

The Ways of the Peaceful



*Teachings about “Samana-Dhamma”, the virtues of a Buddhist Monk
by Luang Por Liem Thitadhammo*

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Information about the Ajahn Chah Tradition

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*Wat Pah Nanachat (“The International Forest Monastery”) is
also the monastery to contact for foreigners in Thailand
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Tradition. The training starts from becoming an anagarika (a
homeless one), observing the eight precepts for several
months, to becoming a samenera (novice) for about one year,
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Foreword

“The Ways of the Peaceful” is one of the many possible renderings of the term “Samana-Dhamma”, an expression that summarizes the whole lifestyle of a Buddhist monk. “Samana” means somebody who is peaceful. Generally in the time of the Buddha all kinds of recluses, ascetics, contemplatives, and members of ordained communities living the life of a homeless practitioner (anagarika) were referred to as “Samanas”. The Buddhas disciples were often called the “Samanas of Gotama” or the “Samanas of the Sakyana clan”, using the Buddhas family and clan names. Whenever the aspect of celibacy of these religious practitioners is stressed, the term “brahmacariya” is used, which translates in short as “Holy Life”. The Buddha himself called his monks “Bhikkhus”. This literally means beggars, but especially in the Thai Forest Tradition a second translation is popular: “Those who see the danger in the round of rebirth”. Besides the specific monastic code that the Buddha established for his monks (the “Vinaya”, with its 227 major training rules and countless minor rules), that spells out the conduct of a Buddhist monk in great detail, there was a general understanding of the etiquette, the virtues and qualities of a Samana, a peaceful ascetic. This is the “Samana-Dhamma”. It refers to these general virtues more than to the details of the training rules, but in fact the daily life of a monk is always a combination of both, in the same way as the Buddha

always used the words Dhamma and Vinaya as a pair when he talked about his dispensation.

This compilation of teachings circles around the routines, practices and aspirations that form the life of a monastic community, (Sangha), as practised in the Thai Forest Tradition in the present day and age. Luang Por Liem Thitadhammo is one of the living teachers of this tradition. He was entrusted the leadership of the famous forest monastery Wat Nong Pah Pong in Ubon Rajathani in Northeastern Thailand by Luang Pu Chah, who is well known in Thailand and abroad for his unique style of teaching this all encompassing way of life and meditation to both Thai and western monks. Presently, Luang Por Liem keeps this emphasis on training monks alive, ranging from mastering the details of daily life to very profound insights into the universal truths about life that the Buddha taught.



Luang Pu Chah



Luang Por Liem

In this book, besides general outlines of monastic aspiration and its practice in daily life, some material on the ceremony of ordination, called the "Going Forth" from the household life to the homeless life is included. In comparison with the Thai edition called "Samana-Dhamma", some talks have been shortened, as some parts are only of interest to those who know Thailand well.

We hope that the teachings put together in this volume serve those who are not yet familiar with Buddhist monastic culture as an introduction to areas of Dhamma practice that are usually only accessible to monks and inspire those that are interested in taking up monastic life to do so, and those who are already monks, to continue to train themselves in the Ways of the Peaceful.

With best wishes in the Samana-Dhamma,

The Translators

(Wat Nong Pah Pong, June 2550 (2007))

*To let other people see the example of
one's actions, to live so they can see, is much
better than to teach using merely words.
Therefore let all of us follow the footsteps of
the Enlightened Beings together.*



*“Following the
Footsteps of the
Enlightened Beings”*

Following the Footsteps of the Enlightened Beings

Excerpts from a short speech written by Luang Por Liem to be read out opening the conference of the Australian Sangha Association, the umbrella organization of all traditions of monastics that have settled down in Australia, including Mahayana and Vajrayana besides Theravada, in June 2006 (2549).

Siam, or Thailand, is highly renowned all over the world for being one of the countries where Buddhism is thriving and flourishing. This is in part due to our ruler, His Majesty the King, giving Royal patronage to the national religion. As a result, Buddhism has flourished, especially in the areas of the study of theoretical knowledge and Dhamma education.

Still, our country has not yet been able to present to the world an acceptable example of somebody who has gained the highest spiritual fruits of Buddhism. Having emphasized the spreading of theoretical knowledge, we have yet to take the next step to spreading the practice of Dhamma. If we have succeeded in this, we will be truly following the footsteps of the *ariapuggalas*, the Noble Enlightened Beings, who we have learned and studied about so much. We have yet to send one of those who have received the full fruits of practice to prove to the world that the path of Buddhism is capable of extinguishing the suffering in the hearts of beings – just in the same way as modern science is able to relieve the physical pain of the body.

Day by day our lives come closer to ending. Therefore we must strive to follow the footsteps of the Enlightened Beings, and incline towards the highest fruits of Buddhist practice. Thus we will fulfill our duty as monastics: the obligation to abandon all things that are obstacles to the ending of suffering. To cast them off completely. In contrast to this, is the lifestyle of settling down in huge, big residences – the life of a householder who needs to take care of all kinds of possessions, and has many worries and lots of responsibilities.

Actually, being a householder or a monastic is not defined by the type of cloth worn, be it that of a layperson or a monastic. The way we lead our lives defines us and the spiritual qualities we have. This is independent of the external form or our special status as monastics. Anyone who lives without a house, who does not possess anything apart from the clothes he needs for covering his body, only has a single vessel for taking his meals, and is solely intent on a life free from suffering, can rightly be called an *anagarika*, a “Homeless One” – irrespective of whether he wears lay or monastic clothing. Coming from the heart, the principles of the Dhamma are not aiming at taking status or anything external as essential. We need to maintain the Dhamma in our hearts, develop an internal resource of refined thinking and have the dedication to act accordingly. This means to follow the footsteps of the Enlightened Beings in our actions.

If we keep following the footsteps of the Enlightened Beings, we will eventually discover a “science of the mind”–spiritual knowledge that can be of great benefit for the world. We will be able to maintain this lifestyle with dignity in its original form, bring it to the West and create something useful for the world. In fact, the world has tremendous thirst for truth and

happiness. Are we going to lie down, waiting for our habits to change by themselves, or are we going to try and do what can be done by human strength and effort, the way the Buddha taught us to?

If studying Buddhism by the books was all we needed to do, leading the Holy Life of a Buddhist monastic wouldn't be anything very profound. Nevertheless, to study the books with the motivation to find a way out of suffering seems worthwhile. But if our primary motivation to study is based on ambitions for gain and fame, we begin the Holy Life in a wrong way and are likely to go astray. So, can we see the danger in this? Isn't it obvious, which path leads towards the world, and which one leads beyond? How can we hope to be able to pick up the fruits of the "noble science of spiritual qualities" if we only study the books?

Our teacher, the Lord Buddha, was born on the bare earth under a Sala-tree in Lumbini. He was enlightened sitting on the bare earth with just a thin cushion of grass, under the Bodhi-tree in Bodhgaya. He entered final *nibbana* lying down on the bare earth, under a Sala-tree, with merely his outer robe underneath. Nothing more than that. His whole life the Buddha spent on the earth and under trees. This tells us how withdrawn the Buddha's life was. He didn't get involved with using extravagant dwellings. That he was able to realize the truth about the world of the mind is due to just this dwelling in seclusion. If we have never given it an honest try to live in places of seclusion, we shouldn't just assume that we lack the opportunity to cultivate the wonderful qualities that the Buddha taught about. We should cut off the fetters in our hearts that bind us to seeking company, entertainment and a life of pleasure. We should maintain that it is an honour to frequent the kind of places of retreat that the Buddha himself used with great

results and recommended to all of us. And we should hold our being Samanas of the Sakyan clan in honour, through our wholehearted determination to act with honesty towards ourselves and towards other people. Then we will reach the fruits of this noble science of the mind, an unchanging truth. Our hearts will be liberated, free from slavery to anything in this world. We will experience a power mightier than the sciences of the physical world – a power that is capable of bringing the world to lasting peace and coolness. Isn't the constant lack, hunger and thirst of the world aroused by the temptations and stimulations that modern science constantly keeps inventing anew and anew? Modern science constantly causes people to suffer in all kinds of ways because it keeps stimulating the wish for more and more without knowing an end. Just like when somebody is actually full after he has eaten, but still something that he likes even more comes and tempts him. Taking it, he experiences suffering burning him up inside. The wealthy and poor suffer all the same in this matter, until they eventually get a taste of this noble science, a taste of the way of life of the Enlightened Beings.

Why is it that people don't take this wonderful medicine that can ward off all those diseases which arise in the mind? The suffering of the mind is really like a disease. Desire, never being satisfied, never knowing enough, is the virus which causes it. And peace and seclusion is the medicine which cures the illness. Those who lead their lives according to the practices of the Enlightened Beings are the ones who provide others with the medicine, helping them, after they have cured themselves.

So let us learn this noble science, the science of truth, and help each other for the highest benefit and happiness of the world, ourselves included. To do this, we need to live our lives in a truly

fresh and soothing, cooling way, both externally and internally, deeply bright and radiant, representing a symbol of coolness and tranquility for others. We will be an example for those human beings who experience suffering weighing heavily on their hearts, whose eyes are dull and dark due to internal consumption by the fires of greed, anger and the frustration of their wishes. Only externally representing the form of a Samana, but internally being full of thoughts of lust and craving just like laypeople, we won't be capable of giving the world an example. We will be like the blind leading the blind.

We should create as much benefit for others as possible with our exemplary conduct, even though there won't be any reward for it. By the power of our kindness other people will develop friendship towards one another as well. We should teach the world by sacrificing our own happiness, giving an example of how one can live well using only the bare necessities. We can collect what we have saved by refraining from luxury and use it for the benefit and happiness of those other people that are still suffering.

All through history, in any day and age, a fully enlightened being, an *arahant*, would never spend his life in laziness or take advantage of other people by hiding away from society in order to search for merely his own happiness. In truth, the arahant merely waits for opportunities to give others the example of a truly happy person. All the time, all his life, the arahant is a model of patient endurance, resolute strength and diligent effort, even for people that aspire only to worldly success.

Take a look at the process of becoming an arahant. It starts with making the same resolution the Buddha himself made:

“Bhikkhus, all of you should bring forth effort by determining in your minds: “Even if my blood and flesh all dries up and only bones and sinews remain, if I have not yet attained the fruits that are attainable by strength and exertion of energy by human beings, I won’t stop this effort of mine.”

This resolution shows that people should be taught to be able to bear with and endure things, firmly, relentlessly and continuously. Those who have attained to arahantship will always continue to put forth effort for the benefit of others. They continue to be an example and teach to patiently endure what nature brings, hot or cold weather for example. They aim at perfecting what is beneficial, supporting only the essential. For an arahant it is normal to be an example of somebody who is able to sustain his smile in the midst of all the flames of a fire spreading out and burning him relentlessly.

To let other people see the example of one’s actions, to live so they can see, is much better than to teach using merely words. Therefore let all of us follow the footsteps of the Enlightened Beings together. True benefit, happiness and peace will then arise for all of us and for society as well, for our country, and for the world.

Since we are living the life of one who sees the danger in the round of rebirth and we are in a position where we have the duty to pass on the principles and practices of the Dhamma, it is necessary that we take this obligation seriously.



*“Practise
Within Ones Duties”*

Practise Within Ones Duties

Parts of a talk given on Jan 12th 2007 (2550) in the ordination hall (uposatha hall) of Wat Nong Pah Pong, addressing the yearly monastic assembly commemorating Luang Pu Chahs passing away, where almost a thousand monks gather to express their faith towards their teacher and his specific way of training.

This uposatha hall was built by Luang Pu Chah in 2519 (1976), and was ready for use in 2520 (1977). One can say that it is quite a durable structure, as it has served its purpose now for already as long as thirty years. An ordination hall is a religious site, a place that specifically belongs to the Sangha. The Sangha has received permission (from the sovereign of the nation) to use this site for performing its religious tasks within Buddhism. In a way we can see such a ceremonial site as a fundamental feature of the Buddhist religion. This refers to the physical presence of a religion, in the sense of material objects (*sasanavattu*) being a testimony and representation of the religion. Religious objects of this kind are called *senasana*, the dwelling places (of the Sangha). For this dwelling place we have received permission from the authorities governing society. We have ownership over it, and have the right to perform what benefits the Dhamma-Vinaya in whatever way we wish. This means particularly to be able to accept new people into our religious community (in this hall), which is called the ceremony of Going Forth and Bhikkhu ordination.

The ordination ceremony is meant to ensure that there is enough human potential for doing the work of passing on the heritage of the Buddhist religion. Whenever people go forth into monkhood and ordain we gain strength for the continuation of the

religion. This, in fact, relies on nothing else but the human resources in our community of monks.

So the individual Buddhist, a member of the religion (*sasanapuggala*) plays a very important role, as it depends on the people within the religion to turn the religious teachings, the *sasanadhamma*, the dispensation of the Buddha, into something that is of benefit. That is why, when the individual followers of a religion take up the obligation to transmit and pass on the teachings, they need to be possessed with certain spiritual qualities, namely, as we understand it, some of the aspects of the spiritual realizations that are characteristic for the Sangha¹. Still, this doesn't mean that the people forming the human resources of a religion are already perfect in these spiritual qualities from the start. But it is necessary to gradually develop such knowledge by means of following the principles of the Dhamma-Vinaya.

If a person doesn't have spiritual values that are in line with the Dhamma-Vinaya, this will give rise to things that are incorrect and will further contradict some of those teachings that form the noble qualities of the Sangha. For this reason we need to give knowledge and advice to those persons that we call monks and novices, those who fulfill the role of continuing Buddhism. We need to instruct them, so they acquire good standards and practise what is correct and in line with the guiding principles and values of the Sangha. This is what is called "*sikkha*", training.

¹ This refers to the Nine Qualities of the *ariya-sangha*, the Noble Disciples that have attained one of the stages of liberation. The Nine Qualities are for example: to practise well (*supatipanno*) or to practice directly (*ujupatipanno*).

Sikkha means to educate oneself through being aware of one's conduct when performing the duties of a well-practised person, namely, keeping *sila*² and Vinaya. We have to give this great importance, as *sila* and Vinaya are considered the fundamental roots of our religion. If people have some education in the Vinaya, they will practise and conduct themselves in a way that gives rise to neither conflict, nor decline, nor degeneration.

Since we are living the life of one who sees the danger in the round of rebirth and we are in a position where we have the duty to pass on the principles and practices of the Dhamma, it is necessary that we take this obligation seriously.

To train and educate oneself is actually not very difficult, because the teachings of the Buddha, including the Vinaya with all its connections to the principle teachings, do in fact relate to our own behaviour and actions in all their variety. Whatever behaviour is inappropriate or not right, the Buddha forbids, teaching us so we know how to refrain from it and give it up. In our interactions with other people, we need to be aware of the fact that our actions will have an effect on them. This is something to keep in mind very clearly.

As one of the individual monks living in a certain place, doing his duties as part of the human potential (of Buddhism), one shouldn't give way to thinking narrow-mindedly in terms of "*atta*", one's own person. One should think in terms of the communal aspects of this religion, considering the results and effects that occur on the communal level. Anything that is not

² *sila* (Pali): virtue, morality, ethical conduct, or specifically: keeping the precepts of a monk, novice or layperson.

correct may cause division and arguments in unskilful and unbeautiful ways.

These days we hear a lot about the world being full of conflicts. Maybe you know the Jataka-tale³, in which the Buddha gives the comparison of a Sangha that used to live together for a long time being like the wooden gong of the people of Dasaraka. A gong is an instrument for calling people together. If such a gong becomes old, its wood will start developing cracks, and the person that has the task of maintaining the gong in its original condition will have to insert a wedge or a peg into the gong in a way that the gong keeps the shape of a gong. There is actually not much about all those things that are inserted (into our lifestyle as Samanas) as long as we don't become infatuated with what is not appropriate for a Samana. But this is exactly what happens when wealth and fame develop. Such a development creeps in the corners and bit by bit makes us forget who and what we are. One has to be very careful about that. All of us need to be aware of this and should not get carried away with things. After all, we are not doing these things for ourselves. We are doing them for the benefit of the community, and act based on the principles of the Buddha's teaching, the Dhamma-Vinaya. This is a point we need to take into consideration. If we refer to such principles, we most probably won't become heedless, and we are likely to maintain a life with a heart of loyalty towards practices and ways of conduct, which won't lead to self-destruction.

There is nothing that can destroy us other than negligence. Negligence comes from not searching and inquiring to find

³ The Jatakas are the stories of the Buddha's past lives as a Bodhisatta in the Pali Canon.

knowledge about ways of improving things so that they become beneficial. This is what we need to try, and each individual, being a part of the religion's human potential, plays a role in maintaining it, both on the material and the human side of the religion.

Now, being in a position to do things and to take over responsibilities, we should be aware of the importance of having such a chance. We have the chance, so we try to protect it for our own sake. We need to make the most of our opportunities. As concerns the support of the laypeople: they are ready. Even if they aren't able to give material support, they will still encourage us mentally. In any case they will give their appreciation. So we try to do our duty. Don't be somebody who is weak.

So I'd like to express my appreciation for all of you living in different places doing their duty in line with the teachings of our venerated teachers, and the Dhamma-Vinaya. Don't merely do the things you do following your wishes. This isn't good. One should counsel others. We have many many friends in the Dhamma living together with us. At least, we shouldn't do things in a rush, but rather act in a way that is reasonable. Then things won't go to ruin and we will be pleased with what we have done. What we have done will be Dhamma and Vinaya. Our monasteries, once they are built up completely, will be conducive for practice, and we won't have problems, or be frustrated, burdened with a lot of worries. Everything will feel cool and tranquil, and we'll be in a position where we are accepted by society.

So all of you that are to fulfill these duties, be well motivated to do so, even if you are living alone – then there

shouldn't be many problems, nothing to spoil. Please always do your duties according to our fundamental, essential principles. Always keep to the ideals and have personal standards of practice in the way you lead your lives. These standards will serve as our reinforcements, bolstering and warding off (problems). They will be a refuge for us to rely on. If we possess such standards of practice as our basic principles, our actions will give us strength and a feeling of being at ease.

What I have just spoken about are things which are not too profound, but are the underlying principles that I have practised with in this monastery. Having come together (to this meeting) here, you probably realize that this monastery is a place that we should protect and keep functioning in every aspect: the material objects, the human resources, and even all the different religious ceremonies within the monastery. Let us keep them in line with the fundamental principles of the Dhamma-Vinaya, within the Buddhist religion.

Being a true human being means being somebody who possesses a mind that goes beyond the nature of the world.



*“Ordination:
Going Forth”*

Ordination: Going Forth

Going Forth is the translation of the Pali term pabbajja that is used for the samanera ordination (novice ordination). It means to go forth from the household life to the life of a Samana, a contemplative. This teaching was given by Luang Por Liem during a ceremony of Going Forth of Western monks at Wat Nong Pah Pong on Feb. 19th 2003 (2546).

Now at this time, your presentation of these yellow robes – sewn and dyed according to the most excellent allowances of the Buddha – and your utterance of the words requesting the Going Forth is well done by all of you.

