festival held in Federation Square, in the centre of Melbourne. Monks from Buddha Bodhivana Monastery joined monks, from the other Thai temples in Melbourne, to chant verses of protection and blessings, teach meditation and receive alms food. One part of the Thai Festival was aimed at introducing Thai Buddhist culture to the wider community; and to foster strong relations with state government, welfare groups and charities. Tens of thousands of people attended these events.

I also supported the Thai Welfare Association; and with the help of the Thai community, gave regular donations of food and household goods to the Salvation Army, for distribution in Melbourne; and later supported Thai students during the Covid pandemic. In November 2011, the Thai community organised the first offering of a royal *Kathina* at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery; and we invited Ajahn Thiradhammo, the Abbot of Bodhinyanarama in Wellington, New Zealand to help receive the royal *Kathina* robe offered by the Thai Ambassador, acting as representative of the Thai King.

In 2010, I visited my parents and took my mother to Amaravati to receive some Dhamma teachings. The best gift one can give is the gift of Dhamma, so each time I returned to England, I encouraged my mother to practise the Dhamma. Even some of her friends had become interested in meditation, so I gave them some simple teachings on how to establish mindfulness; and contemplate the inconstant nature of thoughts. Each time I visited my father, he invited friends around from his village church group, including the vicar, and we had some fruitful

discussions on the aspects of Buddhist teachings that had something in common with Christianity.

On that trip to England, I also visited some old friends who were Buddhist monks. Ajahn Punyo had attended the same meditation group as I did at Bristol University in the early 1980s; and is now resident at Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery with Ajahn Munindo. While staying at Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery, I also visited Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, the long established monastery in the Zen tradition, where my old school friend Venerable Sanshin is a resident monk. It was enjoyable to spend time together with old friends; and celebrate the fact that our old school and university had produced so many Sangha members. I guess you could call it the old school ‘robe’ network.

The Dhammacakkha Hall

Originally, the monks used the old farmhouse for receiving the meal and giving teachings, which meant that almost every weekend for several years, there were more visitors participating in the meal offering than there was space to accommodate them. After finishing the construction of the *Maha Thera’s kuti* for senior monks and the public toilet facility, we turned our attention to building a Dining Hall for the community. In November 2012, the Thai community organised a second Royal *Kathina*; and the Thai Ambassador offered a robe, sent over from the palace in Bangkok, on behalf of the King of Thailand. We invited Luang Por Opart to preside over the ceremony and were honoured when he accepted the invitation, as he rarely leaves Thailand. I have known and respected Luang Por Opart, since he first moved to Wat Chong Kam from Myanmar; and began building his monastery. He has always been kind and supportive of Luang Por Chah’s monks; and it was a blessing for us to host him.

Luang Por Opart's training has brought him to gain great knowledge of the Buddhist texts; and also to develop great skill in meditation. He was born and raised in Myanmar; but moved to Thailand, almost forty years ago. When he visited Buddha Bodhivana Monastery, he praised the Sangha and laity for their sincere efforts in following the Buddha's teachings; reiterating the comment he had made in earlier years that Buddha Bodhivana Monastery is an auspicious place. He mentioned that there were many *Devas* and *Nāgas* connected to the monastery; and the strong faith of the Sangha and laity would lead to their progress in the Dhamma. During his brief visit, Luang Por Opart reminded us to clean up the fallen trees, around one of the ponds in the forest, because the *Devas* had mentioned it to him. In fact, Luang Por Opart had never actually seen the pond before; and we had never told him of its existence at the time that he passed on this unusual request. The pond is situated in the forest, almost one kilometre away from the main buildings, and at that time, some large trees had indeed fallen into the pond, and needed clearing.

Luang Por Opart encouraged us to build our practice on the cultivation of the four sublime abidings (goodwill, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity) in our meditation; and through our actions in daily life. He taught us to cultivate insight into the Four Noble Truths, for the realisation of the end of suffering; and to spread kindness to beings in all realms. He presided over the royal *Kāṭhina* robe offering; and the next day we invited him to lead a blessing ceremony at the site of the proposed new Dining Hall. The blessing ceremony was held outdoors and Luang Por Opart chanted various auspicious verses and then spread *mettā* for about 45 minutes. While he chanted, he filled the whole valley with the powerful sound of his chanting. It was our good fortune to receive a visit from Luang Por Opart. In



Luang Por Opart enshrining Buddha relics in
the new Dhammacakka Hall in 2015.



his life as a monk, he very rarely left Thailand because he is so much in demand by the Sangha and laity. During his brief two-day visit, he inspired us with his almost limitless energy, as he taught the monks and laity, continuously, from the middle of the day until the early hours of the morning.

When the Dhammacakkha Hall was nearing completion, I travelled with a group of monks and laity to Thailand to participate in the annual memorial retreat, dedicated to the memory of Luang Por Chah, at Wat Nong Pah Pong in January 2013. Afterwards, we arranged a ceremony to cast a bronze statue of Sivali Maha Thera, presided over by Luang Por Opart and Ajahn Anan. It was another chance to hear Luang Por Opart's powerful chanting in homage of the Buddha and the *Arahants*. Once completed, the statue was placed at the front of the Dhammacakkha Hall; and since then, visitors have found the statue an inspiration for their practice of the Buddhist teachings.

In February 2014, we invited Luang Por Liem to visit the monastery for the full moon of *Māgha Pūjā*; and lay the foundation stone for the new Dining Hall. Construction on the hall had begun. In similar fashion as to when we laid the foundation stone for the *Uposatha* Hall, we invited Luang Por Liem to place the foundation stone on top of a buried time capsule, which contained a small Buddha statue, an alms bowl and set of robes. After the ceremony, we invited him to visit some other temples and Buddhist centres; and teach Dhamma in Tasmania, Adelaide and Cairns in northern Queensland.

A Blessing From Luang Por Opart

The construction of the Dhammachakka Hall was completed in March 2015; and we were again honoured when Luang Por Opart kindly agreed to return to the monastery for the official

opening. The opening ceremony included installing relics of the Buddha, inside the main Buddha statue in the hall. Luang Por Opart chanted blessings and meditated spreading *mettā* to the community; and gave teachings throughout the day.

Once the hall was open, the Sangha could make use of it for dining and teaching the laity, each day. The hall sits 200 visitors comfortably and on public holidays, we had even larger gatherings than that. We continued to invite many other senior monks from Thailand and monasteries around the world to visit Buddha Bodhivana Monastery and give teachings, including Luang Por Liem, Luang Por Toon, Luang Por Khun, Luang Por Sophon, Luang Por Dtumrong, Ajahn Viradhammo, Ajahn Pasanno, Ajahn Piak, Ajahn Anan, Ajahn Khun, Ajahn Nyanadhammo and Ajahn Karuniko.

In March 2016, we hosted another visit from Luang Por Sumedho who kindly gave us teachings; and also took some quiet time to rest in the Maha Thera's *kuti*. We invited him to plant a Bodhi tree, behind the *Uposatha* Hall; and the tree quickly grew larger than any of our other Bodhi trees. Within a year, the tree was over two metres tall, which is unusual in the cooler mountain climate of the monastery; and seemed to be a good sign for the future. We also invited Luang Por Sumedho to visit Uluru, the spiritual centre of Australia where we meditated and chanted blessings with him.



Buddha statue at Bodhipala Monastery.

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Even decorated royal chariots wear out,
and indeed this body too wears out.
But the Dhamma of the good does not age;
Indeed, the good declare it to one another.

