

# The Autobiography of Phra Ajaan Lee

Phra Suddhidhammaransi

Gambhirmedhacariya

(Dhammadharo, Lee)

by

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(Phra Suddhidhammaransi  
Gambhirmedhacariya)

Translated from the Thai by  
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## Foreword 📖

Phra Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo was one of the foremost teachers in the Thai forest ascetic tradition of meditation founded at the turn of the century by Phra

Ajaan Sao Kantasilo and Phra Ajaan Mun Bhuridatto. His life was short but eventful. Known for his skill as a teacher and his mastery of supranatural powers, he was the first to bring the ascetic tradition out of the forests of the Mekhong basin and into the mainstream of Thai society in central Thailand.

The year before his death, he was hospitalized for two months with a heart ailment, and so took the opportunity to dictate his autobiography. He chose to aim the story at his followers — people who were already acquainted with him but didn't know him well enough — and he selected his material with a double purpose in mind, choosing incidents that made both for good stories and for good lessons. Some of the lessons are aimed at monks, others at meditators in general, but they deal primarily with issues he had not been able to include in his written guides to meditation.

As a result, the book contains very little on the substantive events in his own meditation. If you have come to this book in hopes of gauging the level of Ajaan Lee's meditative attainments, you have come to the wrong place, for on this topic his lips are sealed. Most of what he wanted to say on the subject he had already included in his other books. As for his own personal attainments, he never mentioned them even to his closest students.

What he talks about here are the events that surrounded his life as a meditator, and how he dealt with them: the challenges, the strange characters and the unusual incidents he encountered both in the forests and in the centers of human society. He presents the life of meditation as one of adventure — where truth is a quality of the heart, rather than of ideas, and the development of the mind is a matter of life and death — and it is in this that a large part of the book's educational and entertainment value lies.

Ajaan Lee's method of drawing lessons from his experiences is typical of Thai meditation teachers — i.e., he rarely draws any explicit lessons at all. One notable exception is the fine passage towards the end where he discusses the benefits of living a wanderer's life in the forest, but otherwise he leaves it up to his readers to draw their own lessons from the incidents he relates. Rather than handing you lessons on a platter, he wants you to be earnest enough in your desire to learn that you will search for and find useful lessons no matter where you look. When you get used to being taught this way, the payoff is that you find you can learn from everything, for as Ajaan Lee says himself, there are lessons to be learned from animals, trees, and even vines.

Some readers will be taken aback by the amount of space Ajaan Lee gives to signs, portents and other supranatural events. Things of this sort tend to be downplayed in the laundered versions of Theravada Buddhism usually presented in the West — in which the Buddha often comes off as a Bertrand Russell or Fritz Perls in robes — and admittedly they are not the essence of what the Buddha had to teach. Still, they are an area that many people encounter when they explore the mind and where they often go astray for lack of reliable guidance. Ajaan Lee had a great deal of experience in this area, and has many useful lessons to teach. He shows by example which sorts of experiences to treat simply as curiosities, which to take seriously, and how to test the experiences that seem to have important messages.

In my many conversations with his students, I have learned that Ajaan Lee limited his narrative to only the milder events of this sort, and often deals so much in understatement that it is possible to read through some of the incidents and not realize that anything out of the ordinary is going on at all. When the book was first printed after his death, many of his followers were disappointed in it for just this reason, and a number of them got together to write an expanded version of Ajaan Lee's life that included many of the more amazing events they had experienced in his presence. Fortunately — from Ajaan Lee's perspective at least — this manuscript has since disappeared.

To be frank, one of the things that first drew me to Ajaan Lee, aside from the clarity and subtlety of his teachings, were the tales I had heard of his powers and personality. My teacher, Ajaan Fuang Jotiko, was a close disciple of his, and much of my early education as a monk consisted of listening to his stories of his adventures with Ajaan Lee. For me, if the *Autobiography* had lacked the drama of the event in Wat Supat, or the panache of his encounter with Mae Fyyn (having her light him a cigarette as one of her first acts after he had cured her paralysis), it wouldn't have been Ajaan Lee.