Apart from that, the Going Forth requires that – from the beginning onwards – you plant and cultivate your faith and inspiration within the field of the Triple Gem. Because the Buddha, the founder of this religion, has allowed the Going Forth only if one initially studies and knows what the qualities of the Lord Buddha actually are.

The Buddha is endowed with goodness in the following ways:

He possesses wisdom, sharpness of mind and discernment, applying it to those things that ought to be known and seen, knowing their advantages and disadvantages, whether they are beneficial or not, all the way to each of the Four Noble Truths – and he does so without anyone teaching him. This aspect points in the direction of the Buddha's Quality of Wisdom.

The Buddha has left behind all unwholesome states of mind, the defilements and desires, the habits and modes of being that have been incited by these defilements over a vast stretch of time. He possesses the most excellent traits of character, and is composed of qualities of Dhamma that are essential. This aspect is the Buddha's Quality of Purity.

The Buddha is endowed with loving kindness and compassion for the crowd of beings heated up by the fires of defilement and dukkha. He advises and teaches so that these beings, having listened, may follow and practise after him – for the complete extinguishing of the fires of dukkha – and he does so regardless of the troubles, hardships and difficulties arising for him. This aspect is the Buddha's Quality of Great Compassion.

The noble being that dwells in these three qualities is called "Buddha" – the one who knows well and perfectly. When, knowing well and perfectly in this way, a Buddha points out and teaches, these doctrines and teachings are called the "Dhamma". Further, those people that have heard the Dhamma and behave and practise accordingly – following its disciplinary code, the Vinaya – are called the "Sangha".

These three, the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, are thus the three objects that we will have to give the highest importance. When we possess the feeling that we are completely respecting the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, it is appropriate to receive the Going Forth.

Now I will tell you the basic meditation objects, as a means for you to train for liberation from the defilements. They are given in Pali, just in the same way as the teachers of old have been

passing them down for many generations. Please repeat after me:

*“Kesa, loma, nakha, danta, taco,
taco, danta, nakha, loma, kesa.”*⁴

These meditation objects the Buddha called the *mula-kammatthana* (the root meditation objects). They provide a way for us to experience mind states where the desires staining our hearts cease.

It is normal that the ordinary unenlightened being identifies himself with his desires. But the Buddha wanted us to see desires as non-self, as non-personal, and to realize that there is no being there, just the existence of elements – material form that behaves according to the laws of nature and relies on its environment being in balance. It is only then that a state like this can come to be. Still, once existing, it doesn’t mean that it is stable. It exists in such a way that there is change and alteration all the time. It is not in a condition that permanently stays the same. There needs to be arising, existing and ceasing. This way of being is what we call existence according to the laws of nature.

Investigating these root meditation objects leads us to seeing instability, non-sustainability and non-self, a way of being that is born, exists and ceases. This weakens our desires, our grasping onto and giving importance to the self.

⁴ Meaning: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin (repeated in reverse order), the first five outwardly visible of the 32 components of the body that the Buddha taught to reflect on.

Once we have weakened our assumption of a self, the mental states that come from having to interact with the worldly society will also be weakened – regardless of the kind of situation that we relate to. If it is one where we are accepted and receive praise, we won't feel happy about it, and if it is a situation where we are blamed, we won't feel hurt. Not having feelings of either liking or disliking will allow us to understand ourselves better. These feelings are Worldly Dhammas, *lokadhamma*⁵, the qualities that rule over those people who still have dust in their eyes – the average unenlightened beings that exist on a low level. They will see these mind states as something worth wishing for, but as we are practitioners who aspire to diminish the desires staining our minds, we take up the reflection of seeing such states of mind as merely an experience of feelings that are born, stay for a while and then cease – both *sukhavedana* and *dukkhavedana* (pleasant and unpleasant feelings). Happiness, the Buddha called *somanassa*, which is considered a mode of *sukhavedana*, and sadness he called *domanassa*, which is a mode of *dukkhavedana*. *Dukkha* and *sukha* are expressions of reality that cause emotions to arise, so the Buddha taught us to focus our minds on them and know any feeling as simply being a feeling. The emotions of liking or disliking we also know as simply feelings. There is nothing that could be firmly established and enduring, lasting or permanent. All these are just states (of mind) that, after having arisen, will naturally have to cease.

Understanding our experiences like this, we won't get lost and go astray, thinking in terms of “this is good” or “this is bad”. These kinds of thoughts are just attributes of delusion and wrong

⁵ The eight Worldly Dhammas are: praise and blame, fame and disrepute, gain and loss, happiness and suffering.

view – nothing else, so the Buddha taught us to focus and reflect on seeing them as modes of *namadhamma*⁶, being born, existing and passing away. There is no need for one to be a slave of these processes, a slave of the world, a slave of the defilements of sukha- and dukkhavedana. One should see that these processes always have an element in them that makes one feel that they are lacking something. They are of the kind that one can say is never full, that doesn't know the point when there's enough – just like a flame never gets enough fuel.

So, focusing on these processes as simply being born, existing and passing away, we are able to turn ourselves away and get out of the situation of having feelings like this, not becoming slaves of desires or what is called *tanha* (craving). Generally, *tanha* is a feeling that is coupled with dukkha, a feeling that is difficult to bear with, a feeling of non-freedom. We need to investigate these feelings, and this will bring us to experience peace of mind – peace from sukha- and dukkhavedana. We can live like Samanas then, like “peaceful ones”. This is what we need to rely on.

So, let us take these meditation objects and develop them, apply them and bring them to life, so that we know this world. Knowing the world, we know this reality, and what our human birth is about. Being a true human being means being somebody who possesses a mind that goes beyond the nature of the world. Let us take this as our attitude in meditation, so that we can work on helping ourselves with the liberation from the powers of delusion, wrong views and unwholesome mind states, so that we

⁶ *namadhamma*: mental phenomena, as opposed to *rupadhamma*, the phenomena of the physical world (literally: form).

can attain a state of mind that is pure and clean, so that we experience the arising of the benefits of the practice of Dhamma, so that we will see the benefit of relating to ourselves in the correct and appropriate way.

Now, I will hand over the yellow robes to you, to wrap around you. Then you can come in again and take on the precepts, so that the ceremony of Going Forth will come to completion. "...come here...!" (*Luang Por says in English*)

After the postulants have put on the yellow robes and taken the ten precepts of a novice, the talk continues:

From now on, it is your duty as samaneras to correct and develop yourselves. You need to constantly recollect that now you are of a different species than the householders and the common people in the world. Here, we lead our lives like ones that see the danger and disadvantages of the round of *samsara*⁷. So it becomes necessary for us to do our duties in developing our being Samanas – or samaneras – in the sense of being somebody whose ways of life are peaceful.

We develop peaceful bodily conduct. Our body, with all its parts and organs, shouldn't be used in the manner of fools. We'll conduct it wisely. That means in a humble way. Humility means to have an attitude of respect, to live in a subordinate way, not getting carried away with oneself. Manners like these are ways of guarding one's body, as it is called. One also needs to guard one's speech, as speech is the source of good and bad (actions). One

⁷ *samsara* (Pali): the (endless) round of birth and death.

needs to know how to use speech well. Our speech should be grounded in humility, then it won't give rise to troubles and dangers. So we need to observe ourselves in our practice in order to protect ourselves, both in every form of our bodily conduct and in our verbal conduct. It is necessary to guard oneself, keeping within the principle of applying mindfulness and within the standards of the training. In this way we won't fall under the sway of ignoble and confused mind states. Ignoble mind states are the mind states of worldly beings that don't behave well or behave in degenerate ways. They are following the ways of the unwholesome, the mind states of anger, desire, greed and delusion. All of these are considered forms of ignorance.

Our becoming Samanas should gradually give rise to changes in a good direction. Having taken up the training we will have to practise the lifestyle of one who sees how life can be beneficial. We will have to give great attention to ourselves, in the sense that we develop the qualities of honesty and straightforwardness in our minds. We should maintain good ethical conduct, and possess *hiri*, a sense of shame towards doing bad. When one possesses a sense of shame towards bad actions, one will also show fear and be cautious, because one sees that bad deeds won't lead to freedom (which is called *ottappa*).

So we will have to consider things in this way and start the training in leading our life following the intention to keep sila and develop purity. Sila in fact means purity. Sila is the intention of loving kindness, friendliness, (*metta*), or the intention to respect the rights of other people. Whatever we do, we need to be considerate. And we should start to relate (to our environment) in a way that examines and investigates it, for the sake of seeking the truth of reality, *saccadhamma*. These are some aspects that

you need to develop an understanding of and educate yourselves in.

Another aspect is how we use our facilities for communicating and relating to the world. We have got eyes, ears, a nose, a tongue, a sense of touch and a mind. Having eyes, we need to know how to guard them. These eyes we have can give rise to both good and evil. The same is true for the ears, etc. If there is both good and evil, we need the skills to organize and choose the good aspects. For example, if the eye sees something that gives rise to feelings of getting carried away by the power of emotions like desire or sensuality, we need to know how to control ourselves. If this comes up, we need to use meditation. Having been given these objects for meditation we should apply them.

So we start to investigate, taking the body as our object. We analyze it in terms of vedana, and watch out for manifestations of the Worldly Dhammas⁸. We see these phenomena arising and ceasing. They are merely states of existence, and durability and stability cannot be found in them. This is why the Buddha wants us to be cautious and restrained whenever the eye sees a form, the ear hears a sound, the nose smells an odour, the tongue tastes a flavour, the body senses something touching it, or there are mind states arising in the mind. Then the Buddha wanted us to have mindfulness and not be careless, not allowing experiences to come up that we didn't filter (through wisdom). We always need to keep filtering. This is another aspect in which you will have to train in as Samanas.

⁸ Here meaning the two categories of the eight Worldly Dhammas: agreeable and disagreeable phenomena (*ittharammana* and *anittharammana*).

Furthermore, there is the topic of how to relate to the requisites⁹ and necessities of life. We live as somebody who is content and has few wishes. In this we follow the Noble Enlightened Beings. We follow the safe path of those who dwell in mind states that are beyond the world. The way we practise towards our requisites is: knowing what is enough. If we get little, that's enough. If we get much, that's enough. Even if we don't get anything at all – that's enough. We develop to become somebody who always has enough. That means, somebody who is happy with whatever comes. In this way our Samana life will be free from obstructions and worries. If we don't have to worry about our requisites, we have the chance to continue our studies, educating and observing ourselves on and on, relying simply on tranquility and seclusion. We rely on all the opportunities given to us in this lifestyle. We really don't have to bother about anything else. As far as society out in the world is concerned: we aren't living in conflict with anybody. We are living for the sake of creating benefits for ourselves and others. When we are not in conflict with others, a quality arises in our mind that makes us become accepted by others. This is our duty.

The term “diligent effort” is another expression for making the experience of perfection arise in ourselves all by ourselves. Perfection means to be completely prepared and mature¹⁰. This complete preparedness means that there won't be any problems. This is the case with somebody whose spirit is completely radiant

⁹ The four requisites of monks and novices are: the robes, almsfood, a dwelling place, and medicines.

¹⁰ In Thai: *prohm*, a word colloquially meaning “ready” or together and used by Luang Por oftentimes in the sense of attainment, perfection, fulfillment etc., but it also carries the connotations of maturity, being ripe, or being fully prepared.

or enlightened, somebody who has already passed their “shining night of prosperity”¹¹ where there is no more darkness, and there are no more feelings of being oppressed and irritated. A state of being at ease arises in one’s mind, with one’s heart feeling fresh and cool.

So we need to apply ourselves to our tasks. We need to practise and investigate, very much giving importance to ourselves. A chance like this is very rare, and our lives are really short. We don’t have that much time. The Buddha compared us to dewdrops (being dried out by the sun), or to cattle being pulled to slaughter. It really is like this. Time keeps passing, but it doesn’t just merely pass. The fact of nature that our bodily formations keep deteriorating makes itself known accordingly with every period of time that has passed. It is possible that the hair on top of our head starts falling out, or our teeth that had once been strong start to become loose. Our eyesight that used to be clear and bright may become feeble, and our ears that had once been able to hear well and clearly may not be able to locate where the sounds come from any more. Sometimes a noise comes from the north, but we turn our head to the south. We will be making more and more mistakes. Our behaviour will undergo changes, so we need to understand these processes (of life). We have to be aware that time passes and see the value of changing ourselves towards living in the experience of pure and peaceful mind states, unconfused and with a heart at ease.

¹¹ An expression from the Thai translation of the *Bhaddekaratta Sutta* that is frequently chanted in Wat Nong Pah Pong, here referring to the night of enlightenment.

Living without confusion is all we need for being at ease. We can't be well when there is chaos. When the powers of defilements and desires are burning us up, we become completely heated up and there is no peace at all. We are forced to become slaves of our desires. We keep thinking on and on that this or that is good or brings happiness, or is the best. There is no end in sight. This is why the Buddha taught us to see the disadvantages in these processes. Don't go tying yourselves up with thinking that desires are something positive. They are poison. If we swallow a poisonous substance, it will poison us and we won't feel well. We'll be in trouble and panic, burnt up by dukkha. Following our desires will bring us to fall deeply instead of giving us the chance to experience the supreme. We sink into an inferior position, into states of calamity. This is the opposite of the path of progress in our development. It isn't good.

So, now that you have the opportunity, bring up motivation for the training. Continually. Walk on the path that the Buddha pointed out. This path is called *samma-patipada* (right practice). Within this path lies full perfection: the training in sila, the training of the mind and the training of wisdom. Don't lead your life like they do out in the world. Their lives keep following the stream of delusion. If pleasant feelings arise, they are happy about it. If unpleasant feelings arise, they become sad, so they eagerly pursue the pleasant feelings and hate the unpleasant ones or try to destroy them. This seems unworthy. Just think about it. We human beings shouldn't lose ourselves in our ignorance to such an extent. We should know things better. Then things will be to our advantage.

So, be determined and motivated – all of you – to take up these duties of ours that carry the name “Samana”. Do this, as if your being a Samana was a chedi¹² or a place of reverence and devotion that is worthy of respect and worship. Keep on fulfilling your duties in this way. Taking this chance to fulfill our tasks, we will be an example and guide to others, somebody who gives rise to benefit and usefulness in the future. So let all of us be motivated and determined in our hearts and minds. May every one of us fulfill these duties of a Samana in a complete and perfect way.

¹² A circular monument of veneration, also called a *stupa* in Pali.

Living at the foot of a tree we won't develop the tendency to hold on to things, such as thoughts that something is ours or belongs to us.



*“Ordination:
The Announcements”*

Ordination: The Announcements

After the Going Forth – sometimes in the same ceremony – Bhikkhu ordination (upasampada) is given. In the ceremony of upasampada, a certain canonical teaching called anusasana (announcements) needs to be recited. The teacher announces the nissaya, the four dependences on which a Bhikkhu's life is founded (almsfood, robes made out of cloth wrapping up corpses, the dwelling at the foot of a tree and fermented urine as medicine), and the akaraniyakicca, the four things never to be done by a Bhikkhu (sexual intercourse, stealing, killing a human being and falsely claiming superhuman qualities). The anusasana needs to be recited in Pali. In the ordination ceremony on Dec. 15th, 2005 (2548) Luang Por gave the following brief summary of the anusasana in his own words.

The procedure of ordination into monkhood becomes complete by the chanting of a formal act of the Sangha, which we have just finished chanting. So, now you are Bhikkhus in this Dhamma-Vinaya.

In the lifestyle of a monk it is necessary to have rules for proper conduct and practice. We consider it our duty to follow these guidelines, and we have to fulfill this duty correctly, making sure that our conduct and practice is in line with the principles handed down to us by the Buddha. This requires that we do some study and develop understanding.

What the Buddha called “the Announcements” states the points of conduct that are the duties of a monk. The Announcements can be divided into two parts:

The first one is what the Buddha called the *nissaya* (the things to depend on), and the second one is what the Buddha called the *akaraniyakicca* (the things that shouldn’t be done). The *nissayas* point out the way of leading one’s life that is simple and easy. There are four *nissayas*:

For sustaining our lives as a member of the Sangha, we rely on wandering for almsfood in villages. It is up to others how much they support us. We do our duty of going on almsround in a way where we don’t demand or ask for anything. This is in accordance with the tasks and duties of a *Samana*, somebody who aims at peace. The Buddha called this “the dependence of going on almsround”.

Then there is the “dependence on wearing *pamsukula* cloth”¹³. This is meant to create a feeling of dispassion in us, since *pamsukula* cloth is used to wrap up something loathsome and disgusting (i.e. a corpse). Our body is in many ways loathsome and disgusting and shows signs that are not desirable. If what we use to cover our body gets in touch with this dirty thing, it becomes just as disgusting as the body itself. This is “the dependence of *pamsukula* cloth”.

For our dwelling, the place we live in, the Buddha wants us to resort to tranquil and secluded locations. That means to live in

¹³ Discarded cloth, rags, or specifically cloth that is taken from a corpse before the cremation.

a situation where we naturally have to rely on a simple and uncomplicated lifestyle. The Buddha said to live at the foot of a tree. Living at the foot of a tree – a place where there is silence and seclusion – we won't develop *upadana*, the tendency to hold on to things, such as thoughts that something is ours or belongs to us, and similar attitudes. So it is for the reduction of mind states of attachment to our desires that we need to practise this duty.

The fourth dependence concerns the practice towards one's health, when our body is in an abnormal condition – for example when it can't adapt to changes of weather. Then we use something that everybody possesses without exception: we drink fermented urine, following the Buddha's advice. The Buddha called it "to adjust one's elements", meaning, to bring our body back to a state where it has sufficient resistance towards change of external conditions.

This is the part dealing with the four nissayas, things that we are supposed to do. The other part of the Announcements is about actions that we should never do.

The things never to be done are:

- *sexual activities (namely, sexual intercourse),*
- *taking objects that weren't given to us by others (or that others don't consent to us taking),*
- *practices that lack metta, friendliness and helpfulness (that is explicitly: not to kill, destroy or create conflicts and similar activities).*

The fourth point is: The Buddha didn't allow us to carelessly claim and boast (about superhuman qualities) out of self-importance and delusion about oneself. When we come to live in the status of a monk we shouldn't misconceive ourselves to be better than anybody. All of us are in the same situation, determined by the laws of nature that we all have to experience. There is no exception. To see ourselves like this is for the sake of reducing feelings of self-importance that may arise.

So these four factors are called the akaraniyakicca, the actions that shouldn't be done. Now I will announce them to you in their original language, the language that we use generally for the preservation of the original teachings, so that we will be able to apply and use them as points of practice. We practise in order to fulfill the tasks and duties of a Samana.