Dhammapada 151

Taking Mum To The Palace

Recognition Does Not Change Anything

During the rains retreat in July 2016, we received the news that His Majesty King Bhumiphol Adulyadej of Thailand was to award me the honorary title of Chao Khun. The title was given in recognition of service given to the Sangha; and in spreading the teachings of Buddhism. I was invited to travel to the Grand Palace in Bangkok to receive the title on 5 December 2016, the King's birthday, which coincided with the 16th birthday of Buddha Bodhivana Monastery. Unfortunately, the King passed away on 13 October 2016 before the title ceremony, but it still went ahead on 5 December 2016 with his son, the new King, standing in for his late father. Before travelling to Thailand, I was invited to lead the Thai community in funeral services for King Bhumiphol, both at the monastery and in the centre of Melbourne. The outpouring of grief and emotion triggered by the passing of the Thai King was palpable in Australia as well as many parts of the world. Over 7,000 Thai nationals and local dignitaries attended the funeral service in Melbourne. The reaction of both the Thai and non-Thai population to the passing of King Bhumiphol was a unique moment. It was a reminder of how the King had been a greatly appreciated and spiritually advanced leader of modern Thailand. King Bhumiphol had been generally loved and respected; and in the circle of monks, he was described as a *Bodhisatta* or a great being.

After the *Kathina* offering in November, I travelled with members of the Sangha to Thailand for the ceremony to receive the Chao Khun title, at the royal palace. My mother and sister flew to Bangkok to join our group at the Grand Palace, on the day of the ceremony. The Abbot of Wat Saket kindly organised a police escort to accompany our vehicle through the heavy Bangkok traffic to make sure we were not late for our appointment, in the palace. When we arrived inside the palace grounds, some royal officials were concerned at how long my mother might have to wait until the ceremonies were finished; and immediately brought her a chair and some water because it was the middle of the day, and quite hot. We smiled as we recollected how when I first brought my mother to the palace in 1988, a royal guard had spontaneously offered me a chair and umbrella because I was a monk, and ignored my mother. Now life had come a full circle and my mother was receiving the VIP treatment; and I had become 'just another monk' in the crowd of monks standing and waiting to receive their new titles. At the ceremony, I was the only foreign monk in the line of senior monks receiving titles. It was an occasion when I quite naturally felt deep gratitude to the Thai King, the Thai Sangha and the Thai people for all the kindness and support I had received over the years, as a Buddhist monk.

After the ceremony, I visited many senior monks in the Sangha administration in Bangkok; and then further afield to visit Luang Por Opat, Luang Por Plien and Ajahn Anan. It was a chance for my mother and sister to spend time in the monasteries; and receive teachings and advice from the senior monks. After I returned to Melbourne, the monastery committee invited senior monks, from all over Australia, to a ceremony where the Thai Ambassador led the lay community in formally presenting the Chao Khun title to me, one more time. People sometimes asked me how my mind and cultivation of the Dhamma was affected by receiving the honorific title and public recognition. I



Ajahn Kalyano with his mother Jill,
at the Grand Palace in Bangkok, 2016.

responded that I continued to develop mindfulness and insight into the impermanent and non-self nature of worldly dhammas. I simply continued the same practice as always. I reflected on the conditioned nature of my body and mind, internally and externally. Before I received an honorary title, my body was subject to ageing, sickness and death; and after receiving the recognition, my body was still subject to ageing, sickness and death. Any honour, praise or recognition that we receive in the course of carrying out our duties is still subject to the same natural laws of impermanence and degeneration, as all the other conditions of this world. If you cling to such worldly gains as a refuge, you will inevitably experience disappointment.

I had been honoured with the title of Chao Khun Phra Sophon Bhavanavithet by the Thai King, but afterwards I still had the duty to cultivate the Dhamma, uphold the Vinaya and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path as before. I still walked on daily alms round with my bowl, swept the leaves on the paths in the forest, meditated and gave teachings and advice to the monks and laity. Receiving the title did not change the challenge of cultivating effort, mindfulness and wisdom to abandon the mental defilements. In June, I attended the Sangha meeting on Luang Por Chah's birthday as usual; and then I travelled to visit Luang Por Plien in Chiang Mai. Before I returned to Melbourne, I paid respects to the newly appointed Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Sangha in Bangkok.

Luang Por Plien was seriously ill with cancer; and he told our group that he was unlikely to survive much longer. Even though his body was weak and in pain, he seemed as bright, radiant and clear-minded as ever. He appeared unperturbed by his illness; and the fact that he was close to death. Luang Por Plien was giving us a final teaching. He showed us how a well-practised monk uses the Dhamma of mindfulness and wisdom to face the challenges of living with a painful and dying body.



Ajahn Kalyano's mother Jill making offerings to Ajahn Kalyano during the alms round at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in 2018.

Deep Vein Thrombosis - Yet Another Teacher

Entering the rains retreat in July 2017, the community included twelve monks and an *Anagārikā*. We set up the schedule for practice like most rains retreats; and gave the resident monks a mix of time practising together as a group; and also opportunities for personal retreat. After leading the group activities for almost two months, I took my own personal retreat. I lived at my *kuti*, keeping noble silence; and after collecting my alms food, ate alone. I spent most of my time in sitting and walking meditation, as I had done since first entering the monastery. Being on my own without other duties to perform, I increased the length of time I sat in meditation to three-hour sessions. I aimed to strengthen my mindfulness, contemplate the changing nature of my physical body; and observe the arising and cessation of different feelings and sensations. Because of my determination to put effort into cultivating mindfulness, I experienced more rapture, happiness and stillness than usual. As a result, I was slow to realise that my left leg was infected with cellulitis. Eventually I noticed the increasing swelling and pain in my leg; and realised it was not simply the normal pain due to ageing and the many years of sitting in the meditation posture. The cellulitis recurred in exactly the same spot on my left leg as previously in 1986, when I was a young monk.

At first, I did not wish to interrupt my personal retreat; and left the infection unattended a bit longer than is recommended. Gradually, the swelling and inflammation spread up my leg; and eventually I had no choice, but to cut short the retreat and visit the doctor. He diagnosed cellulitis and then after an ultrasound and a scan, he found a blood clot in my vein which had developed from the cellulitis. I was diagnosed with Deep Vein Thrombosis. Even though the clot was soon dissolved by medication, it left permanent damage to the valves in the veins;

and my leg became subject to regular swelling and pain. I was warned that I would always be prone to blood clotting. Since then, I have to manage the length of time I sit in meditation and I am required to change posture more often than before. The swelling and inflammation in my left leg was one sign of the body ageing; and at about the same time, my eyesight began to noticeably degenerate. I needed a prescription for reading glasses. Having heard and practised the Buddhist teaching for so long meant that these changing physical conditions and natural degeneration of the body did not alarm me, rather it provided food for insight. It reminded me of my good fortune to have experienced so many years of relatively good health, allowing me to practise energetically, up until this time.

In March 2018, my mother and sister visited Australia again; and fortunately, this coincided with a visit from Luang Por Liem. It was a rare blessing for my mother; and gave her the chance to meet with Luang Por Liem each day, make offerings and listen to his Dhamma teachings. My mother offered food to the monks each day of her visit; and learnt chanting and practised meditation. I have always aimed to bring my family into contact with the true Dhamma; and meet with wise and compassionate teachers. It turned out that this was the last time my mother visited the monastery, and it was fitting that she had the opportunity to hear teachings and discuss the Dhamma with Luang Por Liem. He gave her advice on how to contemplate the characteristic of impermanence; so that she could adjust her attitudes and have a deeper understanding of where real happiness lies. He taught her how to skilfully manage her declining mobility; and how to accept the limitations of her physical frailty; and the memory loss associated with ageing. Everything Luang Por Liem taught my mother helped her reduce any mental stress; and let go of mental defilements. She

was learning to cultivate peace and contentment in the present moment. He taught her to focus her mind on finding happiness in each moment, let go of any resentment from the past; and recollect the good in her life. Luang Por Liem's radiant and peaceful presence gave her a shining example of how to do this. My mother was very happy and peaceful throughout the whole of her time in Australia.