However, I should say something here about the miracles surrounding the relics that play a large role in the latter part of the book. There is an old tradition in Buddhism that many of the bodily relics of the Buddha and his arahant disciples transformed into small pellet-like objects that come and go of their own accord. The Theravadin version of this tradition dates back at least to medieval Sri Lanka, and may go much further back than that. There are old books that classify the various types of relics by shape and color, identifying which ones come from which parts of the Buddha's body and which ones from which disciple. The tradition is still very much alive in Thailand, especially now that the bones of many of the dead masters of the forest ascetic tradition have turned into relics.

As for relics of the Buddha, I have talked to many people who have seen them come and go, and I have had such experiences myself, although nothing as dramatic as Ajaan Lee's.

I mention all this not to make a case for the existence and provenance of the relics, but simply to point out that Ajaan Lee was not alone in having such experiences, and that the rational approach of Theravada Buddhism has its uncanny side as well.

At any rate, my feeling is that Ajaan Lee mentioned the issue of the relics for two reasons:

**1)** He was compelled to because it was a part of the controversy that surrounded his name during his lifetime, and his students would have felt that something was amiss if he didn't provide some explanation of the topic. The incident he mentions at Wat Supat was not the only time that relics appeared while he was teaching meditation to groups of people, and in fact he once mentioned to Ajaan Fuang that the frequency with which this happened often irked him: Just as his students would be settling their minds in concentration, these things would appear and that would be the end of the meditation session.

**2)** As Ajaan Lee mentions in the book, he believed he had a karmic debt requiring that he build a chedi to enshrine relics of the Buddha, and he needed to convince his supporters of the importance of the project.

So keep these points in mind as you read the relevant passages, and be open to the possibility that throughout the book there are issues between Ajaan Lee and his audience flowing under the surface of the narrative that you can only guess at.

Also bear in mind that the book was left unfinished. Ajaan Lee had planned to tack on a series of addenda dealing with events scattered in time and place throughout the body of the narrative, showing their connections and providing more details, but he left only the sketch of the first addendum, a piece explaining why he chose to name his monastery Wat Asokaram. The sketch is so purposefully disjointed and cryptic, though, that I have chosen to leave it out of this edition.

You will find, as you read through the book, occasional details of Thai culture and the rules of the Buddhist monkhood that might be unfamiliar to you. I have tried to anticipate these points, marking them with asterisks in the text and explaining them in the footnotes at the back of the book, but forgive me if I have missed

anything you find puzzling. The footnotes are followed by a glossary of Pali and Thai terms I had to carry over into the translation, and you might find it useful to read through Part I of the glossary — to get some sense of what is conveyed by a person's name in Thai society — before jumping into the book itself.

Ajaan Lee as a speaker was always very conscious of his audience, and I suspect that his autobiography would have been a very different book if he had written it with a Western audience in mind. My translating the book as it stands has been an act of trust: trust that the value of Ajaan Lee's message is universal, and trust that there are readers willing to take the empathetic journey into another culture and mind set, to see how the possibilities of the human condition look when viewed from another side of the globe, and to bring some of that new perspective back with them on their return.

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## The Autobiography of Phra Ajaan Lee 🇹🇭

I was born at nine in the evening on Thursday, the 31st of January, 1907 — the second day of the waning moon, the second lunar month, the year of the Horse — in Baan Nawng Sawng Hawng (DoubleMarsh Village), Yaang Yo Phaab township, Muang Saam Sib district, Ubon Ratchathani province. This was a village of about 80 houses, divided into three clusters: the Little Village, the Inner Village and the Outer Village. In the Outer Village was a temple; that was the village in which I was born. Between the villages were three ponds, and surrounding the villages on all sides were scores of giant rubber trees. To the north were the ruins of an ancient town with two abandoned Buddhist sanctuaries. The spirits there were said to be so fierce that they sometimes possessed people, causing them to go live in the spirit shrines. From the looks of the ruins, I'd say they were built by the Khmers.

My original name was Chaalee. My parents were Pao and Phuay Nariwong; my grandparents on my father's side were named Janthaari and Sida; and on my mother's side, Nantasen and Dee. I had five brothers and four sisters. About nine days after I was born, I became such a nuisance — crying all the time — that my

father left home for a good while. Three days after my mother left the fire,<sup>1</sup> I developed a swelling on my head, and couldn't eat or sleep for several days running. I was an extremely difficult child to raise. Nothing my mother or father could do ever seemed to satisfy me.