*To ordain is not a
matter of external things.*



“Contentment”

Contentment

During his visit to Malaysia in May 2005 (2548) Luang Por Liem was asked the following questions about monastic life:

Question: *We'd like to know about your experiences living together with Luang Pu Chah.*

Answer: Generally, Luang Pu Chah taught us to conduct ourselves practicing contentment and being of few wishes. Contentment and fewness of wishes, these are words that describe a lifestyle where one isn't prone to obstructions. It is also called the lifestyle of the "ariyavamsa"¹⁴, to live without ties and fetters. Contentment and fewness of wishes is a factor of perfection, as it is one of the qualities of Dhamma that the ariyapuggalas possess. Now, if one isn't an ariyapuggala but just an ordinary person, one still trains according to the guidelines of behaviour of the ariyapuggalas. One takes their ways of practicing and makes them become one's habits. The ariyapuggalas teach us not to become angry, so even though we still want to follow our anger, we make a point of refraining from it. Doing so for long periods of time, becoming angry ceases to be one of our habits, and eventually we don't want to become angry any more. This is the process. Following this kind of model is aiming at a state where certain ways of acting become natural. We then understand that this is the way of living of someone who isn't in conflict with anyone and is free from dangers. This is the way I have practised with Luang Pu Chah.

¹⁴ *ariyavamsa* (Pali): noble lineage – the lineage of enlightened beings; specifically defined by the Buddha as those who possess the qualities of contentment and fewness of wishes.

Question: *Luang Por, this layperson is planning to ordain and would like to ask for some personal advice about leaving behind the household-life and becoming an anagarika – a homeless one, one who has Gone Forth. Do you have some recommendations?*

Answer: To set out and ordain means to go against the stream, and for going against the stream one needs patience and endurance. One needs to build up patience and endurance to the utmost. This means to the level where one gets used to it and becomes proficient in it. Just like fish go against the stream. Any fish that has life will go against the stream all the time. Only the dead fish float along with the current. We need to be like the living fish in our training, building up patience and endurance, making these qualities our habit and getting used to holding ourselves back. Because actually, this life isn't about much. It always has its good and bad sides. This is something we all have the capability to understand – so renunciation means renouncing what we seek for and wish to have in the world.

People in the world are like flies that go for filthy and dirty things. If we see things like this, there is nothing difficult about ordaining. Feeling that we don't want to get involved with things any more makes things easier. Then one actually doesn't have to bear with and endure much at all, it all depends on one's disposition.

But as we all know, it is really true that this practice goes against one's biological instincts. Usually, the instincts of human beings are designed to have us create partnerships. Sexual feelings are definitely present. As all those feelings around love and hate are still present we need to know how to apply patient endurance and effort.

Don't go and follow the thoughts of wanting to have it easy and be comfortable. You need to keep in mind that the source of peace and the attainment to perfection is to be found exactly where dukkha is. It comes from dukkha. That we can experience comfort stems from nothing else than dukkha. So, actually, dukkha is part of what enables human beings to experience the sense of perfection – by having mindfulness and wisdom.

The external dukkha is something that all of us are able to observe with one another, but in order to recognize internal dukkha – the dukkha that concerns one's state of mind – one needs to know for oneself. So to ordain is not a matter of external things. I myself have also passed these experiences and know them well, having ordained when I was still in my youth, in the period of life in which one likes to lose oneself in fun and pleasure, easily forgetting oneself. But I upheld that being a boy or a young man, one has to study and learn from these experiences, even though they are painful, hard and difficult. One needs to understand them as a part of life.

Problems are part of life and are meant to be learned from, so I undertook this, resisting and going against the stream, not taking much pleasure in things that are pleasurable and comfortable.

Also, in our livelihood, one should live like somebody who doesn't possess much. Even with clothing, we only have a single set, just that. When I'm in Thailand I have just this set of robes, coming here (to Malaysia) I have just this set of robes. We don't have many possessions as householders or worldly people do. We have just this, and one can say that just this is enough to alleviate suffering. It is enough to ward off sun, wind, cold or heat. We

maintain these possessions merely for living our lives. In the end everything deteriorates and disintegrates anyway. Who would have strong feelings other than this about possessing things? This attitude creates a sense of being satisfied and pleased in one's heart.

When one is satisfied in every respect, things fall into place. Feeling satisfied, we are happy and at ease wherever we are, simply that. We are happy whether we live by ourselves or in society, whether we have little or much. Just when we have eaten enough of our meal – whoever may come to fill up our plate again, we simply don't want it.

So we eventually develop into being somebody who doesn't have any obstructions, doesn't have any worries about anything any more, living like "*sugato*"¹⁵. This is the way the development leads.

¹⁵ literally: "well-gone" – an epithet of the Buddha.

When relating to the various things that are necessary for our daily living, we follow the example of the Samana, who leads a life of restraint and composure.



“Restraint”

Restraint

Luang Por Liem gave the following advice when replying to questions of the monks and novices at Buddha-Bodhivana Monastery, Melbourne, in May 2006 (2549).

To practise Dhamma means protection. It makes us strong and creates a feeling of solidity and stability. This relies on conducting ourselves with restraint, as it is mentioned in a principle we are using, called *patimokkhasamvara*, to practise restraint within the training rules of a monk (the Patimokkha).

We can also look closer at the *akaraniyakicca* (the things never to be done by a monk¹⁶), which are about actions in which our conduct needs to be different from that of the people in the world, householders, or average unenlightened beings who are dominated by the powers of desire, sensuality and lustful feelings.

It is in the first one of the “things never to be done”, that the Buddha spoke about interactions with the opposite sex, namely (forbidding) sexual intercourse. This goes against the grain. It feels like this really goes against our nature, but we resist following it in order to change our habits of acting like people in the world. We don’t give sexual activities much importance, as they are all about dirty things. And one can say that they bring us into situations where it becomes impossible for us to experience freedom. Seeing it from this angle helps us understand (this point) better.

¹⁶ see previous chapter.

What is called “restraint” is all about changing one’s habits, coming from darkness and seeking the light – or the white and the pure, as one might call it. Maybe we don’t yet see and understand what this brightness and purity is actually like. We don’t know yet. But this is merely because we are still in a state, where such experiences are still unfamiliar to us.

In this situation, we have to pay special attention to the way we relate and communicate (with the opposite sex), as we will always need to interact in some way. But the Buddha did give some definite guidelines of practice here, directed to Venerable Ananda. In fact, at first the Buddha spoke in terms of completely objecting to any contact at all. When Venerable Ananda asked him, “How should I practise towards members of the opposite sex?” the Buddha said, “It is best not to look at them at all.” So the Buddha is in a way against us getting to know and see the opposite sex at all. This is because the Buddha doesn’t want us to face uncondusive situations which we can’t resist and where things might go to the ruin or fall apart completely. Nevertheless, Venerable Ananda questioned the Buddha further, “It is sometimes necessary to look at women. How should we practise then?” The Buddha replied in a way to make us learn how to deal with our feelings responsibly. He said, “If you need to look at them, don’t speak to them.” This was the Buddha’s advice, but Venerable Ananda, who held a position where he had to fulfil the Sangha’s duty of teaching the Dhamma-Vinaya (to the nuns), was still doubtful and asked further: “What about situations where one has to speak, for example, when they don’t know the way. How shall one practise then?” The Buddha further commented, “If you have to speak, you need to have mindfulness while speaking.”

So, let us think about this: “When you speak, be mindful...” How is one mindful? This is something we need to discuss further. One is mindful in a way that goes against the stream of our emotions. Just like the fish that have the skill to resist the current. They never give way to the stream or give up going against it. Even when they sleep they go against it. Their whole life they are in the stream, but they withstand it. That’s what the Buddha meant with being mindful when we meet the opposite sex. Of course, this is also a matter of training. This, the Buddha called restraint and composure.

When relating to the various things that are necessary for our daily living, we follow the example of the Samana, who leads a life of restraint and composure. A Samana needs to live restrained, composed and cautious. This is similar to the way we need to ward off (impingements) when we are developing *samadhi*¹⁷, building up a threshold of stability and firmness (of mind). The Buddha mentions this in the *sammappadhana* (the four right efforts)¹⁸. Although this is one of the principles from theory, there are parts in it that we can apply in our practice and conduct. The Buddha speaks of developing the effort to be cautious not to let bad things arise out of one’s inner tendencies. We all know well what these bad things mean. We just need to look closely and ask ourselves what lies in us that is bound to take us to situations where we drift off on paths that feel insecure and low.

¹⁷ *samadhi* oftentimes means meditation in general, although it is the specific type of meditation that aims at one-pointed concentration of mind.

¹⁸ The first of the four right efforts is *samvara-padhana*, the effort to prevent unwholesome dhammas that haven’t yet arisen from arising.

This is one of the principles that leads to the realization of the Dhamma. So we try to cultivate a sense of restraint and caution when using our sense faculties. But not to the level of being sceptical of everything. If we practise restraint so much that we don't dare to trust any more, that's also not right. Restraint should be practised in the way of a Samana. If it only leads to scepticism and insecurity, it has gone beyond what feels appropriate and beautiful.

*Anyone who behaves gently
and humbly will always be well
respected.*



*“Gentleness,
Humbleness
and Patience”*

Gentleness, Humbleness and Patience

Advice given to monks from Wat Pah Nanachat asking for dependence on Luang Por at the beginning of their stay at Wat Nong Pah Pong on Jan 28th, 2006 (2549).

You need to train to bring forth an attitude of gentleness and humbleness. The words “gentle” and “humble” are about our good conduct as Sangha members – something that we need to practise by ourselves and develop in ourselves. With these qualities, the Sangha is well accepted by society. Anyone who behaves gently and humbly will always be well respected, even by the *devas*¹⁹. The devas praise gentle and humble demeanour. Whatever it is, our prostrations, or the way we raise our hands to greet²⁰, all these are expressions of good manners that all of us in our Sangha should practise.

This practice and training is one of the embellishments of a Samana. It makes him beautiful and enriches him. When a Samana relates to society, he will never provoke feelings of aversion, irrespective of the social status of the people he meets. A Samana is well accepted by society. It is worth noticing that those leaders of society who take the ten Dhamma qualities for a ruler²¹ seriously also need to develop the quality of gentleness

¹⁹ *deva* (Pali): heavenly beings, angels, gods.

²⁰ *añjali* in Pali or *wai* in Thai.

²¹ The ten *Raja-Dhamma* (Jataka 378): *dana* (generosity), *sila* (virtue), *pariccaga* (selfless work and sacrifice), *ajjava* (honest work), *maddava* (deporting oneself with gentleness and congeniality), *tapa* (austerity), *akkodha*

and humbleness. The same was true for the Buddha himself. He gave these qualities importance because they bring up beauty in oneself and cause others to appreciate one. We should understand that gentleness and humbleness are very important qualities for a Samana. The expression “*adikalyanam*” (beautiful in the beginning) points to this: one becomes beautiful to look at right from the start. So we should train in being gentle and humble. It is normal that raw materials need to undergo processes of change and alteration until the outcome is a useful product that pleases people. With no changes and corrections the result would be displeasing. Similarly, if human beings don’t undergo training, exercise or practice, they are like raw products and other people won’t see them as useful.

As Samanas we need to train to mellow down and weaken our worldly behaviour. For example, it is the style of laypeople to sit on chairs or around a table. Merely to change this habit to sitting “*pappiab*”²² on the floor is already incredibly difficult for us. It isn’t impossible, though. After a bit of training one can sit *pappiab* on the floor quite easily. I myself never sat *pappiab* or in the meditation posture before, when I was a layman. So I was very stiff and reluctant with these postures and with all the ways of paying respect or bowing. It didn’t go smoothly. For me, too, these things were irritating. But if one relies on a sense of patient endurance and keeps on doing these practices over and over, then one becomes used to them. One’s way of bowing and being

(freedom from anger), *avihimsa* (non-violence), *khanti* (patient endurance) and *avirodhana* (not straying from righteousness).

²² *pappiab* (Thai): a semi-cross-legged sitting posture on the floor with one foot pointing behind to the back. This is the posture that is considered most appropriate and polite for monks to assume when not meditating, especially when listening to the Dhamma.

respectful starts to feel smoother and smoother, and the sitting posture doesn't make one feel that one is straining the leash any more. One can do these things if one keeps training, exercising.

The training of all these external aspects is necessary. One needs to rely on the continuity of one's efforts. In the end one is able to do things. The reason we do such practices is because, following our principles as monks, we want to take on a very simple life. To sit on the floor, for example, is plain and simple, because there is no need to arrange the place with objects to sit on or cushions to support one, just like in those places that the Buddha considered to be simple dwellings²³. The Buddha wanted us to live in a way where we develop an attitude that is orientated towards nature. This is an important aspect.

We need to train and develop when we practise. Any aspect of the practice relies on this training. It relies on doing things over and over. There are certain qualities in the life of an anagarika, one who isn't bound to a home, that the Buddha called treasures. They are valuable goods. You probably know some of them. One of them has to do with our body – it is what the Buddha called *kayasamvara*, restraint of the body. It concerns our bodily behaviour. Possessing restraint towards the body helps us to see things clearly, because our attention needs to be connected to our bodily movements, activities and the respective feelings in each posture. We need to directly know these things in time, and – for the sake of restraint – we also need to be able to tell straight away whether each bodily action or movement is appropriate for

²³ e.g. living at the foot of a tree, in the open, or in empty houses, as mentioned in the thirteen ascetic practices allowed by the Buddha.

an anagarika, someone who practices in order to realize the danger of samsara.

We practise to observe our bodily conduct in terms of the good manners and etiquette of a Samana. To practice like this makes beauty arise. To maintain one's bodily conduct is similar to looking after one's requisites, like the dwelling, for example. One needs to maintain it well, so it is of use and provides comfort. In our training, we also need to check whether what we do is appropriate for society or not. What do our friends in the monastic life think? Would they approve of our behaviour? If not, we need to train further. These are external things, of course, but still, we should see them as important factors that determine our lives as anagarikas, those who realize the dangers and drawbacks of samsara. They have to be alert and aware of themselves and keep good etiquette – or, as one might say in other words, keep sila.

Sila can also be called an awareness of the dangers and drawbacks in one's actions and the intention, or feeling, that one doesn't want to commit anything that is not good any more. Possessing such intentions – a sense of concern regarding actions that cause enmity and danger – we need to develop and improve our capacity to resist. Bodily resistance depends on factors like food, the weather and our environment. Being a monk, food is something that we aren't able to control or choose by ourselves, as we depend on people's free will to sacrifice by practicing *dana* (generosity). We need to realize that what we get is independent from what we would like to have. Actually, the things that we want are very much conditioned by the things we are used to. Being monks, we need to understand that our practice has to follow the principle of being happy with whatever we receive or have. An attitude like this will make us feel normal about things.

As lay people we always did what we were used to. We've been practicing to call anything "good" if it was what we liked. Anything we disliked was "bad". We've been supporting such an attitude over a long, long time. Now we need to go against it. We have to train ourselves in going against what we are used to and what we like. An example of this is to sit meditation. If we have never sat in this posture before, the first time we sit, there are a lot of painful feelings. All one experiences are feelings of agitation and irritation, to put it simply: dukkha. This is the same whenever we don't get what we like or what we were used to. Sometimes we struggle so much that we become worried and start to doubt everything. This is where we need to learn how to let things go, how to put things down. We need to realize that, as monks, we are not part of those people that can arrange things according to our wishes or ask for things. Which kind of food we get, for example, is up to the donor's wish. So we need to be able to adapt and step back from our own ideas. Not getting what one wishes, one needs the quality of *upekkha* (equanimity) or at least patient endurance.

This entails what is called "going against the stream" – to resist one's moods, or going against what one was used to in lay life. So we train to go against the grain, even though it can be incredibly difficult. But it isn't beyond anyone's capabilities. To go against the grain is something that anybody can do. If we go against our preferences, we get the chance to understand that they are merely sankharas, conditioned phenomena, proliferations that we have been supporting all the time. Giving the sankharas importance by identifying with them, saying *we* are like this or this is *ours*, they became very powerful and are able to tie us down.

So the Buddha taught that we should learn to go against the grain and skilfully develop patient endurance, with mindfulness well established and our minds well focused, especially in situations that we have never encountered before. The process is similar to catching animals in the jungle. Catching a wild animal is not easy. Until one can catch one, one needs to learn a lot about its behaviour and approach it with gentleness. One needs to be sure that one knows the animal's behaviour very well until one can approach it.

So we need to observe ourselves. Look at the external side, the way we live our life. If you've studied it well, you will know what this lifestyle of a monk is like. Whenever you don't get what you like, take it as a training in the Dhamma. At least you get some experience and training with the Dhamma of patient endurance. It is exactly when we get used to patiently enduring things that it makes us feel that everything is simply normal and not particularly difficult, or something to get agitated about. These situations become easy and they are conducive for a life that pursues liberation.

So we need to conduct ourselves accordingly and train ourselves, being aware and cautious, practicing to be mindful – mindful not to get lost in worldly attitudes, mindful not to get lost in one's moods.

*To live in competition,
one supports low-mindedness
and uses one's intelligence in
bad ways.*



“Wealth and Fame”

Wealth and Fame

Excerpt from Luang Por Liem's reflections after the meal on July 3rd, 2006 (2549)

Not many more days and it's going to be Asalha Puja Day, the beginning of the rains retreat, the *vassa*²⁴. Actually, the day when we enter the rains retreat is the first day of the waning moon of the 8th month. This is when the Buddha said to determine the rains. So now, before entering the rains, we should start doing all the work that needs to be done before. These are communal duties, duties of the Sangha. They benefit the monastic community.

The best way to spend the rains is when one can carry out all the duties of the Dhamma-Vinaya. If there are at least four monks together we can fulfil our basic obligation, the carrying out of the formal act of the Sangha in which we recollect our training rules – the recitation of the Patimokkha.

The recitation of our rules is done to emphasise our obligations and tasks as monks. It helps us not to lose direction in the way we lead our lives and not to give way to heedlessness. If we have strayed off the proper course in the way we live our monastic life, many negative things will happen and things will go to ruin.

²⁴ The yearly monastic rains-retreat, that the monks determine to spend together in one place for three months. Traditionally this is a time of intensive training.

To do all the practices needed in daily life – our routines, duties and chores – is something that we will always have to deal with. In fact, they are all practices towards our physical well-being. At the meal, don't eat too much. Generally don't take too much time for eating; try to be finished in 20 or 25 minutes. When we practise, we don't give much importance to food.

Luang Por Maha Amorn²⁵ wrote some very nice reflections on one of the Dhamma-signs put up on the trees, which, as he hopes, may stimulate a bit of shame and scruple in us, preventing negligence. He wrote:

“Some ordain just for food. Having filled up their belly they lie down to sleep – no better than animals.

Some ordain wanting to have fun and play around – just like householders.

Some ordain lost in delusion – the longer they stay, the more stupid they become.

If one hopes for magga-phala-nibbana, having ordained, one upholds the Dhamma.”

This is what Luang Por Maha Amorn wrote. After I read it, I remembered it straight away. If we behave like animals in the way we consume things, that's not good. Only animals compete and snatch away things from each other. For us, we practise observing our principles. If it comes to competition, that's not good behaviour. Luang Por Maha Amorn also warned the villagers of snatching away houses, food, land and their partners from each other, and fighting for power to control.

²⁵ Luang Por Maha Amorn or Tan Chaokhun Mongkonkittithada is a senior disciple of Luang Pu Chah.