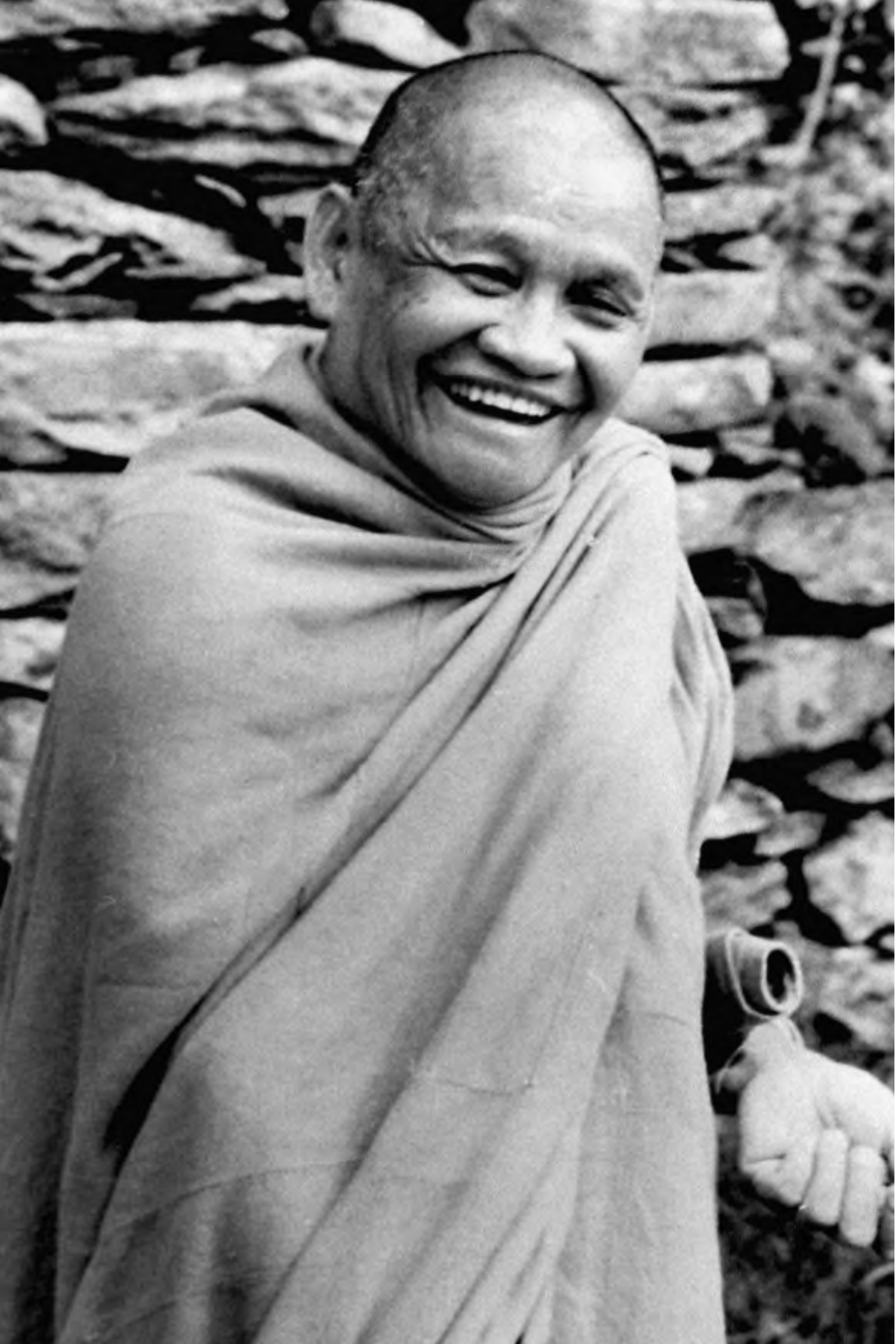
Samana Dhamma Vihara

The project to build a self-contained retreat *kuti*, on the original land that was offered to begin the monastery began in 2017 when Ajahn Anan laid the foundation stone; and construction of the building continued throughout that year. Both Sangha members and volunteers joined together to complete the building work. Ajahn Anan presided over the opening ceremony in April 2018, when the retreat *kuti* was formerly named the Samana Dhamma Vihara. In July 2018, I moved into the Samana Dhamma Vihara for the duration of the three-month rains retreat. The building itself is self-contained with bathroom and kitchen; and can be used by monks for individual retreats.

The completion of the retreat *kuti* actually carried a much greater significance to the monastery, than simply providing additional accommodation for retreats. It brought to a conclusion, the process to legally recognise the land offered by the Soo family, as a monastery. Once the occupancy permit was issued for the building, all the land under the ownership of the Victoria Sangha Association became zoned as a Buddhist monastery; and a place of worship. Previously, the land was zoned by the government as private forest and agricultural land. Granting the permit for the monastery was the culmination of seventeen years of document preparation, permit applications and physical work building the monastery, that began in 2001.

The Samana Dhamma Vihara sits in a quiet and peaceful piece of forest, on the western side of the monastery. It is located in the centre of the first land that was offered to the Sangha. Over the years, many senior Sangha members have visited and chanted blessings there. The site was also visited by the local Mayor and Council members; the senior planners from the planning department; officers from the fire department; and representatives from the local indigenous people, who also performed two blessing ceremonies, for the monastery.

The Samana Dhamma Vihara provides an excellent facility for quiet retreat; and also as a fire refuge, because the main public buildings of the monastery are located far away, on the eastern side of the monastery property. During my retreat, I was able to enjoy many hours of quiet walking, and sitting meditation to arouse energy and mindfulness; experience deeper states of stillness; and contemplate the Dhamma. I experienced some deep states of *samādhi* which were conducive to more refined insight into impermanence; and letting go of greed, anger and delusion. With the monastery properly established, the Sangha received plenty of support from the lay community; so I could devote my time and energy to cultivating the Dhamma. One constant motivation in my practice has been the recollection of my teachers and cultivation of gratitude to my lay supporters. I have always wished to honour my ordination as a Buddhist monk by upholding the Vinaya; and cultivating the Dhamma for the realisation of *Nibbāna*. In between my own practice of developing calm and insight meditation, I also spent many hours spreading *mettā* outwards to the community.



“ “

The Buddha is still present today.
The Buddha is the Truth.
The Truth is always present.
No matter who is born and who dies,
the Truth remains the same.
It never disappears from the world.
It's always here in exactly this way.

Luang Por Chah

Birth Of Bodhipala Monastery

An Expression Of Continued Faith

In 2018, the Soo family who had originally invited me to Australia in 2001, made an offer to purchase land to be used for a Buddhist monastery, near Adelaide, South Australia. It was an expression of their continued faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and the teachings of Luang Por Chah. That year, several potential properties were located and investigated for their suitability to build a forest monastery. Eventually, in August, a sheep farm in Mount Pleasant, on the edge of the Adelaide Hills, was chosen. I was invited to travel to South Australia to view the property, during the rains retreat. The purchase was completed in October.

The property is about 200 acres in size; and nestled in a quiet valley, about seventy kilometres from the centre of Adelaide. The night before I was told about the property, I had a vision of Luang Por Chah sitting together with some monks, in a peaceful and pleasant forest next to a stream. It is always fortuitous to see Luang Por Chah, whether in a dream or a meditative vision; and I guessed that an appropriate piece of land had been found for the new monastery. The peaceful aura surrounding Luang Por Chah and the monks, the refreshing stream and shady trees

all seemed to indicate something positive. The Buddha pointed out that to offer land to build a monastery is such a powerful kind of good *kamma* that the wholesome results follow, and support the donor in every lifetime, until they reach *Nibbāna*.

One of the reasons, that the sheep farm in Mount Pleasant was suitable to become a monastery, was that it already had existing accommodation buildings and facilities that could be used for monastics and visitors. Over 100 years ago, the farm had included a number of stone cottages with several families living together, in a settlement. Later, it had been renovated into a Bed & Breakfast business; and contained three small stone cottages, as well as a small farmhouse; and a stone barn that could be adapted into a small meditation hall. The main buildings were old, run-down and in need of repair. On the positive side, they were immediately available for use by the monks.

Another important factor, in the choice of the property, as the location for a monastery was that it had a natural spring, in the rocks on the higher ground, with a constant supply of ground water, all year round. In 2018, much of South Australia had been experiencing severe drought for many years; and the water supply for many of the neighbouring properties and farms had completely dried up. The donated property was one of the few farms that still had its own water supply contained in a large dam; and some large rainwater storage tanks which were important for the monks to live and practice, all year round. Although the drought made the land look bare, dry and infertile; the natural spring and the large dam full of water offered hope for the future.