When I read those lines, it really stuck in my mind as a warning. But some people never think like that, because it is the nature of animals to live constantly competing. Animals lack a sense of shame and just go ahead and dare to do things. They do things without any wisdom. To live like that, one supports low-mindedness and uses one's intelligence in bad ways. Whenever we start thinking in such ways, we need to correct ourselves. Don't drift off into this direction; don't fall prey to these things. If there are areas where we have gone too far, we need to try to correct our course.

Now that we are close to entering the vassa, especially this year, there are many requests to Wat Nong Pah Pong from (smaller) branch monasteries to send some monks for the vassa (so they fulfil the qualifications of the Vinaya for being allowed to receive offerings within a 'Kathina-ceremony' after the vassa²⁶). It's simply that these people like making requests. What's the point of requesting monks (to spend the rains in a monastery only for the sake of the Kathina-offerings)? We are practitioners. Mostly, those who ask for monks are not ready for training them, and don't have the capabilities and knowledge needed to give support to young monks in their growth and development. They keep asking and the training withers away. The monks that go don't benefit from it at all – they don't develop good, beautiful qualities, nor improve their character traits and habits.

All that happens is that things go to ruin. And the reason for this is that, mostly, the monks fall prey to the worship of

²⁶ If at least five monks have spent the vassa together in a monastery, they may receive these usually very generous 'Kathina-offerings'.

external, material goods (*amisa-puja*). They fall into what Ajahn Buddhadasa used to call ‘a heap of excrement’. He took this comparison from the discourses of the Buddha – Ajahn Buddhadasa doesn’t speak without foundation – and he quotes from the Discourse of the Dungbeetle: a beetle that feeds on excrement. His belly is full and round because of all the excrement.

Are we going to get lost and deluded with things like that? Material possessions and wealth, fame and praise – these are external things. If these things accrue to us, we need to at least keep things within the scope of the supporters’ intentions. They want to enhance good and beautiful qualities. But if we lose ourselves in these things, we won’t develop anything like that. We’ll fall into dangerous pitfalls. That’s why the Buddha gave the example of Devadatta²⁷, who came under the sway of wealth, honour and praise. In the end it’s just this wealth, honour and praise that ruins everything completely.

²⁷ Devadatta, deluded by the fame due to his psychic powers, tried to kill the Buddha and take over the Sangha without success. Eventually he split the Sangha, and was swallowed up by the earth for this heinous crime.

*The Buddha wanted us to reflect on
the use of our requisites... although
they're 'clean' they are actually not clean.*



*“Advice on
Robe Washing Day”*

Advice on Robe Washing Day

*From Luang Por's daily reflections after the meal on
May 5th, 2006 (2549).*

Today is Friday the 5th of May, the 7th day of the waning moon of the 6th month. It is the day when we do the work of cleaning and washing the requisites that we use for covering our bodies (i.e. the robes). These things always need washing. They get soiled and stained by this loathsome and filthy thing called our body.

Our body is a dirty and unclean thing. It oozes and drips out of its openings, the ones in the upper parts of the body and the ones in the lower. It excretes filthy stuff even from its pores. All this transforms the cloth we use to cover our body into a state where it smells stuffy and stinks. We all like to see the human body as something nice and beautiful, but the truth is that there is nothing at all about it that is desirable.

The body is a dirty, filthy thing and smells. If we don't bathe and wash it, it will develop quite a strong smell – similar to uncivilized people that haven't yet developed in terms of looking after their bodies: hill tribes or people living in the woods, for example. When one meets these tribes, a stuffy, stinking smell tells one that this is an area where there hasn't yet been any development of hygiene and care for the body. They can live with it, though. They are used to it.

The Buddha taught to take the unattractiveness of the body as an object of meditation, pointing out that its reality is not desirable. Simply the fact that the body excretes and drives out

substances is already something that causes feelings of disgust in us. Nevertheless, we still experience feelings of sensual desire. But there are people, though, who become weary and disenchanted with the body and see its unattractiveness, and that it is not something that can be considered beautiful in any way.

The Buddha taught, with special emphasis, that we should see the body as an unbeautiful thing. He even scolded one of his monks who gave it too much importance and was attracted to the Buddha's physical appearance. He scolded him so he would start to reflect on what is so desirable about such a foul and filthy object. The Buddha pushed him towards realizing the truth about himself. One shouldn't be enamoured and infatuated with mind states of desire. These are worldly mind states. If we want peace and seclusion from sensual desires, we need to pay attention to our states of mind.

So, living in society, we wash and dye our robes because we want them to be in a condition that isn't indecent and intolerable for society. That's why we need to wash them.

We wash our robes with an astringent liquid – the juice from jackfruit wood, and we have a well set-up place for that (called the dyeing shed). Using this method for washing our robes is uncomplicated and there shouldn't be any difficulties in maintaining them. Also, we only have a limited number of pieces of cloth. All we have is a lower, upper and outer robe, a waistband, an *angsa*²⁸, and a bathing cloth.

²⁸ *angsa* (Thai): a small rectangular cloth that covers the chest area that is used in Thailand whenever the main robes aren't worn, e.g. in informal situations, out in nature or at work.

But still, the Buddha wanted us to reflect on the use of these requisites – although we keep them in a state which society acknowledges as 'clean', the Buddha said that they are actually not clean. In the same way we usually say that after we have had a bath we are now clean. But in fact, we're not. Because the body itself is a dirty thing. Similarly, no matter how much we wash and dye – things are not clean²⁹. The dirt is right in them. It is like with our robes: In the beginning they are white pieces of cloth. Then we dye them with some dirt that is conventionally defined as colour, and stain the whole cloth. And our feelings of what we consider as clean suddenly flip.

Thinking about these things, the Buddha wanted us to reflect on the *ajjhatta*- and the *bahiddha-dhamma*, internal and external conditions: both internally and externally, things are all just disgusting. He wanted us to see both as disgusting. This will make us experience mind states that are relieved from sexual desires – the cravings and desires that stain our hearts.

So, washing and cleaning counts as one of our duties. Living under such circumstances, we need to take care of our things. We need to look after them, use them and wash or dye them, maintain and clean them, and also clean up the tools in an orderly fashion.

The Buddha wanted us to keep our dwelling and everything in the monastery in an orderly state. This is the way that

²⁹ The traditional method of washing the robes with the yellow water of boiled jackfruit-wood chips is more of a re-dyeing than a washing, since the robes are not rinsed out, as one wants the wash water to remain in the robes because of its astringent properties.

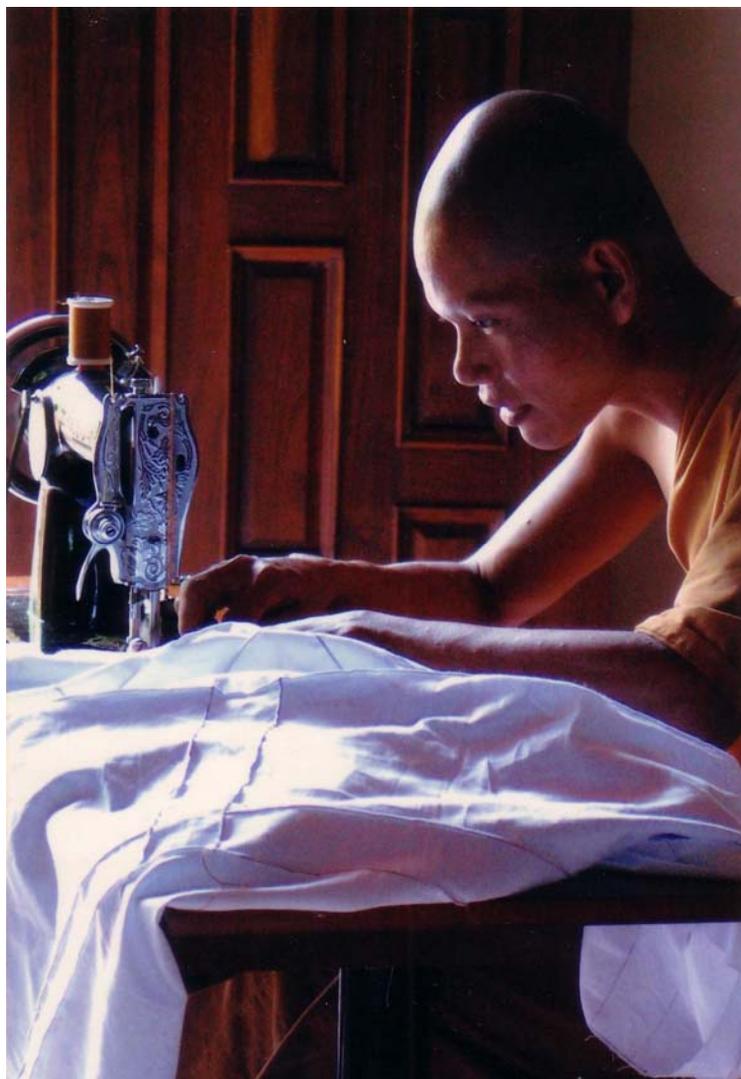
somebody who keeps sila behaves. It is a way of life that has good standards and is tidy and well organised.

*“A monastery, though designed to endure,
with temple halls of surpassing beauty,
wealthy, with uncountable treasures,
becomes ‘good’ in measure
only when the monks do their duty,
keeping the Vinaya pure.”*

We need to be aware of this. Vinaya means being orderly.

So today, the rain overnight hasn't brought much water and the sun has come out, so these are very conducive conditions for drying the robes; there shouldn't be any problems. Our chores we can do after robe washing. Everyone does what he can. But don't forget our obligation to behave properly, and keep up living in a way that doesn't get carried away with fooling around. It is the fooling around that ties up all the beings in the world.

If one works without being worried about things, or with not much of a critical mind, one can really do these things properly.



“Creating Benefit”

Creating Benefit

On April 25th, 2006 (2549) during his visit to Buddha-Bodhivana Monastery in Melbourne, Luang Por was asked for some advice on how to practise while working. Here are some extracts from his answer:

Venerable Ajahn Buddhadasa gave some good advice (on the topic of work): “We need to work with no feelings of upadana or grasping.” When I work I am not worried about anything or think much at all. I just keep doing the work, only in order to do something that is in some way of use to the community. That’s all. I don’t think about whether there is a lot to do or not – that only causes one to worry. I also don’t do things expecting that the outcome will last very long – I just consider that the things we build should be good enough to provide some shelter from heat and cold. Still, I try to do a good job. I guess it does make a difference for the stability of things whether the work was done properly or not. If one works without being worried about things, or with not much of a critical mind, one can really do these things properly.

With working, it is just like with travelling: if we don’t care about reaching the destination particularly quickly, the distance won’t seem far. But if we want to arrive quicker than usual, our aim will be far away. These things depend on our desires.

When we work, we can pay attention to the different bodily postures and movements we make and observe them. If we keep awareness of our body, the stress that comes from the power of desire won’t weigh on us. Whether we are sitting, standing, walking or lying down there won’t be anything (heavy). We can

see everything as a matter of changing one's bodily posture, work included.

When we work we sometimes experience strong feelings that we usually don't have to face. But focusing on emptiness while working or seeing work as merely a change of posture can turn the experience into something good. In the case of office work or writing, there is also not much of a problem, unless we worry a lot. Then things can become difficult. If we don't think anything about the things we do, they become something absolutely normal.

There are different kinds of work – coarse work, for example, when we do the building for providing basic supports for the physical needs of our bodies, the dwellings to live in. This kind of work demands great sacrifice. Then there is the work of creating benefit (for society), such as teaching Dhamma.

The Buddha pointed out certain qualities a Dhamma-teacher needs, for example:

- *One shouldn't hope for anything in reward for teaching Dhamma, but aim only at establishing (correct) views in a way that is suitable and fitting and gives rise to useful things.*
- *One should teach the Dhamma in a well-reasoned and systematic way, gradually, without omitting points of meaning.*
- *One should not teach for the sake of (material) gains.*
- *One should not teach praising oneself and making insinuating or denigrating comments about others.*

To teach the Dhamma is also work. But if we keep in line with the Dhamma, such unwholesome intentions as the ones mentioned won't arise. Our intention is solely to aim at offering improvements and corrections for the sake of being beneficial.

When I was still in the age where one is very strong, while living with Luang Pu Chah, sometimes he would ask us to sew robes for the new candidates that wished to practise and train under the Dhamma-Vinaya temporarily. One year it was 40 or 50 sets of triple robes. To sew as much as that, one has to start with it every morning. If one does the work harbouring negative feelings about it in one's mind, one will have to experience feelings of irritation and anger and eventually start complaining. I was able to do the job feeling good. If on one particular day I would finish only a certain amount, I would be alright with just that, continue next day, and just keep on doing the work. I didn't have any feelings about it. When it was time to stop, I stopped. Luang Pu Chah said to do just the amount we could handle. And when the night came, I would spend it quietly keeping up my meditation. So, this is also a kind of work. One has to work with a willingness to help and an attitude of sacrifice in one's mind. It's for the good that one sacrifices.

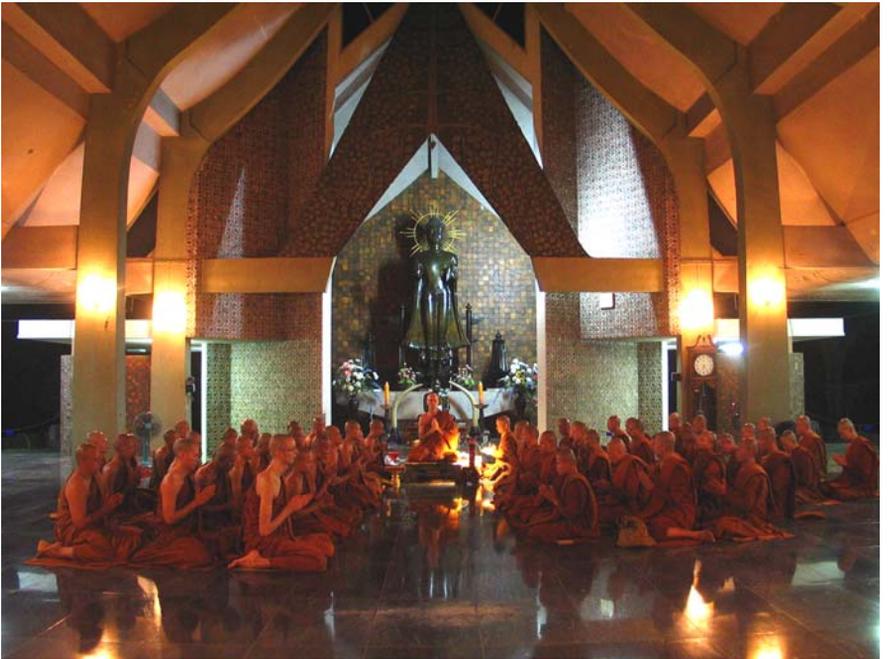
Before, when Luang Pu Chah was still young, when somebody came to live with him he was very supportive and helpful, although it was a policy to let people spend some time on their own in the beginning – so they could test whether they could make it, living in such an unfamiliar place. After they made it, Luang Pu Chah would rely on the method of letting people help themselves with all the work and their practice. All this meant giving people the opportunity to live self-reliantly.

As concerns the robe sewing – in the old days they were hand-sewn. One used needles and not machines or the tools we have today. Luang Pu Chah would help with the cutting, but one had to do the sewing oneself. Until a robe was finished it took many, many days. These practices show how much Luang Pu Chah cared about us being able to take care of ourselves.

Concerning the use of our requisites – the ways of putting on the robes and looking after them, or even how we practise with conducting our bodies in all the different postures – Luang Pu Chah would give the advice to do things mindfully: sitting with mindfulness, walking and standing and so on, or being mindful when putting on the robe. Everything would in some way give rise to people becoming self-reliant. And they wouldn't be a burden for others by having them do everything for them. This is also an aspect of 'work'.

The way Luang Pu Chah lived, it is not the case that one doesn't have to do anything. One does work that is of benefit to oneself and to the community at the same time.

*We don't just let our lives
pass devoid of sense. We have to
rise up to our ideals.*



*“Reflections after the
Patimokkha Recitation”*

Reflections after the Patimokkha Recitation

A teaching given after the fortnightly recitation of the 227 training rules of the monks (the Patimokkha) at Wat Nong Pah Pong on June 26th, 2006 (2549).

What we have just listened to are the *sikkhapada*, the training rules, prohibitions laid down by the Buddha. These training rules are all about actions that shouldn't be committed. One can call them "akaraniyakicca", actions not to be done. Going ahead regardless, and acting against these rules won't lead to good results, as the Buddha put it. We presently still use these rules as our basis and as our roots, although they are given in the original language, a language that has lasted over two thousand years in history. When recollecting and reciting the rules together now, if we don't understand the meaning, we should look it up in a language that we understand. We need to give these things attention, as they concern our ethical standards (*sila*). There are things that we should refrain from as monks. Certain actions we should stop doing. We should start leading our lives being equipped with Dhamma.

To be equipped with Dhamma relies on a number of factors, just as new Bhikkhus in the Dhamma-Vinaya need to have certain qualities. The physical, material aspects of our bodily *khandhas*³⁰ are only external, so we need to have Dhamma in the

³⁰ *khandha* (Pali): aggregates; the five causally conditioned groups of existence forming a human being; rupa or physical form, vedana or feeling,

way we lead our lives. We should fulfill our obligations toward ourselves, supported by our spiritual potential (*parami*). Our character traits and habits surely will change, as the principles of practice that we keep applying are definitely capable of causing changes in us.

When we practise, we hope and aspire to attain to purity and perfection. This relies on putting those teachings into practice which enable us to experience an understanding of Dhamma. The *bodhipakkhiya-dhammas*³¹ are considered the group of teachings that is best for the training and practice. For example, the *iddhipadas* (ways to success) – *chanda* (zeal, aspiration), *virīya* (energy, diligent effort), *citta* (thoughtfulness, active thought, dedication) and *vimamsa* (investigation and examination) – are qualities that we need to arouse in ourselves. One of them is the “putting forth of effort”.

In putting forth effort, there needs to be continuity. One needs to put one’s heart into the practice, maintaining an interest and motivation that doesn’t cease or expire. Then one needs to refine one’s experience by using *dhamma-vicaya* (reflection on Dhamma), investigation of the conditions that one is practicing with, not letting feelings of discouragement and loss of motivation take over. For all this, one needs the very quality of patient endurance.

sañña or memory/perception, *sankhara* or mental formations and *viññana* or consciousness.

³¹ *bodhipakkhiya-dhammas* (Pali: the wings to awakening): a group of qualities that the Buddha considered essential for realizing Nibbana, comprising the four *satipatthanas*, the four *sammappadhanas*, the four *iddhipadas*, the five *indriyas* and the five *balas* (*saddha*, *virīya*, *sati*, *samadhi*, *pañña*), the seven *bojjhangas* (*sati*, *dhamma-vicaya*, *virīya*, *pīti*, *passaddhi*, *samadhi*, *upekkha*) and the Noble Eightfold Path.

The qualities expressed in the iddhipadas are all very close to the quality of diligently putting forth effort – viriya. As we probably know from our studies, the Buddha gave us some similes for the perfection of the spiritual potential of viriya in the *Jatakas*, in the *Mahajanaka Jataka*³². Relying on effort one eventually succeeds. Just like when chanting the Patimokkha – a task that is beneficial for the Sangha – one needs diligence. Relying on effort one succeeds in memorizing the Patimokkha. This relies merely on effort. This is why the Buddha stated that diligent effort is a quality that gives rise to success.

The conditions of our lives, which we should find methods to overcome and become free from, don't refer to anything else than the categories of *rupa* (the physical world) and *nama* (the mental world). In the bodhipakkhiya-dhammas the four *satipatthanas*, namely *kayanupassana* (mindfulness of the body), *vedananupassana* (mindfulness of feelings), *cittanupassana* (mindfulness of the mind), and *dhammanupassana* (mindfulness of mind-objects) concern both *rupa* and *nama*. *Kayanupassana* deals with *rupa*. We take up contemplation of physical form so we can free ourselves from it and come to experiences that are not bound up with the kinds of delusions and wrong understandings caused by attachments and mistaken identities. We apply our practice to the body, or the *rupa-khandha*, in order to create a feeling of not being concerned and worried about the body. We practise according to the ideals that are appropriate for walking the ways of the peaceful.

³² The Mahajanaka Jataka refers to one of the ten last lives of the Bodhisatta, in which he perfected viriya-parami, swimming across the sea for seven days without knowing when he will reach the shore.

We apply ourselves to this practice again and again, so that feelings of self-importance and mind states based on the ego don't arise. We contemplate seeing the body in the body as merely a physical phenomenon that is prone to arising, existence and cessation. We should see the body from the point of view of the Three Universal Characteristics. Due to them the body is the way it is, and not any other way. This is how we need to contemplate the rupa-khandha. The body can't be otherwise. We should see it as a particular manifestation of Dhamma. It is *anicca, dukkha, anatta*³³ – precisely that. Seeing things like this allows us to experience a way of being where feelings of delusion – or misperceptions where we forget who and what we actually are – don't arise.

Concerning *vedana* (feelings): feelings are symptoms created by the sense bases. The sense bases are where their origin lies and also their extinction. Feelings arise due to pleasant and agreeable things (*piyarupa satarupa*), experiences that we encounter in one way or another. The eye seeing something or the ear hearing something can be the cause of both happiness and suffering – pleasant and unpleasant experiences that we can also call “Worldly Dhammas”. They are part of the modes of the mind. We observe them. To really say that they are pleasant or unpleasant doesn't hold when we look at them closely. They are merely modes of experience that arise. Feelings are just like waves that build up, break in and roll towards the shore where they eventually disintegrate into nothing. They are just conditions of experience that arise within the realm of the Three Universal Characteristics. To say that they *are* happiness or suffering isn't

³³ impermanence, suffering and not-self. These are the “Three Characteristics”, or “Three Universal Characteristics”.

true, so we neither agree nor disagree with them. These symptoms arise if a person's mental immunity is still insufficient – it has weak spots. Agreeable feelings (or happiness) and disagreeable feelings (or suffering) occur.

This is why the Buddha wanted us to stay in a state that is neither happiness nor suffering, where feelings are simply feelings, with no-one who owns them. He encouraged us to see feelings from the perspective of emptiness. When one is empty of feelings, empty of happiness and suffering, there is neither happiness nor suffering. There is what is called the “dhamma of equanimity”, *upekkha-vedana* (neutral feeling). This is indeed nature.

So we try to observe ourselves in this way. Particularly as we need to constantly keep track of ourselves, with focus and awareness, so as not to be overwhelmed by the power of sensuality, or the power of our desires and defilements. This is how we practise regarding vedana.

Concerning the mind things are similar: We need to watch the activity of the processes of our minds, whether they are *kusala* or *akusala* (wholesome and skilful, or unwholesome and unskilful). We watch the kusala-citta with its positive emotions and the akusala-citta that can take our lives towards defilement, depression, aversion and enmity, when it comes under the sway of *agati* (biased views or wrong courses of perception).

We need to focus on our mind and observe it. We need to refer to the facts of existence when we look at the mind, well

grounded in the *vipassana-ñanas*³⁴ which, in fact, are all about the Three Characteristics.

The Three Characteristics are like a bright light that enables us to see things in a way in which we don't need to get involved or attached or need to hold on to things. The mind is simply the mind, whether it is wholesome or unwholesome. We should not approach it in a way that leads to attachment and grasping.

In relation to the objects of the mind (dhammas) we need to be like “one who is possessed with wakefulness and insight” – free from the *nivaranas*³⁵. We shouldn't allow the hindrances to be present. As long as they are, one is still in a state of being incapable of growth and progress. The hindrances are a shield that restricts growth, just like a tree that is hindered by some structure is unable to sprout. We shouldn't allow ourselves to live with the hindrances. We ought to live a life free from the hindrances.

We always need to see how we can live putting forth effort, with diligence and mindfulness – being one who is awake. This is a factor that creates Right View and a feeling of peace. When one has Right View there is no desire and no suffering. Right View is like a light, dispelling darkness. The Buddha mentioned this, saying the light of Right View removes the obstacles and destroys the barriers. The Buddha also said:

“Natthi paññasama abha”
(There is no light equal to wisdom)

³⁴ *vipassana-ñanas* (Pali): the nine insight-knowledges.

³⁵ the five hindrances (*nivarana*) of sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and agitation, doubt and uncertainty.

We live our lives as one who is awake, who is radiant – like a Samana, like one who is possessed with the Samana-Dhamma.

Living according to the Samana-Dhamma, one of the points to reflect on every day is this: As Samanas we now have a different status from householders. They act, following the influence of defilements and desires. Under the power of craving they are always in need. But we, as Samanas, endeavour only for being at peace. Our relationship to the requisites of a monk and the necessities of life is free from likes and dislikes. It isn't based on desire. Our life isn't ruled by the power of craving. We live through the power of knowing. This is of true benefit for ourselves, and that is why the Buddha pointed it out.

Also, in the daily reflections of a Samana, the Buddha reminded us to reflect on the fact that time keeps passing, so we see that there is nothing really sure and stable in life. It is not just that the time of our lives passes, but along with it, everything that is part of the material world will also reveal instability and uncertainty. In the end everything will have to transform into emptiness, a state where a being, a person, a self, or “us and them” can't be found. We should reflect like this, and find support in heedfulness, as time keeps passing and passing. We should live with an attitude of practice, and sustain our life being possessed both of Dhamma and of Discipline (Vinaya). Having Dhamma-Vinaya is called a great fortune. It creates a feeling of being on the right path – the path leading to maturity and perfection. The treasure of sila refers to having a feeling for good manners, behaviour and conduct – with all the physical expressions, namely our actions by body and speech. But if we attain to perfection in terms of the *asankhata-dhamma* (the unconditioned) in all our

behaviour, there is only *kiriya* – mere performance of activities, or functioning. There is nothing that has to do with *kamma* (purposeful action). If one’s actions are still on the level of *kamma*, they are going to create negative effects in some way or another. In the case of actions that are *kiriya*, experiences of peace will arise. This arising of peace is called “*asankhata-dhamma*”, a state where there are no proliferations as found in the world. Proliferations that create moods in the mind don’t exist.

So, the principles of the four satipatthanas are really worth studying, applying, developing and bringing to perfection. All four are synonyms for each other. They are interdependent. Seeing the body, feelings, the mind and the mind-objects should in fact be done in a way similar to how the Buddha reflected on the law of conditionality, or “dependent origination”. How did the Buddha reflect? He started with reflecting on the *sankharas*. Ignorance being the cause for *sankharas* to arise, and *sankharas* causing *viññana*, *viññana* causing *nama-rupa* ... and so on. This should lead us to focus on the round of existence (*vatta*), which one might as well call the “round of change”, with its phases of passing on and beginning again. Ignorance causing proliferations to arise is like darkness causing people to have doubts and uncertainty. It is like being in the dark, where all we can rely on is making assumptions and suspicions. Walking in the dark one is anxious about everything. One doubts that one will arrive at one’s destination, one fears all kinds of threats and changes. *Avijja* (ignorance) has got these qualities. This is why we should live with *vijja* (knowledge), or *vijjacarana*, both knowledge and appropriate conduct.

So we undertake this study and practice together – now it is almost time for entering the rains retreat, which we are going to spend together with the study of Dhamma and Vinaya. Those monks who are still young and physically strong – please try to do your duties. In relation to this, we have just been informed that the Sangha authorities of Ubon would like to know how many Patimokkha chanters there are in each monastery in Ubon province. To keep the Patimokkha in memory is a quality that will lead to benefit in many ways. So they asked how many “Patimokkha-holders” each monastery has. If you are not physically disabled and your body is still in a state that allows you to learn the Patimokkha, you should try. There’s nothing wrong about giving it a try.

Chanting the Patimokkha is also a means to overcome the hindrances. If we experience obstacles in the development of the qualities of a Samana, we can revert to reciting the Patimokkha. The Buddha once gave Venerable Maha-Moggallana this advice. While Maha-Moggallana was practising in Kallavalaputtagama and his progress was hindered by some obstacles, the Buddha told him to recite principles of the teachings that he had learned in order to dispel the hindrances. In this way the Patimokkha can be helpful to our practice.

We should also try to do some further studies. One of the qualifications mentioned by the Buddha of a monk who fulfills the duties of a senior member in the Sangha is to know what is an offence and the method of resolving it.

Further, the Buddha stated very clearly that a senior monk needs to be one who is possessed with a sense of shame and fear of wrong-doing (hiri-ottappa). One can’t do without these

qualities – to be equipped with a sense of shame preventing one from proceeding with incorrect actions, or from not fearing to transgress the rules. This is what we understand by “sense of shame”.

So we continue educating ourselves. This occasion of chanting the Patimokkha is an opportunity to demonstrate our skills and show how much dedication we put into these duties. We don't just let our lives pass devoid of sense. We have to rise up to our ideals. Once we have achieved our aim, it's not going to be without benefit. There will be more opportunities to use what we have learned in the future. One can see it also as another way of warding off obstacles. So we should make an effort in this area.

Now that the rains retreat will soon begin, there is also the opportunity for us to move to other monasteries that provide good facilities for the development of the Samana-Dhamma, and spend the rains retreat there. We change places in order to experience some new possibilities for developing the practice, our studies and in fulfilling our obligations.

For myself – in the first year after spending the rains at Wat Nong Pah Pong, I went to Wat Suan Gluay. Just a few days before entering the vassa, Luang Pu Chah wrote a letter of recommendation and told me to go there. I thought, okay, that's fine – no problem. So I travelled to Suan Gluay. By coincidence there was a cremation just when I entered the monastery. “That's a good start,” I thought (*Luang Por laughs*). Wat Suan Gluay is an old cremation site. I didn't want to leave the site, thinking that this is a good chance, because I wanted to challenge and test myself. In the old days the burning of a corpse wasn't such a neat thing as today. As soon as the fire was lit, all the people would run away.

Nobody would stay. There is a saying that if one stays around, the fire won't really burn. So everybody had disappeared. When the night came I took my chance to observe things. But there wasn't anything. There was a tiny bit of fear: I was afraid that some dogs would come searching for something to eat. To go to these places is also a good way of getting to know and train oneself. That year we were 16 monks and novices spending the rains in Wat Suan Gluay. The kutis were more like little shacks. The food was good enough to stay alive from day to day. The stay at Suan Gluay was also good in that it brought the experience of getting to know some of my companions in the monastic life. Before I had always depended on a teacher. Now, at Suan Gluay, I was a senior monk with quite a few rainy seasons. So I did my duty in that position. This is also one of the good aspects of life in another monastery. We get the chance for further training. In that rainy season I also gave the monks and novices instructions on how to memorize the Patimokkha.

So, at this time, now that we are about to enter the rains retreat, we'll be having plenty of opportunities for the development of the Samana-Dhammas, the virtues of a monastic.

*“The Embellishments
of One Gone Forth”*

*To be somebody who conducts himself
with a mind standing firm...not
becoming overpowered.*



The Embellishments of One Gone Forth

A teaching given to the monks of Wat Nong Pah Pong on the occasion of entering the rains retreat (vassa) on July 22nd, 2005 (2548), after Luang Por had just returned from a stay in hospital due to acute heart-weakness.

In the period that we undertake to spend the vassa, a period of ninety days, we take up both aspects (of the Buddhas teaching): the side of study (*pariyatti-dhamma*), in which we have to get a bit of a foundation; and the side of practice (*patipatti-dhamma*), in which we should know what is what. We rely on this period for developing these two because now we don't need to worry and make plans about what to do and where to go. This cuts off all the problems about the things that we think we need to do when we are following our desires. We rely on this period for doing our duty of changing from the state of ordinariness to a state which has more valuable qualities.

We can observe that the principles of life in society, the lay-system, and the principles of One Gone Forth, are different. Coming from the lay-system, we are now Ones Gone Forth. The life Gone Forth has ideals, and there are standards of behaviour and practice. Since there are guidelines for behaviour and practice, we follow these ideals and standards of practice. If we were to use our former system of life, the way of life of a layperson, there wouldn't be as much value as there should be. So we have to keep reminding ourselves that now we are of a

different gender than laypeople or householders³⁶, who do as they like and act according to their moods. But we have ideals, which means we have principles in the way we live; that is, we are those who see the disadvantages and dangers in the round of rebirth.

We need to have principles in our lives. At least we need *sila*. Keep in mind that *sila* is one part of the embellishments of One Gone Forth. We need to live with caution, carefulness and restraint in our manners, actions and ways of expression by body and speech, for the sake of not allowing our conduct of body and speech to become inappropriate. We need to change them to a state of appropriateness. This is a state that needs to be cared for and maintained. We train ourselves in this way by taking the principle of living as one who goes against the stream of lay life and the stream of worldly attitudes. We all know what the stream of lay life, the stream of worldly attitudes is like. It is always under the power of delusion, under the power of desires and under the power of craving and defilements. It is always lacking and insatiable, like a fire that can never have enough fuel. So now we go against the stream and don't act in conformity with our likes and our moods. We have guidelines of practice, such as the ascetic practices, which are for directing our life as someone who doesn't follow the stream of the world. We all know that the stream of the world is the stream of darkness and blindness. It's a stream in which there is no freedom, in which one is not one's own. For this reason we need to change our character and habits, change our feelings, not letting them be like those of laypeople. Worldly people follow their moods, the stream of desires, and the Worldly Dhammas. These things concern the beings of the world.

³⁶ In Thailand there is an idiom saying that the “third sex” besides male and female is “ordained”.

These are the dhammas of the worldling. They concern what is called worldly materialism, the nutriment of beings of the world. We come and look at ourselves and search for skilful means that help to relieve and eradicate the desires that stain our minds and reduce the mind states of entertainment, amusement and diversion. We start seeing the world from a perspective that brings relief from desires staining the heart. This is how we try to see it. The only question is, where exactly should we look? In fact we can look both towards material objects, for example the body, and towards the mind and its moods. The Buddha always emphasized that all of us should look at our experiences as being like an ornamented royal chariot, which only fools get carried away with, but those who understand won't see anything there³⁷. We come together here seeing things in a way where we can experience a feeling of not getting overpowered by craving and grasping when we get involved with things. Just like the Buddha taught us to pay attention and reflect whenever material possessions accrue to us. Even in terms of external matters, such as the clothes we wear, the food we eat and our dwellings, the Buddha wanted us to understand that they are merely elements that simply follow their nature. They keep transforming in a way that we don't want them to at all. This is something we contemplate. It helps to relieve our eagerness.

The Buddha taught that the enjoyment of sensual pleasure and the cords of sensuality is one of the dangers for the Sangha, and so is the wish to have more and more of these pleasures. That's why we are determined to look, know and see – seeing in a way that doesn't get involved with the fetters and bonds caused by the sense of self. We are determined to contemplate, allowing

³⁷ Dhammapada 171.

the sense of self to abate and eventually be dissolved into the universality of the Three Characteristics which, as we understand it, is “saccadhamma”. What we mean by “saccadhamma” is the ultimate truths of nature: *aniccata*, the state of not being permanent; *anattata*, that which doesn’t make the burden of conceit arise since, ultimately, there isn’t anything that is in a state of true constancy or absolute certainty. Nothing can be called stable or permanent at all. Seeing this will truly give rise to the feeling of some relief from the mind states where we delight in things and become deluded. The mind state where we experience ignorance in its various ways will be slightly reduced. This feels like a reduction of heat, the pulling out of drunkenness, and relief from dukkha.

When we find that we can relate to things in this way, it will make us change from the state of ordinariness experienced by worldly people and give rise to a state that has valuable qualities, a state which feels peaceful, cool and shady. The Buddha taught this way so that we remind ourselves that we are now of a different status than laypeople. We have to know how to reflect on ourselves and the fact that we rely on others for supporting our lives. For this reason we need to develop ourselves into somebody who welcomes whatever he is given happily and does not have the feeling that he needs to change and improve things according to the pulls of craving and ignorance. He puts down these feelings and abides in a state which is light and grounded in peace – irrespective of whether what he receives is good or bad. Actually there isn’t anything good or bad. It is only since we have desires and rely on desires, that good and bad come to be. We have to approach and reflect on things like this, which means lowering oneself down to becoming one who accepts the truth of nature. Whoever accepts the truth of nature will not get worked up too

much, will not experience many problems. This is for the sake of peace of mind, not for anything else. Peace from the mind states of *kilesas*³⁸ and *tanha*. Peace from desires and craving.

We need to develop and recollect the attitude of applying effort, having mindfulness and clear comprehension. This means to get rid of the sense of grabbing as if one was out of one's mind, always taking hold of as much as one can, like worldly people do. Rather we live like ones who have mindfulness and recognize the right measure in the way we lead our lives. We live just appropriately and well. This way of acting reminds us of being somebody who recognizes what is enough. One won't get worked up when one recognizes what is enough. Having little is enough, having a lot is enough.

These are some of the qualities and treasures of somebody who practices changing his character and habits. He always reminds himself of what these qualities which embellish one who has Gone Forth actually are. The embellishments of the body are something that we can all see, they are the things we use to cover ourselves to protect us from heat and cold, but there also need to be embellishments in the qualities of Dhamma. At least we should give rise to the beauty that comes from having intentions that are based on a sense of shame. Having a sense of shame to a certain extent enables us to restrain ourselves from falling into what is evil or bad.

The Buddha held that having a sense of shame is like a goad for forcing a cart to go towards its destination at the end of the road. Another expression for this is: to have *sila*, to observe

³⁸ *kilesas* (Pali): defilements, stains, afflictions of the heart.

virtuous conduct, or to possess guidelines of practice which are harmonious and cause beauty to arise. Walking – one is beautiful, standing – one is beautiful, sitting – one is beautiful, speaking – one knows the right amount. It makes one feel that the factors and embellishments of a Samana are present in every way. This requires living like somebody who bears in mind a sense of shame, like somebody who has got sila. We consider this to be one of the constituent factors of our Going Forth, of our practice.