From 2019, we began a programme of reforestation, with volunteers helping to plant thousands of native trees. Although at first, many were lost to the drought, over time, some survived and grew strong. We compared the struggles to revive the

forest with the difficulties monks face in training their minds to overcome the mental defilements. If you are patient in your efforts, success can be achieved, but you need to nourish your practice with the water of the heart which comes from the good *kamma* you make through your effort in cultivating the path of moral integrity, meditation and insight.

The farm was previously home to both dairy cows and sheep for about 150 years. On my first night in the new monastery, I saw a vision of a *Deva* appearing to me first as a cow with a garland of flowers around its neck; and later as a woman adorned with flowers and the clothes of a heavenly being. Such images can appear when the five hindrances drop away; and the mind is in a state of *upacara samādhi*. However, caution is needed as visions can be deluding; and the subject for speculation and attachment. If you remain in a state of calm with detached awareness, and contemplate the impermanence and lack of self in such experiences, you can gain some knowledge of beings in other realms that are associated with a place or person. I consulted Ajahn Anan and Luang Por Opart and they also confirmed the presence of *Devas* associated with the new monastery. In the same way that *Devas* had moved into Buddha Bodhivana Monastery after myself and the monks took up residence, *Devas* were supporting the new monastery in Mount Pleasant, South Australia.

Beginning Bodhipala Monastery was another step forward after many years of close association with the Buddhist community in Adelaide. Luang Por Boonyarit had lived there until the early 2000s and I had travelled to Adelaide and paid respects to him several times, before he returned to Thailand. Later, I received invitations to take senior monks, such as Luang Por Liem, to visit and give teachings in the city. We had already made Dhamma

friends in Adelaide, and for many years, they had been interested in the possibility of having a forest monastery in the area. After the *Kaṭhina* cloth was offered at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery in November 2018, we invited Luang Por Kham and the other senior monks who joined us from Thailand, to visit the lay community in Adelaide and see the new land. Everyone was in agreement that the quiet and secluded farm made a good site for a monastery.

Buddha Bodhivana Monastery Expands

At the same time, as land was donated for a monastery in South Australia, our neighbours in East Warburton announced that they would be selling the four neighbouring property titles that bordered Buddha Bodhivana Monastery to the north and east. The monastery committee felt that we should make the effort to purchase the land because we would be able to preserve the forest bordering the monastery for future generations; and it would help protect the quiet and secluded atmosphere of the monastery. It also would mean the end of cattle farming next to the monastery. So, to our surprise, in the same year, we began a new monastery in Mount Pleasant, South Australia, we doubled the size of Buddha Bodhivana Monastery to over 450 acres. By January 2019, both purchases were complete and I travelled to Thailand to inform Luang Por Liem, Ajahn Anan and the senior monks of the Sangha of the developments; and to invite them to visit Bodhipala Monastery.

Bodhipala - Protector Of Enlightened Knowledge

The name Bodhipala means ‘Protector of Enlightened Knowledge’ and refers to the goal of Buddhist practice which is *Nibbāna*. The monastery is a place to preserve and protect the path and realisation of *Nibbāna*. Luang Por Opart was positive about the new project and confirmed that the monastery was an auspicious place with many *Devas* associated with it. He kindly



Ajahn Kalyano and the Sangha at Bodhipala Monastery in 2022.



Ajahn Nyanadhammo (standing left), Ajahn Kalyano and
Ajahn Nyanadipo at Bodhipala Monastery in 2022.

blessed a set of mahogany stakes for us to bury in the ground; and mark out the boundary of the monastery. He predicted that the monastery would continue to flourish in the Dhamma.

In April, Ajahn Nyanadhammo visited Buddha Bodhivana Monastery and we brought him to see Bodhipala Monastery which is located near his place of birth in South Australia. He was very happy that a new monastery in the Luang Por Chah lineage was being set up near his hometown. He commented that the property offered had great potential as a place for practice. On the lunar Observance Day during his visit, the monks gathered in the small barn to listen to one of the first recitations of the *Pāṭimokkha* rules of discipline in the new monastery. As the monks quietly listened to the recitation, two laymen who had accompanied Ajahn Nyanadhammo from Thailand, sat meditating outside in the cool night air. During an interval, one of the laymen noticed a beautiful sphere of glowing light hovering over the barn, but out of shyness he did not wish to disturb the monks or his friend, to tell them what he had observed. Meanwhile, the other layman had also observed the same brightly shining sphere of light floating above them; and eventually asked his companion if he had seen it. They both agreed that they could see a ball of reddish orange light floating above the monks and eventually they observed the sphere of light float slowly away from the barn until it disappeared. Everyone agreed it was an auspicious sign for the new monastery and probably generated by a *Deva*.

I began making regular visits to Bodhipala Monastery, to give encouragement to the small groups of monastics from Buddha Bodhivana Monastery who took turns to reside there. The early days were difficult because of the sporadic material support and the limited facilities. Some days, there was very little food collected on alms round and no one visited the monastery, but

none of the monks complained. They put their energy into arranging the existing buildings to suit the monastic lifestyle; and regularly went on alms round into the surrounding towns and villages. Luang Por Chah had encouraged monks practising in areas new to Buddhism, to walk out on alms round regularly and be seen by the local population, even if no food is donated. Walking for alms is one way monks make Dhamma friends; and in combination with giving teachings and guiding people in meditation, more people have become interested to offer support to the monastic community.

The monastery is a place for practice of generosity, virtuous conduct and meditation. In the end, it is the training to cultivate the factors of Noble Eightfold Path that sustains the Sangha; and allows the *pāramī* of the individual members to grow. Just as we had experienced in Buddha Bodhivana Monastery near Melbourne, each person visiting the new monastery found their own way to participate. Some people like to offer food, join in meditation teaching programmes or visit the monastery for a time of peaceful reflection. Some like to share their knowledge, skills and labour in building and maintaining the monastery. The duty of the monks is to practice the Dhamma and Vinaya, which keeps the Sangha on safe ground and flourishing.

Practice As Usual

I spent the 3-month rains retreat of 2019, on retreat for the second time, in the Samana Dhamma Vihara. Again, I found the solitude and simple life in the forest conducive to developing mindfulness and contemplation. My elderly parents were both close to the end of their life. I spent much time recollecting their goodness and spreading *mettā* to them. More generally, I contemplated the impermanence of human existence; and the inevitable separation we must face from everybody; and everything that we love and like.

After all these years training as a monk, the way I practised in the retreat of 2019 did not differ significantly from former years. Following the rules of discipline laid down by the Buddha; and the monastic training rules and practices I inherited from Luang Por Chah, is the natural way for me to live. I recollect my teachers and their guidance; and make constant effort to cultivate mindfulness and insight to overcome the mental hindrances; and observe and contemplate the universal characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self, in physical and mental phenomena. When mindfulness is strong and continuous, one can clearly see the three characteristics in physical and mental phenomena. This results in the experience of deep peace of mind, dispassion and letting go. The more one investigates, the more the emptiness of the five aggregates becomes apparent to the mind. When one sees emptiness, one experiences true peace.

Having cultivated the Dhamma for a lifetime, you could say that some aspects of the practice have become easier and more natural to me, as I have gained more skill and understanding in how to train my mind. One's spiritual faculties gradually mature through practice and in particular, the wisdom faculty develops. It is a natural result of cultivating insight into the Dhamma that you become weary of the way the mind follows the habits of craving and clinging to the world; and how craving leads one to make *kamma* and subsequently, have to receive the fruits of *kamma*. The weariness that you experience through clearly seeing the nature of the world is called *Nibbidā*. The mind becomes tired and fed up of clinging to the constantly changing physical world; and of grasping at mental states of happiness and suffering with a sense of self, which arises out of ignorance. Seeing the world as empty brings a profound experience of peace with it. However, one always has to remain heedful and vigilant because the conditioning nature of ignorance and



Laity offering alms to Ajahn Kalyano and the Sangha
at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery.



delusion is so deeply ingrained into one's consciousness. That is why Luang Por Chah reminded us to reflect that everything is not sure. Everything is uncertain.