Concerning samadhi and sati: sati is necessary, as it is a dhamma that gives great support. We must know the flow of the wind, the flow of kilesas and tanha, the flow of the world, not making ourselves like a water hyacinth going up whenever the water level rises, and going down whenever it falls. If there's delusion letting it be just delusion, if there is sati letting it be just sati. We need to know how to go against the stream, have sati and *sampajañña* (clear comprehension), not to be deluded by the world, not to be deluded by moods such as praise, blame, gain, loss. We shouldn't feel obliged to go along with everything, but be aware and have *dama*, self-discipline. At least we need to have control of our minds and hearts. If we get what we wish, we get what we wish. It's just that. If we don't get what we wish, it's just that. We need to know how to put things down and how to abandon.

This should be enough to create the feeling of being one's own refuge, of not being deluded by the world or by moods. To be somebody who conducts himself with samadhi, a firm standing – a mind standing firm, mind-objects standing firm – not becoming overpowered and obscured, emerging into a characteristic quality called resoluteness. We have got immunity and we have got firmness. To have immunity is something very

valuable, therefore we need to train and learn. These are factors of our being Samanas, being ones who have Gone Forth.

Some of our views may give rise to feelings that lead us into ways of thinking that aren't right or appropriate, so we should remind ourselves of nature, seeing things in a way that gives rise to a sense that fits in with nature. As the Buddha says, having "wisdom, all-around knowledge, of this heap of sankharas". Sankharas are states of constructing. Constructing needs to be understood on the basis of the experience of anicca, impermanence. Certainly, there is the state that is hard to endure, but there is also the state where there isn't anything at all. We try to focus on seeing things in this way, letting our understanding be a factor that influences our way of living.

Further we need to be aware of the conventions in the way we live together with other people. If that's not the case, we won't attain freedom. To like certain persons in one moment and later hate them is like a virus causing damage to us and keeping us from a state of peace. That's why we need to know, watch and observe things that concern us. Bit by bit we have to put our hearts into those things that are relevant to us.

When at times our behaviour and our actions aren't good, our friends in the Dhamma might warn us or criticize us. Then we have to know how to accept it, not just taking our own feelings as a basis, or taking atta, self, as our principle. We need to know how to relax, whether the criticism is right or wrong. We need to be humble and lower ourselves first. If the criticism is right, we really need to accept that there are still parts of ourselves that we have to face with humbleness.

So our practice relies on following certain ways that uphold the training and our lifestyle needs to be supported by the activities of a Samana. Getting up early we recognize straight away that we need to change our feelings, not allowing them to go in a direction where we give things too much importance and grasp onto them. We consider and remind ourselves that the days and nights are passing, passing. What does this mean? It is a way to see that the passing of time very clearly reveals the truth. It really speaks for itself: days and nights are passing, relentlessly. Even the parts of us that are considered rupa-khandha, the “form-sankharas” (i.e. the physical world), still point to ending and deterioration, changing into a state where there is nothing that belongs to oneself. What shall we expect from them?

So, taking up contemplations like this is done for the sake of pulling out *asmimana* (the conceit “I am”), a view that seems to be controlling us all the time. We have to really pull it out through living as One Gone Forth who possesses guidelines for his behaviour and practice. The way we lead our lives has to be like this.

We understand that this involves changing our character and habits towards seeing the disadvantages and dangers in the round of rebirth. All of us already know that this danger isn't anything far away. It is in fact the danger of ignorant mind states that are associated with greed, hatred and delusion. Just this is the danger. And just this is what forces us to live in a state where we are tortured, with freedom unable to arise. That is why the application of effort is considered something very good, a valuable quality that we can receive benefits from. It eliminates the problem of going in a direction in which we can get lost and are aiming at dukkha.

The meaning of applying effort amounts to living in a way that is not careless, just that. When we relate to external objects in our lives we relate to them as someone who has *sati-pañña* (mindfulness and wisdom). In the same way we relate to conventions. It is better to do so, because this can give rise to peace and enables one to experience happiness. This happiness does not rely on worldly or material things, but on the application of energy and effort.

Since we live as a society or group we do have to take on agreements and a variety of duties for our living together. Whatever is communal activity we need to hurry to help each other with, especially concerning the application of effort (in meditation). Each day there should be an occasion of putting forth effort together in order to build up strength and energy. We don't always do meditation together, only from time to time. In the language of the Buddha, building up strength and energy together like this is called *sangha-anubhava* (the power of the Sangha). If we do something we do it through the power of the Sangha. The sitting meditation we do all together. In any activity which goes in the direction of *samaggi* (harmony) we try to do our part, but if the state of nature (*i.e. Luang Por's health*) doesn't support it, one has to accept that it is too much, going beyond one's range. An example of this is related in the Vinaya. It concerns our practice with the requisites to cover ourselves (*i.e. the robes*). The Buddha forbade us to be without the three robes, even for one night, but he did allow us to be without them if our body and our form-elements are in a state of deterioration. This is about nature and the fact that it is beyond the range of one's control. But if one is still in a normal state, the Buddha advised us not to be careless, and to live in a way where we put our hearts into looking after and protecting our requisites – for the purpose of training our habits.

We should take it to be a part of our lives that we need to have things to cover ourselves. If we stay far away from these things they may disappear or get lost. Somebody who wants our robes might come and use the opportunity to take them away. We aren't allowed to beg (for new robes) then. This is something that we have to consider very well. If something like this happens, it might make us break our precepts. At least we'll have to go and request replacement from somebody else, either from a relative or non-relative, or from the communal stores. As we are training to change our character and habits we don't request or do anything based on craving.

All the different tricks of deceit and ways of acting based on craving: don't go and use them. We uphold that we should make our ways of acting as straightforward as possible, not making excuses in this or that way. One can't do that – finding excuses... we've been excusing ourselves for a long time already and it just brings bad habits, the habits of a fool. Now who's going to do this? Our training has to have resoluteness. To be resolute means to possess strong determination of mind (*mano-panidhana*). This can cut off those problems that give rise to degeneration and decay. This is what it relies on: it relies on the actions we do. Just that.

Concerning our chanting now, during the time that we determine the vassa, we have to pay attention to the proper time and place (for coming together). This is something that is considered part of the training of the new monks, but it also means maintaining our communal duties as a Sangha. This is another factor of the practice.

Something else that we also consider to be part of the season of vassa is that we will have to study that which is related to the pariyatti-dhamma, the Vinaya, the training rules, concerning the things that the Buddha forbade us to do – for the sake of support and increase of our knowledge on a deeper level. The Vinaya is all about our bodily, verbal and mental actions. One can say it is something that affects our lives. The issues of the body, speech or mind are all about life in this way.

Today we have come together to determine the vassa. In this period my health is a state that can be called definitely “not sure”, it is in a state of degeneration, the degeneration of the mechanism of the pump, the motor inside the system of the heart. The condition of the heart isn't good. The muscles of the heart are weak. One can say that they don't have strength in their function and when they push and pump, the heart doesn't contract as much as it should. So I had to rely on consulting those who have sufficient experience and knowledge. They said the system is not capable of ejecting all the fluid out of the heart. This then causes fluid to accumulate in the heart. This makes the heart weak and enlarged and there is the possibility of it stopping to work, which in technical terms is called having a heart failure, suddenly and unexpectedly. All this, one can say, is a matter of nature. I think of it like this. It's about the process of degeneration in nature, but in a position of living in society one can't just let go. So one needs to know how to cure, maintain and nurse as much as one is able to support it, only for that reason.

These are some of the issues concerning the body that I'm facing now, so I'm telling you this to let you all know. It isn't anything that's far away. Concerning other inner organs, like the

liver, lungs and kidneys, they are still usable. But the system of the heart is damaged, simply that. There's the chance of complete failure. This can happen, suddenly. There's nothing difficult about it, it's not hard, and it's good in that there will be no dukkha vedana. With these symptoms there is no dukkha vedana, only the breathing becomes quicker, that's all. We went to see the doctors and they said these will be the symptoms (preceding total heart failure). I have the feeling that the tests, checks and the things that they observe mean this.

Regarding the fact that we are living together, we have come together now for determining vassa, in order to create feelings that give rise to concord and unanimity in principles, the principles of Dhamma-Vinaya. So today we have come together to do this act of determining the vassa with each other as witnesses. We understand that this is a special occasion in this period.

I don't have much more, so I don't want to say much more. It is appropriate. If I speak much it also uses a lot of energy, so I'd like to use this occasion to express my appreciation for all of us who have come together for determining the vassa, doing the duty of changing our characters and habits and leading our lives as those who see the disadvantages and dangers in the round of rebirth. Doing so, we can be a bit of a light for others, for the people in the world, so that they may open up their eyes and ears; because just as the external light is capable of giving support and convenience, the light inside is capable of making the hearts of people in society change. May you all have happiness that is without any dukkha. With your permission, may I end now.

*“Different from
Ordinary People”*

*If one is able to change and leave behind
the emotions of an ordinary person, that's
something amazingly strange.*



Different from Ordinary People

A teaching given at Wat Nong Pah Pong after the Patimokkha on August 26th, 2003 (2546).

Now we have already reached half of the vassa. The ceremony of entering the rains was 1½ months ago. Another 1½ months and the rains period is over. If we all practise continually and make a habit of putting forth effort, this will be sufficient to change our behaviour in some ways. At least the practice with the conditioned physical form of our bodies is well within the realm that is capable of change. But it takes time for us, who have just come here to this lifestyle, to follow the principles of the Buddha with all the methods of practice for leading this life. Even more, it takes time, if one has been closely linked to friends and relatives, to free oneself from worries. We have become acquainted and used to places and people, so it takes time before we can change. It is only after a long time that we can see that we don't need to worry about the situations that our old friends and relatives are in. It is very difficult to develop this "unconcerned" feeling towards people we have been closely linked to. It is not easy. When we study how the Buddha trained himself in his practice, we see that it is something that takes a long time, to abandon these feelings of being bound up and fettered to ones old life. So for us, it should be similar: it will take us some time until we can let go of the things that bind us to people and places that we used to relate to.

So I'd like all of us to develop a mind that doesn't follow wrong courses of perception (agati-dhamma). Normally we do have these mistaken perceptions. Our views are not the true Dhamma; we are prejudiced. If one sees things from an angle

without preconceptions, one can see the way things normally are. An example is our living together: if we look at the physical features (of people), or the conditions of their bodies, everybody is different. There are big and small people, the colour of the skin is not the same, and there are differences all the way up to people's voices and the languages they use for communication. In these aspects, each individual is special, but if we see things in the light of the facts of nature, in terms of form, elements and aggregates everybody is the same. We chant this in the "five subjects for frequent recollection": we all age, become sick and become separated when we die – all the same for everyone.

From this point of view, the feeling of being especially closely related to certain persons won't arise. We see everybody in the same way. Actually, everybody is our relative in terms of nature, or concerning our true situation, the *saccadhamma*, the truth of the reality of life. If we can manage to realise this aspect of nature, we will be possessed of a mind that isn't prone to seeing others with perceptions of being better, worse, or on the same level. The term for these biased perceptions is *mana*, conceit. The Buddha wanted us to observe in what kind of forms *mana* occurs. Thinking "I'm not like this or that person" will eventually lead to seeing others as either good or bad. It will lead to accepting or resenting them. When such mind states arise, we need to put things in the right perspective, a perspective that is based on *saccadhamma*, the truth of reality in its universal scope. From this angle, states of mind that are free from aversion, where we neither denigrate nor praise others, will come about naturally. We see others as part of nature, as perfectly right and appropriate. The Buddha called this the attitude of somebody who has Right View. It is the mind state of a person that is accomplished and pure in the qualities and virtues of a true Sangha member.

Talking about ‘Sangha’: it is worth noticing that Sangha doesn’t have anything to do with individual monks that can be specified. Speaking about the Sangha in its conventional sense (*sammuti-sangha*), the Buddha didn’t refer to certain monks. Sammuti-sangha (merely) means a group of four monks or more, a sufficient number to be able to perform communal duties. This is one way the Buddha understood ‘Sangha’. But in what the Buddha called the ‘*ariya-sangha*’ (the group of the Noble Enlightened Beings) the word ‘Sangha’ is related to the realisation of Dhamma. There the Buddha did refer to certain individuals: those that don’t fall under the power of the Worldly Dhammas, those that are not prone to agati and therefore progress with right practice (*samma-patipada*) – namely: those who walk the Middle Way. The Middle Way doesn’t follow the course of Worldly Dhammas. These are the paths of householders and ordinary unenlightened beings. If our behaviour is not yet accomplished in the Dhamma, there will always be elements of agati. So in this matter of changing one’s behaviour, what we should do is have a look at ourselves and take our own feelings into account. Moving towards observing other people can take us very far from relating to ourselves in a way where we are able to see the Dhamma.

Thinking about it, this is an aspect of Dhamma that is interesting: how is it possible that good and bad feelings arise, or happiness and suffering? Happiness, according to our model of thinking, is positive, and for us who haven’t yet reached the level where one is content, anything that is dukkha is undesirable. But those who are accomplished and free from the mind states of worldly, unenlightened people would uphold that even sukha is something negative. They would see neither sukha nor dukkha as something positive. The Buddha still considered feelings of

appreciation as dangerous. They are another aspect of dukkha. Only because we agree to this type of dukkha, we say it's positive. There has to be peace from sukha and dukkha, peace from good and bad, peace from agreement and disagreement. This peace arises from seeing things in the light of the nature of reality.

This is how we see things. One needs to be well aware of the different kinds of angles from which one looks at things. This is why the Buddha taught us to live grounding ourselves in attention and heedfulness, looking at the world and all the mind states that arise in ourselves. If the things that arise in our mind arise in a peaceful way, without proliferating or fantasizing about the Worldly Dhammas, they are a potential that can provide peace and happiness for us. This is what is called "seclusion from the sankharas" in the Buddha's words – seclusion from the mind states of proliferation.

This is also something that is hard to explain: if there is no mental proliferation, how is it possible for somebody to act at all? One can understand it in this way: those (who don't have any activity of mental proliferation) carry out their actions in a mind state that is perfected with what the Buddha called kindness, friendship, and helpfulness, or metta. Metta means wanting to be useful to those people that are still in a state of danger – wanting similar benefits to arise in them. You could call it the intention of a real grown-up person. It is the way the Buddha acted. In that sense, when one pursues the peace that arises from separation from the defilements (*upadhi-viveka*), peace means peace from the mind states of a normal, unenlightened being – where the mind experiences greed, disagreement or all kinds of negligence and errors.

Peace from these defilements arises because of seeing their drawbacks, dangers and inappropriateness. In this way the Buddha's mind state was secluded from defilements. Still, looking at the way he lived, the Buddha seemed just like an ordinary person. He needed clothes to cover his body, ward off cold, heat, mosquitoes and gadflies. He ate food for sustaining the physical condition of his body, just so that it feels like neither too much nor too little, consuming it only for stilling the hunger that arises due to the work of the body's digestive system (and not overcome by desire). His dwelling place can be considered 'good'. It was merely a shelter from sun and rain, a place of relief from having to deal with insects. It can't be called 'good' by worldly standards. The Buddha was indifferent towards it. He lived just well enough to sustain his life and to have some relief from the heat and cold that nature brings, from the sun and the rain. The same with medicines: the Buddha wouldn't use medicines thinking of curing his illnesses – but only for the sake of a little relief, as the situation of having to experience the physical conditions of a body always has to involve constant changes, according to causes and conditions. Eventually the physical body will have to reach its end, disintegrate and transform into its original state: earth goes to earth, water to water, wind to wind, and fire to fire. Seeing that this is the way it goes, the Buddha didn't think of his physical body being a person or an entity in itself. The body is merely a manifestation of the elements and khandhas – arising, existing, and ceasing to be. With this perspective there is nothing that is to be assumed as a self – whether relating to the rupa-khandha, the vedana-khandha, or sankhara-khandha.

The Buddha saw that the khandhas are a way of being that follows causes and conditions – arising, existing and ceasing –

which one can't consider a being or a person at all. Because the Buddha saw things from this perspective, he was able to experience true peace. When we study aspects like this, we need to do it with an attitude that doesn't allow mindfulness to slip. We need to possess mindfulness and clear comprehension, immediately understanding the world and our states of mind, knowing them as they are. Knowing people, realizing the world. One who understands the world and knows the truth about it is able to still his feelings towards it. This means to look at things with an attitude of practice, following the ideal of heedfulness. We can also say it is a way of keeping track observingly, with comprehension and vision. Another expression (for an attitude like this) is to keep looking until one has revealed it, to keep addressing it until it works, and keep using it until one can handle it: look, figure it out, try to articulate it, apply it, and carry it out. Practicing in this way, both benefit for ourselves and benefit for others will arise together by itself. This all falls under the topic of guarding one's faculties, so they're beneficial – nothing more than that.

So these are the principles that we practise and give importance to. If one is able to realize peace and liberation from suffering, one changes in a strange way from being an ordinary person. In the ordination ceremony, when a young man enters the new gender of being a celibate, he is required to be a 'complete male human being' (*purisa*). But this only refers to the common features and conditions of an ordinary human. When one comes to completion of one's person (in the sense of complete freedom from dukkha), one actually goes against one's biological nature as a male person. One doesn't drift along the current of one's natural conditioning. This is truly strange.

The same is true for the mind with its various moods. If one is able to change and leave behind the emotions of an ordinary person, that's something amazingly strange. One can't say one feels good, because one doesn't see anything 'good' there. And instead of feeling bad, one sees that there isn't anything 'bad' there either. One merely sees these feelings as modes of being, states that are neither good nor bad. One's mind doesn't behave in terms of approval or disapproval. This is an effect of experiencing seclusion – seclusion from the world.

This is also something strange: if one practises a lot to be continuously observant, then even while one is asleep, one is able to remain watching. Those experiences that concern the body, relate to the body. The experiences that the 'one who knows' makes, relate to the 'one who knows'. One eventually needs to separate: what concerns the body is just a matter of the body, and what concerns the mind is just a matter of the mind. Practising following the Buddha's guidelines indeed leads one to very strange things. This is the course of the training. It leads all the way to becoming awake, to the arising of maturity and to fulfillment and completion. Therefore we try to develop an attitude of taking every opportunity, studying and observing. We study right at our six senses. The Buddha didn't want us to study anywhere else, but to see what is happening at our sense bases. This is something that we ought to know very well and thoroughly.

Again, there is something strange: when we have the experience of a very pure state of feeling and view, a 'mysterious' or strange phenomenon arises in the form of gladness and bliss. But it is not that we become obsessed with feelings of liking experiences like this. As I see it, such states of gladness and bliss

have to do with a person's previous wholesome behaviour (*upanissaya*). Whatever it is that we have invested importance into will eventually manifest at the right opportunity. Such an experience the Buddha refers to as '*vasana*', a gift of merit from the past. One can see it like that. Not every monk is equally well-gifted. Even the noble disciples in the Buddha's time weren't all the same.

Just look at Luang Pu Chah. When I was spending time with him he definitely had some very special gifts. From what I observed, it was very special that the people who came to pay respects and visit never felt bored or fed up with him – they wouldn't even think of these feelings. This is one of the aspects of *vasana*.