The human body is constantly experiencing change; and because of this we must endure pain and discomfort. The untrained mind reacts with agitation, discontent, fear and insecurity. The Buddha encouraged us to cultivate mindfulness, clear comprehension and energy, to make our physical and mental suffering objects for contemplation. If you have a foundation in mindfulness; and contemplation to develop insight into the nature of your body and mind; the accumulated wisdom and understanding you gain from your practice reveals the true Dhamma to you. Then you can avoid creating more suffering out of these experiences; and eventually relinquish the causes for suffering completely. Continuous reflection on the unattractiveness and impermanence of your body counters the habit of lustful attachment to your own physical form or that of others. As your mind becomes firmer in *samādhī*, insight into the unattractiveness of the body deepens; and the mind detaches more and more from its old habit of identifying with the body as something desirable, and to be clung to. For me, the experience of ageing confirms the insights into the changing nature of the body, that I had already established earlier in my life; and provides me with more food for insight into relinquishing attachment to the body.

In addition to using retreat time to closely examine the true nature of my physical form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and sense consciousness, I also reflected on the uncertainty of the eight worldly dhammas such as gain and loss; praise and blame; status and loss of status; and pleasure and pain. These are the eight worldly winds that all human beings encounter constantly, throughout their lives. If one gives proper

attention to the impermanent and non-self nature of these experiences, the mind can know, with detached awareness, that it is just the normal way of the world for these pairs of experience to arise and cease. They are uncertain. Quietly meditating in the forest has given me the opportunity to observe the truth of how uncertain these worldly winds are; and the confidence that the cultivation of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path is the clearest way to transcend them, and abandon the delusion of self.

At the end of the rains retreat, we invited Luang Por Khun from Thailand to join us for the *Kathina* cloth offering. I have known Luang Por Khun since I spent the rains retreat with him in 1986. This was a good opportunity to show him both Buddha Bodhivana Monastery and Bodhipala Monastery. We invited him to teach the monks and lay devotees; and he shared with us his characteristic wisdom and insight into the Dhamma.

At the end of December 2019, we held the annual monastic retreat for the lay community, dedicated to the memory of our teacher Luang Por Chah; and also held a temporary novice ordination programme for those men who wish to train as monks, but still have other commitments, preventing them from leaving home on a permanent basis. We were blessed by a visit from Ajahn Anan at this time. He inspired and encouraged the community as he shared his great wisdom and compassion with us. We invited Ajahn Anan to visit Bodhipala Monastery for the first time, which was a source of great happiness for the Sangha and lay community. He gave some positive words of encouragement to the monks, reminding them that the heart of our practice remains the training in the monastic discipline; cultivation of mindfulness and insight, to see the empty nature of the world.

Dhamma Is Medicine For The Mind

Every day, since I first moved to Australia, I or another senior monk have taught Dhamma to the visitors who attend the monastery. We occasionally teach at retreats and meditation workshops; and we give the opportunity for Buddhists to stay in the monastery and deepen their meditation practice in a monastic environment. Teaching the monastic and lay community has been a way to give Dhamma back to the laity who supported the monastery. It also leads the monks to grow in insight and understanding of the Dhamma. Everyone born in the world has their own suffering, and problems to deal with; and as you listen to others, out of compassion and try to give some advice and encouragement, you are also learning.

Some people come into contact with the Dhamma briefly in their lives, others associate with monks for their whole life because they have strong faith in the Triple Gem. People visit the monastery for many reasons: to make merit, receive blessings and for teachings and advice. Since living in Australia, I have been asked to bless babies, people applying for jobs, visa applicants, job applicants, people getting married, the sick, the elderly, people with new cars and motorcycles and so on. I also teach them that the best blessing is to cultivate the Dhamma of morality, meditation and wisdom. Other people visit the monastery because they have had some insight into the nature of life as suffering; and wish to learn meditation or even train as monks.

The majority of lay devotees learn meditation to understand more about themselves, and the Buddhist path. Some practitioners have turned to meditation to help them gain peace and understanding, in the face of relationship problems or health problems. I encourage them to develop meditation, to improve their mindfulness and understanding of where our

mental suffering comes from; and begin to solve it through letting go of craving and wrong views that underlie suffering. One young mother experienced cancer and it revived her interest in meditation, which she had previously practised but given up when looking after her two young children. Taking up the meditation using mindfulness of breathing, when receiving treatment in hospital, she successfully subdued the worst of her anxieties; and experienced deeper peace of mind than she had ever known, before she was ill. An old man experienced extreme anguish and despair when diagnosed with terminal cancer, but through cultivation of *mettā* (goodwill) meditation completely changed his attitude; and brought happiness to everyone around him, in the last months of his life.

A number of young Buddhists have consulted me over the possibility of having abortions over the years; and I have encouraged them to consider carefully about the possibility of keeping the baby. One lady had been advised by her partner to have a termination, but she did not wish to break the five precepts. I encouraged her to be patient and keep practising through the pregnancy. In the end, the baby was born, and the happy mother has a healthy and happy adult son today.

When I lived in Thailand, there were a couple of occasions when I nursed ageing dogs that were without an owner, through the last weeks of their lives until they died. The dogs were in pain, but it seemed correct to help care for them; and I learnt many things as I did that. On a number of occasions, pet owners have consulted me about the possibility of taking their ageing and ill pets to the vet to have them put down because they were in pain. I encouraged them to consider caring for their pet right through to the end of their natural lifespan, just like they were a family member. Those who followed this approach did not seem to regret it.

Over the years, we have found that the sincere efforts of lay devotees to practise generosity, train with the precepts; and cultivate the qualities of mindfulness and insight through meditation, have led them to flourish and progress in every level of the Buddhist path. One comment we hear frequently from lay devotees is that they gain inspiration and strength in their own practice because they know the monks are practising as they do, in the forest. When laity join us for meditation at the monastery, they invariably find that their effort improves; and their meditation goes a little further.

Covid-19 Pandemic And Lockdown

In 2020 the spread of the Covid pandemic into Australia, coincided with a visit from our friend Ajahn Karuniko, the former abbot of Chithurst Buddhist Monastery. He was visiting different monasteries around the world, at that time. His original travel plan was interrupted by the changing border restrictions in Australia; and after arriving at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery, his planned one-month visit turned into eight months. Like most unexpected changes in life, the pandemic brought some benefits as well as challenges; and we were happy to host Ajahn Karuniko for the unexpectedly longer period of time. We offered him an extended retreat in the Samana Dhamma Vihara. The period of the pandemic and associated lockdown actually turned into a period of prolonged retreat for the entire monastic community, as overseas travel and access to the monastery for visitors, was restricted.

The monastic community and lay residents did not find that the period of lockdown impacted much on our monastic training, and way of life. The monks live in simplicity and with a high level of discipline. They have plenty of natural space available in the forest. The lay Buddhist community probably found the



Ajahn Kalyano answering questions, over Zoom,
at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

government restrictions much more challenging as they were confined to their homes. One of roles the monks took on, during the pandemic, was to give additional spiritual support and guidance to the lay devotees. The daily routine of the monks and way of practising in the monastery remained the same. The strong faith and kind support of the lay community ensured that everyday, there was someone available to deliver food to the monastery. With so few lay people visiting the monastery; and so few public activities possible, the Sangha had more time for meditation and pursuing activities that supported their practice such as study and chanting, sewing robes and renovating the buildings. The monastery also benefitted from the government's efforts to increase mobile phone and data coverage in the more sparsely populated mountains, around the monastery. This facilitated the beginning of regular Dhamma teaching via live-stream; and provision of online meditation retreats offered to the lay community, throughout the pandemic.

In-person teaching offered to daily visitors was significantly reduced, during the pandemic, but it was supplemented by the online teaching. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, there was almost no mobile coverage in the monastery; but throughout 2020, our online services increased with the improved coverage. In 2020 and 2021, the *Kaṭhina* cloth offering ceremonies were held online with just a limited number of people physically participating at the monastery. Even with severe limits on the number of participants at the monastery, the online *Kaṭhina* cloth offering still brought the happiness of merit-making into people's homes, at a time when they were facing many difficulties. Like many things in life, the pandemic brought with it some hidden benefits for those interested in practising Dhamma. In the end, the one theme that remains constant is the truth that all things are uncertain; and subject to change.