His special qualities also created good opportunities for him to be useful to others. Even though his activities mostly took place in the period of his life when he wasn't yet old, still they were of great and long-lasting benefit. It is a fact that we have received our style of practice from him, and even today, his principles (in the Dhamma) are still preserved by various means. Even his voice we can still hear. Or, in terms of the monastery regulations, standards and routines that he guided us in, we still reap benefits. He really laid good foundations. For example, our practices toward material gains or fame and reputation that arise from offerings made, Luang Pu Chah wouldn't let these fall to any individual. He always tried to designate them for communal purposes.

Then we need to recollect his spiritual practice and the qualities of Dhamma that he realised. Even in the time when his conditioned physical body deteriorated, he never showed such

symptoms visibly, or displayed a state that gave rise to aversion. It is noticeable that those who were involved in looking after him and nursing him (during his illness) never experienced feelings of being weary or fed up with it. He also never showed any extreme reactions. All this is part of vasana.

Also, Luang Pu Chah possessed an aspect of the four *patisambhida* (analytic insights), that which is called *patibhana* (ready wit, initiative, creative and applicable insight), and he was skilled in using speech in all kinds of ways. This definitely enabled great benefits to arise.

Then there was his relationship to his fellow monastics. All these are factors of vasana, the gifts of an individual person. So when we train, things are similar. Sometimes we need to see that the practice also depends on each and everybody's individual qualities.

*Our mind is like a flame when the wind is stilled.
The flame is unmoved and upright in itself and blazes light
into all directions, when we are fully present.*



*“From the Darkness
to the Light”*

From the Darkness to the Light

Excerpts of a Dhamma talk given to the monks, novices and nuns after the ceremony of asking forgiveness at the annual retreat of Luang Por's disciples at Wat Nong Pah Pong on September 12th, 1996 (2539).

In our practice we constantly have to remind ourselves that all of us need to begin like children. We can't be like adults right from the start. At first we are not yet purified and keep falling into states of dirtiness. We live in the mud and mire like a lotus that hasn't yet bloomed and still depends on the dirt for nourishment. We are the same – when we are born in the world we are not yet fully mature, ready and complete, but come with the burden of having to fight obstacles of all kinds. There is happiness and suffering, good and bad, right and wrong. To experience this is normal for an unenlightened person, who still has dust in his eyes. That someone who has dust in his eyes could experience the brightness and clarity of being unburdened with suffering and drawbacks cannot be. In the beginning there are always hardships, there always has to be suffering – this is just normal.

It's like we live in the dark. Living in the dark is not as pleasant as one might wish. There is always a certain feeling of discomfort and uneasiness. In this state we are still not free from dependence, are not yet wholly accomplished. We still experience a bit of happiness and a bit of suffering from time to time, some satisfaction and dissatisfaction. We haven't yet transcended the world of conditions and are not yet in a safe place. We are going back and forth in samsara, the round of birth and death. Sometimes the situations that arise are good, sometimes bad. In

our lives we are not going smoothly over all the ups and downs. Until we reach the aim of our practice this is just the natural way things are.

Although we accept that anything that is still in a stage of development is of course not yet as good as it ideally should be, we still need to make changes and improvements. And for doing this we need to know what we are supposed to do, so we can try to direct the development towards our aim. Whatever doesn't fit in our plan, we seek to let go, keep away from, or not respond to. The things which aren't alright will come to an end in this way. They won't be allowed to become part of our behaviour patterns or habitual attitudes.

Everybody has goodness, everybody has perfection and purity right inside himself. Surely everyone of us possesses at least some personality traits which could be brought to consciousness in a way that is useful for oneself. Make these complete and perfect them. It is like with the flames of a fire: in the places where the flames light up there wasn't any fire before. But once they are ignited and kindled, the flames appear out of the darkness – and eventually the fire and flames are burning right there. With us it's the same as with the flames: everyone of us has to come from dark places, come from being a child, being someone who has no strength, is not yet mature. Naturally, of course, this brings disorientation. That a state at this level could give rise to full confidence and clarity just can't be. To be able to experience purity straight from the start is impossible. One has to gradually develop oneself like this.

Until the state of perfection is reached, we need to understand the situation we are in, and that it is normal to

experience both happiness and suffering. Still, we need to find means to improve ourselves. We can use the guidelines the Buddha established for us monks in order to correct the shortcomings and faults in our actions. Inabilities, negligence and thoughtlessness in our behavior can make us feel very inappropriate. But we have the chance to open ourselves up to the friends we live together with, to let them know about our deeds. We can confess or speak up in a meeting, letting the others witnesses our actions, saying words like:

“What I have done here was careless and wasn’t right. I have transgressed (a rule of conduct) here. That wasn’t good. What I have done wasn’t appropriate for someone who lives by the ways of a Samana, who practises for the sake of penetrating dukkha with clarity and insight.”

By letting others know and be witnesses in this way, we implant our principles deeply into our memory, building up our capacity to be aware of what we are doing and gradually creating a sense of shame. If we are grounded in this sense of shame, shying away from things that could cause us problems becomes natural. Seeing dangers and disadvantages will keep us alert and attentive. This alertness is the way leading to the experience of freedom and safety. It leads to the attainment of the “non-suffering”, the “unburdened”. This is the way to fulfill our task in the practice and development of ourselves.

In the beginning of the practice, we always do things according to the standards and rules, similar to a fighter preparing to enter the fighting arena. First, he trains strictly according to the rules and regulations. But when he really faces the fight, he

sometimes goes beyond the rules. But in our case, everything still remains within our general principles – principles that aim at peace and cessation and lead us to freedom from danger and enmity. For determining these principles, the Buddha gave us the criteria:

Any Dhamma that reduces the desires that stain our hearts won't deviate from the principles of the Buddhas teaching.

There are many skilful means and tools in the Buddha's teachings for correcting our actions, for destroying and abandoning confusion and unpeaceful, unhappy states in oneself. These tools are needed, and none of them transgress the general principles that the Buddha proclaimed. They are the Buddha's recommendations, so we should put them into practice.

Usually our mind likes to get carried away with having fun. If we find ourselves infatuated with amusement, take it as important and hold on to it, the Buddha recommends to ground ourselves in an attitude of alertness. Hilarity is a tie. It can drag us onto the path of foolishness. When we are infatuated and crazy about something, we can go wrong anywhere. Whether in the hidden or in the open, it's all the same – it's really like when one is drunk.

People get drunk with their bodies through the illusion that the body doesn't have illnesses, afflictions, pains and fevers threatening it. They think they won't die, won't degenerate and wear out. They don't consider the possibility, but it happens. Because in reality our physical body is a conditioned phenomenon, it always will follow the nature of its material

constituents. Nevertheless we like to see the body as permanently powerful, tough and strong and not afflicted by disease and pain. We want to see it in this perspective, the way we are used to seeing it, just as if the body was fit for all circumstances. But the Buddha said, if there is light, there will be darkness. If there is hot, there will be cold. It has to be like this. So in this very way, any state of strength, agility or ease may degenerate in just a single day or just a single moment into a state of decline and ruin, becoming deteriorated and worn out, following its nature. But if we cultivate an attitude of seeing the disintegration of the body as natural, we won't be upset by the decline. We won't take the body as something important, keep holding on to it or attach feelings of self to it.

The Buddha called the illusions we create around the body *sakkayaditthi* – the view that the body is self, that we and other people *are* our bodies, that the body is our possession. The Buddha reminds us to keep recollecting that whatever thing there may be, it is not ours, not our self. Nothing really belongs to us. Thinking like this prevents wrong courses of perception (agati-dhamma) from gaining power. One can easily get lost in these perceptions. They stimulate feelings of self-importance in us. So the Buddha taught to remedy them by reflecting in one's mind that there is nothing that really belongs to us. Through thinking like this we won't start holding on to things. Attachment is the root of all self-importance.

The more we take ourselves as important, the more we are prone to drifting away towards unwholesome feelings, towards suffering, until we finally follow the path into the realms of darkness. In this way we float along the round of birth and becoming. The Buddha saw this as the source of all suffering.

States of anger, greed or delusion come to be. Desire, aversion and ignorance arise. All of these states of being entail suffering and unhappiness.

Analyzing and observing our personality we see that it consists of what is called *namadhamma*. Mental phenomena, too, are not ours, not our self. Our personality is not “we” or “they”, but simply consists of certain states out of all the possible mental states. Don’t see it as “this is me” or “this is mine”. See it in the light of mental states which arise naturally on their own and then cease on their own. Just like the darkness comes to be naturally, it goes naturally as well. As brightness is born in its own natural way it likewise ceases. These states arise and vanish.

Mental states arise and cease, whether they are states of happiness or suffering, *ittharammana* (agreeable states) or *anittharammana* (disagreeable states). These two are what we call the the Worldly Dhammas, attributes that dominate the hearts and minds of beings living in the world. Seeing the Worldly Dhammas simply as elements of Dhamma, we won’t make the assumption that *we* are happy whenever we feel happiness, or that *we* are suffering whenever we feel suffering. There is nothing like *our* goodness or *our* badness either. We see these attributes, but they are just aspects of Dhamma. Each one is just one of all the possible states of Dhamma. There is nothing special about it.

Feelings are just feelings, happiness is just happiness, suffering is just suffering. Only that. Having arisen, it all ceases. We don’t *have* happiness and suffering. We don’t take interest in them. They are just attributes of the mental objects that come up – just that much. The Worldly Dhammas appear and vanish according to their own logic. Finally, if we don’t show interest in

them, don't support and give importance to them, they lose their existence.

The fantasies our mind spins, the sankharas, can be seen in a similar way. Sankharas are states of proliferation. They come and disturb us all the time, because, by giving importance to them, we keep feeding them. So of course they continue to provoke and challenge us. Naturally, then, we are constantly subject to feelings of up and down and states of confusion. We don't have freedom. We are not even refuge to ourselves for a second, only because we give importance to these states of mind.

The Buddha teaches us to be aware that sankharas are states that aren't permanent and enduring. We shouldn't build up the perception that they last forever. It's their characteristic that having arisen they cease. We should see sankharas as being nothing more than changing states of the elements, nothing but nature in the end.

We aspire to experience full accomplishment in the Dhamma. At least, we'd like to have mindfulness and clear awareness of ourselves, so this is the place to start the training. Normally, people start off with their emotions and moods, letting them lead everything. The people out in the world think their moods are what counts. But emotions and moods are illusions that swindle. They are tricky. Sometimes they take us on a good path, sometimes on a bad one. Following our moods easily turns to our disadvantage. We should take superior states of mind rather than moods and emotions as our guide. Why not let the one they call "Awakened" and "Blessed" lead us? Let "Buddha" walk in front of us. Let "Buddha" be the leading principle. Let "Buddha" be our guideline. Whatever we do, there will always be moods, so we

should see through them by being in a state of awareness. In this way eventually there is no danger. There are no drawbacks. We are on the watch.

Let the various moods and emotions that come up simply be as they are. In this way we train really to be with ourselves. We train this very self to sit and really be there, to stand and really be there, to walk and really be there, until always, in whatever changing posture, we can be called fully aware. We are fully there through our peace. It's different from being on top of our experience through getting carried away with pleasures and having fun. Instead, being fully present with life comes from peace of heart. If there is peace, we are in a state where we can adjust to anything that comes up, so we can always be in the appropriate mode. That people attain to Right View and right understanding is because the sankharas are quiet. They don't have mental proliferations. Therefore they experience peace. With all the kinds of opinions that could come up, they won't start arguing.

When relating to the world and society, those who are intelligent, understanding and have a feeling of peacefulness will praise us. But should they praise us, we don't get happy because of it. We don't get infatuated with it. Ultimately, the praise of someone is just a product of the delusion of the one who expresses it. Just that much. We don't have feelings of like and dislike. Praise is just what it is. We don't feel that we need to foolishly run after it. We don't want to get on the track of being a slave. If we maintain peace, there is nothing that can do harm to us. Even if others should blame, criticize or condemn us, making us subject to suspicions out of enmity, we nevertheless have peace. We have peace towards the anittharammana, the mental states we don't wish to have, which don't go according to our likes. Even they

can't cause us harm and hurt us. Should someone criticize us, it's just that much. Eventually it all dissolves by itself. It flows away in its own specific way. This is where the Worldly Dhammas can't dominate us, since we have nothing but peace in our hearts.

When standing, when walking, when sitting, when sleeping and when getting up, this is it. If we deal with society, and with things in the world around us, we can relate in a way that is of benefit for all. We don't go astray and drift away. We behave like one who can let things be. We behave like Samanas or anagarikas, those who are not bound up. This is the way we train. Training ourselves like this is really peaceful. We make peace arise all the time. Whenever we are in society, we will always have smoothness and tranquility.

We might not have succeeded yet in our aim to experience the feeling of peace. If we don't yet succeed, we can at least try and practise to recall the state of peace. Practicing to write all the letters of the alphabet is similar: First of all, we need to follow the method given to us. The lines we draw sometimes turn out straight, and sometimes not. Sometimes the result is good, sometimes it's not good, but it's enough to make sense, it is usable. In our training and practice, even if we get lost in our moods from time to time, we notice it immediately. So what... If we get lost in our moods, we just "reset" to start anew. Be up to knowing your state of mind. Don't lose yourself. Only observe the emotions, observe the mind, observe and watch out for the sankharas. If we have the determination to observe ourselves in this way, we allow correct knowledge and vision to arise, according to the reality of existence.

Seeing it like this, I would say, gives us an understanding of the way to let things be Dhamma – it gives us a sense for the state where we *are* Dhamma. If we truly *are* Dhamma, external things, the realm of forms and conditions (*rupa-khanda-sankhara*), our living in society, and objects around us are no problem – they won't make us struggle. There is no confusion, no happiness, no suffering, no delight, no sorrow. There is nothing which can give rise to feelings of opposition or aversion. Everything flows naturally following the force this state of peace has. Everything dissolves through the power of peacefulness. Nothing really matters, there is nothing to gain. It's not essential, it's uninteresting. We don't find all those things that we were interested in when we were children attractive anymore. There is nothing about the world that can overwhelm us, there is nothing that can make us go wrong. Not to fail is really a good thing. This is indeed something we could rightly accept praise for – but there is no one to praise. It just praises itself, just like the name and the qualities of the Buddha that we recite together in the chant on the Nine Qualities of the Buddha. The praise is intrinsically there through itself.

People who have no problems, who don't have *dukkha* can be said to be free from having *kilesas*, but actually they live together with them, only that there's nothing to them. This has to do with one's delusion. The attention one gives to the *kilesas* comes from delusion. If one isn't deluded, one couldn't care less about the *kilesas*. *Kilesas* are just what they are. This doesn't mean that one doesn't have to relate to the world or society or use language in order to speak. One still has to relate to others. But one doesn't let dangers and drawbacks arise, since one's whole attitude isn't one that would allow anger to come up.

There is no anger, just like water that doesn't have any dirty particles in it. The water is free from dirty particles until we agitate it by mixing something in to make it muddy. Even though we may be challenged or provoked, we don't feel stirred up, since the water of our heart is clear. There aren't any particles of dirt inside us which could be agitated. We keep the goodness of our heart. Praise can't provoke it, criticism can't. There is always the feeling of purity in it. That this purity exists, we can only know individually by ourselves.

We sometimes wonder and ask ourselves where this purity actually comes from. Well, purity comes from impurity. This is exactly where it comes from, just like peacefulness comes from agitation and happiness comes from suffering. If there is suffering, then there must also be happiness. Darkness can only come to be because there is brightness. Brightness can arise because of darkness. This is the way we see it.

Seeing things in this way, we live our lives with knowledge and awareness, with a feeling of being ready and prepared, possessing perfection in a pure way, free from provocation.

Unluckily for most of us, what can easily arise is the feeling that we are still at a stage where we haven't yet established these new qualities. Well, if they aren't habitually there yet, we can make them become habitual. It's not that this is something difficult, it's not much of a problem to get a foundation in order to get started.

For example in relating to social problems around us, we build up an attitude that is ready to tolerate, or at least we

maintain an attitude of relinquishment (*caga*) and generosity (*dana*). Maintaining generosity, giving and tolerance supports our mindfulness, since whenever discontent arises, we think: “Well, living together has just got to be this way!” You can compare it to my tongue here. It’s normal that it sometimes gets hit by the teeth. We just admit that being together sometimes doesn’t go hand in hand.

Of course there are always conflicts in life. But we know how to forgive, we know how to give up, we know how to open up and invite constructive criticism from others. When we live together in a community, we have to find ways of expressing ourselves to others, so that our living together leads to peacefulness and goes into the direction of harmony. We call this *pavarana*³⁹. Pavarana means to give those with whom we live together the chance to criticize us, granting them the freedom of speech, as we say in modern terms. This cultivates the ability to open oneself up. It also involves the ability to listen in an open way, to accept the opinions and feelings of other people. Whether their views are right or wrong, we can always see them as something to learn from. If we can contribute this openness of pavarana to our living together, we won’t have anything that stimulates self-importance or holding on tightly to ourselves. When we have these qualities it is possible to go one’s own way and nevertheless create a community feeling of living together in peace and happiness.

When we live in society and with the objects in the world around us, of course there is unevenness. There is unevenness, but

³⁹ *pavarana* (Pali): literally means “invitation”, i.e. the invitation to admonishment by other bhikkhus in this case.

we can still live together in harmony. Because of this unevenness we have to live with the attitude of not taking anything for sure. We have to live in accordance with the underlying principles of reality. We live in uncertainty but we create a feeling of certainty. There is change (aniccam), but in this there is stability (niccam). There is suffering, but there is non-suffering in there as well. We have a feeling of not-self (anatta), but right in there we have a feeling of self (atta). The deathless (amata), the Dhamma that doesn't die, lies right here as well. When we start to look at impermanence (aniccam) and view it through an experience of maturity and perfection, we will see permanence (niccam) coming up as a reality. This is similar to contemplating our mental proliferations, the sankharas. If we see things from the perspective of maturity and perfection, the *visankharas*⁴⁰ are actually right where the sankharas are. It is like death and the deathless being both in the same place.

This is the way we contemplate things. Seeing things from this perspective, the feeling of peacefulness will arise. There will be stillness. Total peace in all aspects – peace from all sensual pleasures, peace from wanting, peace from all mind states, peace from praise, peace from blame, peace from happiness and suffering.

⁴⁰ *visankhara* (Pali): the unconditioned, the unconstructed, where there are no proliferations.

*We sometimes wonder where
purity actually comes from. Purity
comes from impurity, just like
peacefulness comes from agitation
and happiness comes from
suffering. Brightness can arise
because of darkness.*



So, if we experience both sukha and dukkha in our practice, this is not a problem. We just need to try and not be negligent. There will always be a bit of sukha here and a bit of dukkha there. This is what I experienced. Thinking about myself, when I was new to the principles of the life in the yellow robes, I didn't know anything. I didn't come with the expectation to take on this lifestyle for all my life, either. I thought I would ordain merely to follow the tradition (of young men in Thailand to ordain temporarily at least once in their life). I came to have a look, because people say that it's good to try becoming a monk. But even after I had tested the monk's life and decided to stay, I kept drifting back towards my old ways of living in many situations. Actually I was still a layperson, although now I was part of the class of monastics. Living under the shade of the yellow robe, I had become an object of reverence for ordinary people, but I still had the thoughts of a layperson, and everything kept being influenced by this. I still had dirty thoughts – but at least it was only thoughts.

There are these thoughts and feelings, and one can't just go, stop and erase them all at once. It takes four or five years until one acquires new habits. Until then, one needs to live with dust in one's eyes, always craving under the power of sensual desires. The eyes seeing a form is sensual desire, the ear hearing a sound, the nose smelling an odour, the tongue tasting a flavour – all these are sensual desires. It feels like one is clouded by the impingements of sensuality, and there is nothing that could clear or lighten the situation up. But, I thought, one has to try anyway. When others bowed to me or paid respects, I didn't pretend that there was anything especially good about me. Rather, I felt I lack the merit to be able to pay people back for all their goodness towards me. With such thoughts spinning around in my head, I

actually felt quite depressed. There was nothing I had as a reward to return people's kindness. How people treated me was kind in every way. I kept worrying, is there any good in me? Why is it that I have all these bad and coarse thoughts?

Now, I think, this is absolutely normal. I would say that it is normal to be in a weak and uncondusive state. But one needs to find skilful means in order to help oneself out of this situation. One needs to take the practices the Buddha recommended and apply them.

Sometimes, I would take up death as a reflection and use mental images of corpses for practice. Or I would go to very lonesome places which were secluded, silent and still, where there was no one around to be a friend. Then the thought of death would come up, since there were dangerous animals around. Thinking that something might harm us takes away the desire to sleep, because we always need to watch out for dangers. To be frightened is very good, all you can do is sit and observe it. Observe how the body heats up and breaks out in sweat. These are experiences of the sankharas arising and building up the illusion of a certain feeling. We face them using patient endurance. We don't need to give way to them. Actually, they aren't much of an enemy for us. Sankharas delude us because we are in an unfamiliar situation which we aren't used to. Experiences like this are simply symptoms of the unknown, so we need to try to understand them over and over again. For understanding a phenomenon it doesn't make sense to wish it away. If these experiences go, they go. If they come, they come. We see these experiences as particular states of our existence that have to be just the way they are. All living beings have to face death and fear

death. There is no way around these experiences. We accept them as something natural for beings living in this world.

What I tried more than anything else is to handle those feelings that arise as obstacles in our practice, when we need to relate to society and the world around us, with all kinds of desires and defilements stimulated by sense contact. As much as we see it as normal, that with all our weak spots we are prone to experiencing these impingements as obstacles. Still there is nothing as difficult to handle as our interest and desire for the opposite sex. Don't think that I didn't have this problem. Of course I did, with all its implications. But I tried to look at it, asking, "Hmm..., what's the reason for my desire?" We can see sexuality as a biological fact for all living beings. Although it is a natural instinct, this doesn't prevent us from having to look for means to deal with it. Could we make our feelings in this area change? We might think, "No, that's completely beyond our capabilities." But that still doesn't mean that we shouldn't be careful with it and train to deal with these feelings of desire.

Sometimes when we suddenly get into contact with desire, we are completely taken by surprise that strong feelings such as these are possible. In a situation like this we are taken back by worldly feelings dominating us. We need to take hold of these feelings and relate to them in a new way. We can change our perception by turning it towards reflections about the unbeautiful, non-self-sufficient, non-durable nature of things, or the very fact that there is not a personality or a self in them at all. You can bring the images of dead bodies to mind in order to counter the perception of the body as attractive and beautiful. Reflect on these images, but don't expect sexual desire to vanish completely. But at least it might change to the point where you can breathe again.

Just like when you come up and take a deep breath after having dived under water for quite some time. When you can breathe, your strength comes back to you again.

So reflections on death can reduce sexual desire and the delight in romantic objects, but it won't make desire disappear completely since the seeds for it are still in us. This practice is strengthening, so don't give up. Don't forget to build up a solid foundation and try to sustain awareness and focus of mind as a steady basis. We focus our awareness continually. Sometimes we may feel ashamed, but there are also times when we feel pleased. So we just take the experience of feeling ashamed as an object of our awareness.

Eventually we will be able to sustain our minds in being aware steadily. Equipped with *sati* and *sampajañña*, we focus on the body and its conditioned nature. We can bring up the image of our own corpse in our mind and focus on it. Staying in the experience of the present moment, the *paccuppanna-dhamma* (the reality of the present moment) will grow in our mind. The mind won't go astray into the past and future. It won't pay attention to things that are already gone or yet to come. It won't worry whether a situation is going to be like this or like that. All that is left is the present moment. Our mind is like a flame when the wind is stilled. The flame is unmoved and upright in itself and blazes light into all directions, when we are fully present.

It doesn't matter whether we have our eyes closed or open, or what is our particular posture – we always have the feeling that we are refuge unto ourselves. Still, an experience like this may not always be good – it still has its negative sides. (In my case,) I took it as an experience that comes entirely by itself. I hadn't tried

to force it to arise. It all came by itself. The experience that arose was similar to what is called *obhasa*, a bright light or clear radiance, which is considered to be one of the *vipassanupakilesas*⁴¹. What arose was a bright radiance and happiness in myself. But it wasn't the case at all, that I got deluded or carried away with it. This happiness was simply there by itself, even when resting or sleeping. What it is, and when it comes, one doesn't know. There is simply the experience of it, an experience of uninterrupted wakefulness that sustains itself all through the day and night. Even when the body sleeps, it rests in this happiness. All this comes by itself.

An experience of bliss like this can last for a period of one or two days, and then it may change again. There is nothing unusual about this. Things simply change. The happiness in this experience isn't the usual happiness based on liking and disliking. It is the rapture and gladness that the Buddha calls *piti*, an ongoing joy throughout the day and night, whether sleeping or awake. There is nothing to compare with this happiness. If we have such an experience of *piti*, we need to establish the awareness in ourselves that, having arisen, an experience like this will also be subject to change, and we need to uphold mindfulness and stay with this awareness of change.

Over long periods of time, our experience will indeed change, maybe even to extreme, incomparable, heavy suffering. But we should sustain our mindfulness, saying, "Oh, this suffering is really suffering." Thus we remain mindful of it. We see and watch, knowing that having arisen the suffering must also cease.

⁴¹ *Vipassanupakilesa* (Pali): ten defilements or corruptions that hinder true insight, such as abundant feelings of energy, bliss etc.

Seeing suffering in this way is actually quite fun. We see it, “Suffering all day, suffering all night: Oooh...!” We want to cry, but there is no point in crying. We want to laugh, but there is no point in laughing. There is only suffering in its genuine form, taking its turn as a normal experience. And we observe it, knowing that having arisen, it will also have to cease again.

This is what we can feel when we really observe ourselves. After a while things will change again. Sometimes, after one or two days, our experience will go towards happiness again – happiness in the morning, happiness in the evening, walking, sitting, standing we experience happiness. We feel that our task is only to watch and follow this experience by knowing and seeing, keeping up mindfulness over long periods of time. Then, when we sense that we have been doing our task in practising this way long enough, we sit down in meditation. We sit and develop samadhi. We sit with mindfulness well established. All by ourselves we keep sitting. And then, another change may take place: We experience peace, coolness and tranquility. We aren’t concerned with our body, we experience a feeling of lightness of the body as if there was not a “me”, not a “self”. There is complete lightness. This is a refreshing and cooling experience. One feels peaceful and secluded. The sankharas are stilled, all the proliferations have ceased. The continuous changes of ups and downs and liking and disliking have disappeared.

This is not something that we have created by ourselves, it is where the practice takes us if we follow the natural course of our training. If you are determined to practise in a similar way, be aware that experiences like these can only arise specifically in the course of one’s individual practice.

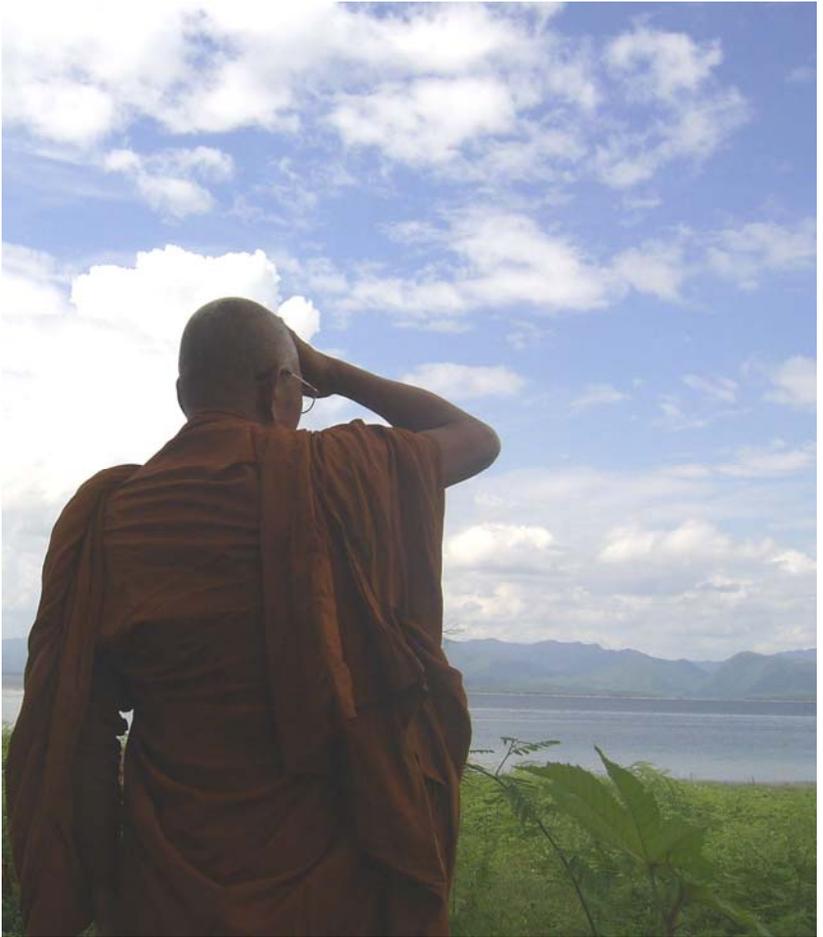
If you want to follow this path, don't follow it in a worldly way. This won't be much good. Just like the Buddha warned his five first disciples not to take the path of worldly, unenlightened people, who follow merely their own moods. Don't follow your moods. Be ahead of your moods. If something satisfies you, see it just as a state of mind. If something frustrates you, see it just as a state of mind. If you are pleased with something, it is simply one of the ways that pleasure manifests. Don't give way to relating to these experiences in a deluded way.

We need to walk following the footsteps of the Buddha in terms of knowing, knowing ourselves and knowing for ourselves, just as expressed in this little Thai saying:

*Know how to
Look and figure it out
Try and speak it out
Go and carry it out*

So, today, as you have come to show your respect to me, I'd like to say that I don't take these ceremonies as too important for me as a person, but still they are a nice expression of our relationship towards each other when we are living together. As for now, I don't have any more points of reflection for our journey together. May this be useful to your understanding in some way or another. Your listening is a chance for us to get in touch with each other – may we also work on our practice in the same way.

*Look and figure it out
Try and speak it out
Go and carry it out*



Glossary *

agati-dhamma (*Pali*): biased views, ways of understanding and behaviour, wrong courses of perception. Arises out of desire, anger, fear and ignorance.

Ajahn Buddhadasa: A highly respected Thai monk who lived from 2449-2536 (1906-1993), and founded Suan Mokh monastery in Chaya province, Southern Thailand. Known throughout the world for his all-encompassing, contemporary, and highly accessible teachings.

akaraniyakicca (*Pali*): The four things never to be done by a Bhikkhu (sexual intercourse, stealing, killing and falsely claiming superhuman qualities).

anagarika (*Pali*): A homeless one; one who enters the holy life without formally entering the *Sangha*.

anusasana (*Pali*): Advice given to new *Bhikkus* as part of the ordination ceremony. Comprises the four *akaraniyakicca* and the four *nissaya*.

anatta (*Pali*): Non-self, not-self. One of the *Three Characteristics*

anicca (*Pali*): Impermanence.

arahant (*Pali*): One who has attained *nibbana*.

ariya (*Pali*): Literally: noble.

ariyapuggala (*Pali*): Literally: noble person; Noble Enlightened Being. A person who has reached one of the four stages of enlightenment.

ariya-sangha (*Pali*): *Sangha* in the highest sense: the group of Noble Enlightened Beings (*ariyapuggalas*).

ariyavamsa (*Pali*): Literally: the noble lineage – the lineage of enlightened beings; specifically defined by the Buddha as those who possess the qualities of contentment and fewness of wishes.

Bhikkhu (*Pali*): Literally: beggar; or one who sees the danger in *samsara*. Buddhist monk.

* For the sake of simplicity, in this edition all Pali-words are given in ordinary English spelling, omitting special diacritical signs.

bhojane mattaññuta (*Pali*): Knowing the right amount in eating, or in consumption of other requisites.

dana (*Pali*): The quality of generosity, and the act of giving.

deva (*Pali*): Heavenly beings, angels, gods.

Dhamma (*Pali*): (Sanskrit: Dharma) The ultimate truth of reality; the teachings about this truth; and the practice leading to its realization. Specifically refers to the Buddha's teaching or doctrine.

Dhamma-Vinaya (*Pali*): The name the Buddha gave to his own dispensation.

dukkha (*Pali*): Suffering, unsatisfactoriness or stress. The central term in the *Four Noble Truths*.

dukkha vedana (*Pali*): Unpleasant or painful feeling.

Four Noble Truths (*Pali*): The first and central teaching of the Buddha about *dukkha*, its origin, cessation and the path leading towards its cessation. Complete understanding of the Four Noble Truths is equivalent to the attainment of *nibbana*.

Going Forth: see *pabbaja*.

khandha (*Pali*): The five aggregates, or basic constituents of life: *rupa* (form), *vedana* (feeling), *sañña* (perception or memory), *sankhara* (volitional formations), *viññana* (sense-consciousness).

kilesa (*Pali*): Defilements, stains, afflictions or obscurations of the heart. Their various forms are traditionally summed up as greed, aversion and delusion.

hiri (*Pali*): Sense of shame towards doing wrong; see *ottappa*.

Holy Life (*Pali: brahmacariya*): Literally: the Brahma-conduct; a term for the monastic life that stresses the vow of celibacy.

Jataka (*Pali*): A collection of stories about the Buddha's past lives, that forms a part of the Buddhist canonical scriptures.

lokadhamma (*Pali*): The eight Worldly Dhammas: praise and blame, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, happiness and unhappiness. These can be divided into agreeable and disagreeable phenomena (*ittharammana* and *anittharamana dhamma*).

Luang Por (*Thai*): Literally venerable father; a respectful way of addressing senior and elderly monks.

Luang Pu (*Thai*): Literally venerable grandfather; a respectful way of addressing senior monks that are very old.

magga-phala-nibbana (*Pali*): The path, fruition and full attainment of *nibbana*.

metta (*Pali*): Loving-kindness, goodwill, friendliness.

namadhamma (*Pali*): Mental phenomena as opposed to *rupadhamma*, the phenomena of the physical world.

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

nissaya (*Pali*): The four dependences on which a *Bhikkhu*'s life is founded (almsfood, robes made from cloth used to wrap corpses, dwelling at the foot of a tree, and fermented urine as medicine).

nivarana (*Pali*): The five hindrances in meditation: sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and agitation, doubt and uncertainty.

ottappa (*Pali*): Wholesome fear of wrong-doing; see *hiri*.

pabbajita (*Pali*): Literally: One Gone Forth; a *Samana*; a contemplative; see *pabbaja*.

pabbaja (*Pali*): Ordination as a novice (*Pali*: *Samanera*). Going Forth from the household-life to the life of a *Samana*, a contemplative.

pañña (*Pali*): Wisdom; discernment.

pariyatti-dhamma (*Pali*): The study of the scriptures.

Patimokkha (*Pali*): The 227 major rules of the *Vinaya*, recited fortnightly by the *Bhikkhus*.

Patimokkhasamvara (*Pali*): The practice of restraining one's actions within the 227 rules of the *Patimokkha*.

patipatti-dhamma (*Pali*): Practicing according to the scriptures.

Right View (*Pali*: *samma ditthi*): The first of the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, the path leading to *nibbana*. In the highest sense to have Right View means to understand the *Four Noble Truths*.

rupa (*Pali*): form.

rupadhamma (*Pali*): the physical world, as opposed to *namadhamma*.

saccadhamma (*Pali*): The truth of reality.

saddha (*Pali*): Confidence, faith or trust.

Sangha (*Pali*): The monastic community.

sankhara (*Pali*): Conditioned phenomena of the mind; proliferations of the mind; (occasionally) all conditioned phenomena.

samadhi (*Pali*): Concentration. The development of sustained, blissful, unified, one-pointed awareness on a meditation object, leading to tranquility.

samaggi (*Pali*): Harmony, unity.

Samana (*Pali*): Peaceful one, contemplative, renunciant, ascetic, recluse.

Samanera (*Pali*): Novice.

sampajañña (*Pali*): All-around awareness and clear comprehension. The Thai usage as “roo dtua” also means consciousness.

samsara (*Pali*): The round of birth and death.

sati (*Pali*): Mindfulness and recollection.

sati-pañña (*Pali*): Mindfulness and wisdom.

sila (*Pali*): Moral conduct, ethical behaviour.

sukha vedana (*Pali*): Pleasant feeling.

tanha (*Pali*): Craving or desire, sometimes translated as wanting.

Three Characteristics: *anicca, dukkha, anatta*.

upadana (*Pali*): The tendency to hold on to things, such as thoughts that something is one’s own or belongs to one.

upajjhaya (*Pali*): Ordination preceptor.

upasampada (*Pali*): Ordination as a *Bhikkhu*.

upekkha (*Pali*): Equanimity.

vassa (*Pali*): The three lunar months of the rainy season. The *Bhikkhus* observe an annual “retreat” for this period, passing every dawn within the same monastery or residence.

vedana (*Pali*): Feeling. Either *sukha-*, *dukkha-*, or *upekkha-vedana*

Vinaya (*Pali*): Training and discipline undertaken by the Buddhist practitioner; or, the *Bhikkhus*’ discipline with its 227 major rules.

viññana (*Pali*): Sense consciousness.

Worldly Dhammas: see *lokadhamma*.



About Luang Por Liem

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

Already for the second time Luang Por Liem was given an honorary monastic title by His Majesty the King of Thailand. He is presently known as Tan Chao Khun Pra Rachabhavanavigrom. For the Sangha at Wat Pah Nanachat (Luang Pu Chah's International Forest Monastery for training monks using English as the language of instruction). Luang Por Liem is not only a dearly respected teacher and guide in the monastic life, but has for the last ten years also conducted every monastic ordination ceremony as the preceptor.