My Father's Death

In May 2020, I travelled back to the UK when I received the news that my father had become gravely ill due to a growing brain tumour. My father had remained active until the very end of his life; teaching, writing, gardening and cooking until only a few weeks before he passed away. Unfortunately, by April 2020 his health took a serious downturn. The Australian government regulations made me jump through many bureaucratic hoops to gain permission to travel back to the UK because of the pandemic; but eventually, permission was granted to leave the country and visit him. I fulfilled the UK government quarantine requirements staying at Chithurst Monastery and was able to visit my father at home each day, through the final stage of his life. He was cared for at home with healthcare professionals visiting him when required. This provided the best environment for his end-of-life care. Every day, I was able to sit by his bedside, talk with him and spread *mettā* to him as he gradually lost the ability to communicate. At the end of May, he passed away peacefully with his pet dog on the bed with him.

Before returning to Melbourne, I visited my mother to give her blessings and words of encouragement. She was also disappointed with the lockdown regulations, which made it difficult for her to travel out to the local monastery; but at least I could visit her at home. When I returned to Buddha Bodhivana Monastery, the monks and I performed Buddhist funeral chanting and held a memorial service for my father. I consulted with my teachers; and it was good to know that my father achieved rebirth in a wholesome destination.



My Mother's Death

In April 2021, I received news that my mother had suddenly become very weak and was close to the end of her life. The travel restrictions for entering and leaving Australia still remained in place; and at very short notice, I had to satisfy the same bureaucratic requirements, as the previous year, to gain permission to fly to the UK. Unfortunately, I arrived in the UK the day after my mother passed away, but I was happy to know that she died quietly in her sleep, with a very peaceful state of mind. When I visited her body, I was struck by the serene expression on her face. I meditated and chanted for her every day, until her cremation which I arranged with other family members. After the cremation, I went with my sister and nephews to Amaravati Monastery where Ajahn Amaro and the monastic community kindly joined us in a Buddhist memorial service. My relatives offered Sanghadana, received a chanted blessing and then joined in scattering my mother's ashes and planted a tree in the gardens on the spot that my mother had previously requested. Luang Por Opart and Ajahn Anan kindly meditated and spread *mettā* to my mother; and confirmed that she was reborn in the *Tāvātimsa* heaven realm.

Losing both parents, within a year of each other, gave me another strong reflection on impermanence and the ending of many things. Their final passing was a powerful reminder of the transient nature of life; and the inevitable experience of separation from all those that we love. I had left home for the first time when I was seventeen to travel overseas; and then to attend university; and later I travelled to Thailand to become a monk. I have had a lifetime to contemplate the truth of the inevitability of separation from family and friends. I always reflect on the goodness of my parents, with gratitude and appreciation; and wish that they attain *Nibbāna*. I continue with my cultivation

of the Dhamma and dedicate the goodness of my life; and efforts in my practice to them; in the same way as I dedicate the goodness of my practice in gratitude and appreciation, to Luang Por Chah, Ajahn Anan and my other teachers.

In 2022, the 60th year after my birth and 38th year as a Buddhist monk, the monastery re-opened to visitors following the pandemic restrictions. We continued with some of our livestream teaching programmes. In January, I flew to Thailand and paid respects to Luang Por Chah's relics at his monastery; and later in the year, I attended the annual Sangha meeting in June. Unfortunately, during the Sangha meeting I received the news that my sister, who has been a good Dhamma friend over the years, had been involved in a serious automobile collision in England. I travelled back to visit her, at short notice, to give her some spiritual support. We both noticed, with some humour, how in the later years of our life, it seems that we only get to see each other because of the effects of ageing, sickness and death amongst our family members. It is a simple reminder of the three things that are certainties in our life. Ageing, sickness and death are inevitable and are universal truths that affect us all. The Buddha's teachings give us a way to face this suffering and transcend it.

During my last visit to England, I stayed in Bristol near the hospital where my sister was admitted for treatment. I had not been back to the city of Bristol since I left the university in 1984. It was interesting for me to contemplate some of the memories and perceptions that came up in my mind, during my visit. I can say that I feel a little wiser and confident in my understanding of the path out of suffering today; than I did during the time when I lived there as a student. I certainly have no regrets having chosen the path of the Buddhist monk in my life. By chance, as

I took some lay devotees around the university campus, I ended up standing for a photograph at the same spot where I had told one of my lecturers of my decision to travel to Thailand and become a monk forty years ago. Back then, he had been surprised and was not very supportive, but I have no regrets about the decision to become a monk; or devote my life to the study and practice of the teachings.

As I enter the rains retreat of 2022 at Buddha Bodhivana Monastery with seven monks, one novice and three layman, I continue to cultivate the Buddha's path to Awakening with gratitude and appreciation to my teachers and all the lay supporters of Buddha Bodhivana Monastery and Bodhipala Monastery.

May all beings be well and free from suffering.





Glossary

Abhidhamma (Pāli) : The third of the three baskets of the *Tipitaka*, or Pāli Canon, a systemised compendium of Buddhist philosophy and psychology.

Ācariyavatta (Pāli) : The practice of serving or attending to the teacher.

Ajahn (Thai) / **Ācariya** (Pāli) : Teacher; the term used as a title for senior monks.

Anagārikā (Pāli): White-robed postulant or monastic trainee.

Ānāpānasati (Pāli): Mindfulness of breathing.

Anger / **Dosa** (Pāli) : Any form of aversion or disliking.

Anattā (Pāli) : Not-self or non-self; the emptiness of all phenomena; independent of a unique identity or an ultimate self or soul; one of the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena.

Anicca (Pāli) : Impermanence, instability, transience; one of the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena.

Añjali (Pāli) : Palms together in a gesture of respect.

Anumodanā (Pāli) : Rejoicing together after something good has been done.

Arahant (Pāli) : An enlightened being free from all greed, anger and delusion.

Ariyajana (Pāli) : A Noble One; one who has realised any of the stages of enlightenment beginning with stream-entry (see enlightenment).

Asubha (Pāli) : The unbeautiful; meditation subject on the impurity, loathsomeness and foulness of the body. This often refers to contemplation of the thirty-two parts of the body or the ten cemetery contemplations.

Asubha Kammatthāna (Pāli) : Cultivating the meditation focused on the unattractiveness or impurity of the body.

Āṭānāṭiya Paritta (Pāli) : A verse paying homage to the Seven Past Buddhas. The *Āṭānāṭiya Sutta* is the 32nd Sutta in the *Dīgha Nikāya*. It is often chanted as a spiritual protection against evil spirits.

Avijjā (Pāli) : Fundamental ignorance of one's own true nature; lack of clear insight into the Four Noble Truths.

Bhāvana (Pāli) : Cultivation of all factors of the Eightfold Path, including mental cultivation.

Bhikkhu (Pāli) : A Buddhist monk; a fully ordained member of the Sangha.

Bodhisatta (Pāli) / **Bodhisattva** (Sanskrit) : In the Theravada tradition, this term describes the Buddha from the moment he made his vow to become a Buddha until his enlightenment.

Bodhirājakumāra Sutta (Pāli) : In this Sutta, the Buddha teaches Prince Bodhi and describes his striving, Awakening and decision to teach.

Body and Mind / *Rūpa* and *Nāma* (Pāli) : Physical and mental phenomena; body is identical with the first aggregate (see "Five Aggregates"), and mind covers the remaining four.

Buddha (Pāli) : The Awakened One; the historical Buddha, Siddhattha Gotama, who taught in northern India in the sixth century B.C.

Buddhānussati (Pāli) : Meditation recollecting the qualities of the Buddha.

Buddhasāsana (Pāli) : The teachings of the Buddha; the Buddhist religion; Buddhism.

Buddho (Pāli) : Awakened or enlightened; the one who knows; a traditional epithet of the Buddha used as a meditation word in the Thai Forest tradition.

Chao Khun (Thai) : An ecclesiastical title bestowed upon a monk by the King of Thailand, to acknowledge past acts of service.

Chedi (Thai) : Chedi is an alternative term for Stupa commonly used in Thailand. It is a monument usually built to house relics of the Buddha or an *Arahant*.

Citta (Pāli) : The mind, heart, consciousness.

Concentration / *Samādhi* (Pāli) : Meditative calm and stability; one-pointedness of mind.

Craving / *Taṇhā* (Pāli) : Desire conditioned by delusion; the second noble truth taught by the Buddha is that craving is the cause of suffering.

Dāna-Pāramī (Pāli) : The skilful act of giving.

Defilements / Unwholesome Tendencies / *Kilesa* (Pāli) : Mental qualities that obscure the clarity and purity of the mind. There are three basic sorts — greed, anger and delusion.

Delusion / *Avijjā* or *Moha* (Pāli) : Fundamental ignorance; that is, ignorance of one's own true nature. Delusion can be said to imply a lack of clear insight into the Four Noble Truths. Alternatively, delusion can be described as the tendency to see the unsatisfactory as satisfactory, the impermanent as permanent, and what is not-self as self.

Dependent Origination / *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (Pāli) : Conditioned co-arising; one of the central doctrines of Buddhist teaching. The twelve-stage conditioned process that brings about suffering. Founded on the this/that principle of specific causality (when there is this, then that arises). It proceeds as follows: from ignorance arises kammic formations; from kammic formations, consciousness; from consciousness, mental and physical phenomena; from mental and physical phenomena, the six sense bases; from the six sense bases, contact; from contact, feeling; from feeling, craving; from craving, clinging; from clinging, becoming; from becoming, birth; from birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

Deva (Pāli) : Celestial being. Existence in such a refined and blissful state is directly related to purity of heart through the development of virtue, *samādhi* and wisdom. Such a happy state of existence is, of course, impermanent.

Devadūta (Pāli) : Heavenly messenger.

Dhamma (Pāli) / ***Dharma*** (Sanskrit) : Truth, reality, nature, or the laws of nature considered as a whole. The term is often used to refer to the Buddha's teachings as well as to the truth to which they point.

Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (Pāli) : This *sutta* is considered by Buddhists to be the first sermon given to the five ascetics by the Buddha in the Deer Park at Sarnath.

Dhammanusati Satipaṭṭhāna (Pāli) : Recollection of the virtues of the Dhamma or truth.

Dhutaṅga (Pāli) : The thirteen ascetic practices made allowable by the Buddha that practitioners may take on to cultivate the qualities of renunciation, contentment and ‘wear away’ the mental defilements.

Dukkha (Pāli) : Suffering, unsatisfactoriness, discontent; literally — hard to bear. It is one of the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena.

Dukkha Vedanā (Pāli) : Painful feelings arising in body and mind.

Eight Worldly Conditions : Gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and disrepute, happiness and suffering; also known as the eight worldly dhammas.

(Noble) Eightfold Path : The fourth of the noble truths taught by the Buddha; the way leading out of suffering consisting of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Enlightenment : The ultimate goal of Buddhist training and practice. Many words and phrases express this transcendent experience of Awakening, for example: *vimutti*, freedom or liberation from the mental defilements of greed, hatred and delusion; *Nibbāna* — literally, extinguishing the fires of greed, hatred and delusion; the deathless or unconditioned, that is, the heart is free from the conditions that bind it to conventional reality. Enlightenment is traditionally defined in terms of the

abandoning of ten underlying defilements of heart and mind that fetter or bind it to the cycle of death and rebirth and the suffering experienced therein (see "*Sam̐sāra*").

Five Hindrances / *Nivarana* (Pāli) : Five qualities that are obstacles to clarity and concentration of the mind. They are sensual desire, ill-will, dullness, restlessness and doubt.

Five Aggregates / *Khandha* (Pāli) : Literally, heaps. The psychophysical components that the deluded mind attaches to as a self: bodily form, feeling, memory and perception, mental formations and consciousness.

Four Elements / *Dhātu* (Pāli) : Earth, water, wind and fire — the primary qualities of matter. Earth has the characteristic of hardness, water of fluidity and cohesion, wind of motion, and fire of heat. All four are present in every material object, though in varying proportions.

Four Noble Truths : The first teaching of the Buddha — the truth of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path leading out of suffering.

Four Sublime Abidings / *Brahmavihāra* (Pāli) : Loving-kindness (*mettā*); compassion (*karuṇā*); sympathetic joy (*muditā*), happiness at witnessing others' good fortune; equanimity (*upekkhā*).

Greed / *Lobha* (Pāl) : Any sort of wanting, desire or attraction.

Hiri Ottappa (Pāli) : *Hiri* means an inner conscience that protects one from doing harm to one self and others. *Ottappa* means a wise fear of the consequences of evil actions.

Impermanent / *Anicca* (Pāli) : Transient; having the nature to arise and pass away; one of the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena.

Jhāna (Pāli) : Mental absorption. Eight successively more refined states of meditative concentration.

Kalyāṇajana (Pāli) : A virtuous or noble person.

Kalyāṇamitta (Pāli) : Good and noble friends.

Kāma Rāga (Pāli) : Sensual desire and lust.

Kamma (Pāli) / **Karma** (Sanskrit) : Intentional action through speech, body or mind; cause leading to an effect.

Kammatthana (Pāli) : Literally means basis for work. Used to refer to the practice of training in mindfulness and wisdom to abandon the mental defilements.

Kathina (Pāli) : A ceremony held in the month after the annual rains retreat where the Sangha receives an offering of cloth from lay supporters, sew a robe from the cloth and offer it to one of their members.

Khanti (Pāli) : Patience; forbearance. One of the ten perfections (*pārami*).

Kilesa (Pāli) : Mental defilements, unwholesome qualities that obscure clarity and purity of mind. There are three primary roots of the mental defilements: greed, anger and delusion.

Krooba Ajahn (Thai) : A title of great reverence reserved for an eminent teacher or meditation master and which often implies the realisation of enlightenment.

Kuti (Pāli) : A single-person dwelling place for a Buddhist monastic.

Luang Por / Pu (Thai) : Venerable or reverend father/grandfather; a term of respect and affection reserved for senior and very senior monks.

Māgha Pūjā (Pāli) : The full-moon day in the third month when Buddhist recollect the occasion when the Buddha gave the teaching known as the '*Ovada Patimokkha*'.

Maha Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (Pāli) : The Buddha's Great Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Maṅgala Sutta (Pāli) : The Buddha's Discourse on Life's Highest Blessings.

Māra (Pāli) : The demonic personification of the negative emotional and psychological forces that oppose the development of virtue, *samādhi* and wisdom.

Marananusati (Pāli) : Recollection of death, meditation on death.

Mental Object / *Ārammaṇa* (Pāli) : An object appearing to the mind brought about by contact at any of six sense doors. In the Thai language the word, *arom*, can also refer to an emotion or mood.

Merit / *Puñña* (Pāli) : The accumulation of positive *kamma* and the actions that contribute to this; the spiritual power of good deeds.

Mettā (Pāli) : loving kindness, goodwill, friendliness; one of the ten perfections (*pāramī*) and one of the four sublime abidings (*brahmavihāra*).

Mindfulness / *Sati* (Pāli) : Awareness or attentiveness; the ability to keep one's attention deliberately fixed on whatever one chooses to observe.

Mula Dhātu (Pāli) : crystallised relics that form in the excrement of an *Arahant*.

Nāga (Pāli) : A term commonly used to refer to strong, stately and heroic animals, such as elephants and magical serpents. In Buddhism, it is also used to refer to those who have attained the goal of the practice.

Nesajjik'anga (Pāli) : Often shortened to *nesajjik* in Thai. Sitters practice or the practice of not lying down for the duration of a determined period of time. One of the thirteen ascetic practices.

Nibbāna (Pāli) / **Nirvāṇa** (Sanskrit): Freedom from suffering; the extinction of greed, anger and delusion; enlightenment; the ultimate goal of Buddhist training.

Nibbidā (Pāli) : Weariness, disenchantment.

Nimitta (Pāli) : Vision. A mental 'sign', usually (but not exclusively) a visual image that arises in meditation.

Nirodha-Samāpatti (Pāli) : The short version for *saññāvedayita-nirodha*. A deep state of cessation only attainable by non-returners and *Arahants*. One who enters this state resembles someone who has died.

Noble Ones / Ariya Puggala / Ariyajana (Pāli) : Those who have realised any of the stages of enlightenment beginning with stream entry.

Not-self / Non-self / Anattā (Pāli) : No distinct identity, without individual essence; one of the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena.

Obhāsa Nimitta (Pāli) : Vision of radiant light.

Observance Day (Thai: Wan Phra) : The four Buddhist holy days that occur every full moon, quarter moon and new moon

each month according to the lunar calendar. It is the custom for Buddhists to go to a monastery and observe Eight Precepts, listen to Dhamma and meditate on these days. The Pali word ‘*Uposatha*’ refers only to the full and new moon days. The ‘*Uposatha*’ is the day the monks listen to the recitation of the *Patimokkha* rules of monastic discipline.

One-pointedness / *Ekaggatā* (Pali) : Unification of the mind.

Opanayiko (Pāli) : Meaning ‘to be brought inside oneself’ or ‘leading one close to’.

Pabbajjā (Pāli) : Novice ordination. The candidate formerly requests to ‘go forth from home to homelessness’, takes refuge in the Triple Gem, undertakes the Ten Precepts of a novice monk and requests to live in dependence on his teacher.

Pāli : The language of the earliest Buddhist scriptures, closely related to Sanskrit.

Pārami (Pāli) : Spiritual development. Virtues accumulated over lifetimes manifesting as wholesome dispositions. They include: generosity, restraint, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truthfulness, determination, kindness and equanimity.

Parittas (Pāli) : Protective verses chanted to ward off misfortune and danger; and cultivate wholesome states of mind.

Pāṭimokkha (Pāli) : The basic code of monastic discipline consisting of 227 rules and recited fortnightly in the Pāli original with a quorum of four monks.

Piṇḍapāta (Pāli) : Walking on alms round to collect food.

Puja (Pāli) : Worship or reverence. The word is often used to mean a service of chanting and meditation.

Puthujjana (Pāli) : Worldling, ordinary person; anyone still possessed of all ten fetters which bind beings to the rounds of rebirth, and thus yet to attain to the first stage of enlightenment.

Rains Retreat / *Vassa* (Pāli) : Every year from July to October — the time of the Asian rainy season — there is a compulsory monastic retreat. A monk's seniority is determined by the number of these retreats he has completed.

Right View / *Sammādiṭṭhi* (Pāli) : The first of the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path. On the most profound level means seeing things in accordance with reality and insight into the Four Noble Truths.

Samādhi (Pāli) : Meditative calm and stability; one-pointedness of mind. It refers to both the process of focusing awareness unwaveringly upon a single meditation object and the resultant state of such concentrated attention. Right concentration (or *Samma Samādhi*) is the eighth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Samaṇa Dhamma (Pāli) : It was used by Luang Por Chah to mean the ways of the peaceful. At the deepest level, it means the virtues and qualities that one cultivates that lead to enlightenment.

Samanera (Pāli) : Novice monk.

Samatha (Pāli) : Tranquillity, the state of lucid calm. 'Samatha Meditation' refers to those meditation techniques which focus on stilling and calming the mind.

Sammāgārava (Pāli) : Correct reverence, esteem or attention. Correct appreciation and reverence for the Triple Gem, the training, heedfulness and hospitality.

Samsāra (Pāli) : The unenlightened, unsatisfactory experience of life; the ongoing cycle of birth and death.

Samyojana (Pāli) : It means fetter or bond. There are ten described by the Buddha. The first three of personality view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*), attachment to sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) and attachment to rules, rituals and external practices (*silabattaparamāsa*) are abandoned by the the stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*).

Saṅgha (Pāli) : In general, the community of those who practice the Buddhist way; on a deeper level, anyone who has attained one of the eight stages of enlightenment.

Saṅghānussati (Pāli) : Recollection of the virtues of the enlightened Sangha.

Saṅkhārā (Pāli) : Conditioned phenomena; that which is created from the coming together of various conditions. Although by definition, *saṅkhārā* includes both physical and mental phenomena, it can also be used to refer to the fourth of the five aggregates, i.e. thoughts, moods and mental states.

Saññā (Pāli) : Memory and perception. *Saññā* is the discriminative faculty of mind that labels and ascribes meaning to experience. However, due to the corrupting influence of ignorance, experience is always interpreted in terms of craving and attachment; that is, in terms of likes and dislikes or desire and aversion. Consequently, one's very perception of reality is distorted from the outset and acting, speaking and thinking on the basis of these defiled memories and perceptions only reinforces their reality and entrenches the heart deeper in delusion.

Sati (Pāli) : Mindfulness, recollection, bearing in mind.

Satipaṭṭhāna (Pāli) : Foundation of mindfulness. There are four: body, feelings, mind and the processes and objects of the mind.

Self-identity View / Sakkāya-Diṭṭhi (Pāli) : The view that a true self exists. This is abandoned completely only on the attainment of the first stage of enlightenment. There are four basic types of self-identity view: that the true self is (1) identical with, (2) contained within, (3) independent of, or (4) the owner of any of the five aggregates.

Seven Factors of Enlightenment / Bojjhaṅga (Pāli) : Wholesome qualities developed for knowledge and liberation (Vimuttī) 1. Mindfulness (*Satī*) 2. Investigation of Dhamma (*Dhamma-Vinaya*), 3. Energy (*Vīriya*), 4. Rapture (*Pīti*), 5. Tranquility (*Passadhi*), 6. Stillness or concentration (*Samādhi*), and 7. Equanimity (*Upekkhā*).

Sīla (Pāli) : Virtue or morality; also refers to the specific moral precepts taken on by Buddhist laypersons, novices, monks and nuns.

Sīmā (Pāli) : Boundary or limit.

Six Sense Bases : The eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body (including the brain) and mind.

Six Sense Objects : Forms, sounds, odours, flavours, physical sensations and mind — objects i.e., thoughts and moods etc.

Tathāgatha (Pāli) : A perfect one; literally, thus gone or thus come; an epithet for the Buddha.

Three Characteristics/ *Ti-lakkhaṇa* (Pāli) : Impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. The qualities of impermanence and unsatisfactoriness apply only to those phenomena that arise from causes and conditions.

Upacara Samādhi (Pāli) : Neighbourhood concentration or access concentration. It is a level of *jhāna* pertaining to the Sensuous Sphere, from the contemplation of the Buddha.

Upajjhāya (Pāli) : Preceptor or instructor of a *Bhikkhu*.

Upasampadā (Pāli) : The ceremony of ordination or acceptance into the Sangha of a Buddhist monk.

Uposatha (Pāli) : Observance day, corresponding with the phases of the moon, on which Buddhist lay people gather to listen to the Dhamma and to observe the eight precepts. On the new moon and full moon *Uposatha* days, monks assemble to recite their rules. An *Uposatha* hall is used to carry out these community transactions. See also "Observance Day".

Vāsanā (Pāli) : Behavioural tendency or kamma that influences the current behaviour of a person.

Vinaya (Pāli) : The Buddhist monastic code of discipline; literally, leading out, because maintenance of these rules leads out of unskilful actions and unskilful states of mind; in addition it can be said to lead out of the household life and attachment to the world.

Vipassana Bhūmi (Pāli) : The six foundations or areas used to cultivate insight. They are summarised in passages chanted by Buddhist monks for reflection on the stages of insight into the arising and cessation of suffering.

Viriya (Pāli) : Energy.

Visaṅkhāra (Pāli) : That which is not conditioned and does not change.

Wat (Thai) : Buddhist monastery.

Wat Nong Pah Pong (Thai) : A forest monastery in northeast Thailand founded by Venerable Ajahn Chah.

Wholesome / Kusala (Pāli) : Skilful action leading to happiness; on a higher level, action in accord with the Eightfold Path.

Wisdom / Paññā (Pāli) : Understanding of the nature of reality; insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self.

May all beings be well and free from suffering.