My mother died when I was eleven, leaving my father, myself and a little sister whom I had to care for. My other brothers and sisters by that time had all grown up and gone off to find work, so there were just the three of us at home. Both my sister and I had to help my father in the rice fields.

When I was twelve I started school. I learned enough to read and write, but failed the elementary exams, which didn't bother me in the least, but I kept on studying anyway. At 17, I left school, my main aim in life being to earn money.

During this period my father and I seemed always to be at odds with each other. He wanted me to start trading in things that seemed wrong to me, like pigs and cattle. Sometimes, when it came time to make merit at the temple, he'd stand in my way and send me out to work in the fields instead. There were days I'd get so upset that I'd end up sitting out alone in the middle of the fields, crying. There was one thought in my mind: I swore to myself that I wasn't going to stay on in this village — so I would only have to put up with things just a little bit longer.

After a while my father remarried, to a woman named Mae Thip. Life at home became a little more bearable after that.

When I was 18 I set out to find my elder brother, who had found work in Nong Saeng, Saraburi province. News had reached home that he had a salaried job with the Irrigation Department, which was in the process of building a watergate. So in October of that year I moved in with my brother. Before long, though, we had a falling out, because I happened to mention one day that he ought to make a visit back home. He was dead set against going, so I left on my own, heading south, looking for work. At the time, I felt that money ranked in importance next to life itself. Although physically I had now come of age, I still thought of myself as a child. When friends would ask me to join them in going out to look for women, I wouldn't be the least bit interested, because I felt that marriage was for grownups, not for kids like us.

From what I had seen of life, I had made two resolutions that I kept to myself:

- 1)** I won't marry until I'm at least 30.
- 2)** I won't marry unless I have at least 500 baht to my name.

I was determined that I'd have both the money and the ability to support at least three other people before I'd be willing to get involved with a woman.

But there was yet another reason for my aversion to the idea of marriage: During my childhood, at the age when I was just beginning to know what was what, if I saw a woman pregnant to the point where she was close to giving birth, it would fill me with feelings of fear and disgust. This was because the custom in those parts when a woman was going to give birth was to take a rope and tie one end to a rafter. The woman, kneeling down, would hang on to the other end of the rope and give birth. Some women would scream and moan, their faces and bodies all twisted in pain. Whenever I happened to see this, I'd have to run away with my hands over my ears and eyes, and I wouldn't be able to sleep, out of both fear and disgust. This made a deep impression on me that lasted for a long time.

When I was around 19 or 20, I began to have some notion of good and evil, but it wasn't in me to do evil. Up to that point I had never killed a large animal, except one — a dog. And I can remember how it happened. One day when I was eating, I took an egg and put it in the ashes of the fire. The dog came along, found the egg and ate it — so I jumped up, grabbed a club and beat it to death on the spot. Immediately, I was sorry for what I had done. "How on earth can I make up for this sin?" I thought. So I found an old book with a chant for sharing merit that I memorized. I then went and worshipped the Buddha, dedicating the merit to the dead dog. This made me feel better, but my whole train of thought at that time was that I wanted to be ordained.

In 1925, when I was 20, my stepmother died. At the time, I was living with relatives in Bang Len district, Nakhorn Pathom province, so towards the end of February I returned home to my father and asked him to sponsor my ordination. I arrived with about 160 baht in my pockets. Soon after my arrival my elder brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law, etc., flocked around to see me — and to borrow money: to buy water buffaloes, to buy land, to use in trading. I gave them all they asked for, since I was planning to be ordained. So in the end, out of my original 160 baht, I was left with 40.

When ordination season arrived, my father made all the necessary arrangements. I was ordained on the full moon day of the sixth lunar month — Visakha Puja. Altogether, there were nine of us ordained that day. Of this number, some have since died, some have disrobed, leaving only two of us still in the monkhood — myself and a friend.

After my ordination I memorized chants and studied the Dhamma and monastic discipline. Comparing what I was studying with the life I and the monks around me were leading made me feel ill at ease, because instead of observing the duties of the contemplative life, we were out to have a good time: playing chess, wrestling, playing match games with girls whenever there was a wake, raising birds, holding cock fights, sometimes even eating food in the evenings.<sup>2</sup> Speaking of food in the evenings, even I, living in this sort of society, joined in — as far as I can remember — three times:

**1)** One day I felt hungry, so in the middle of the night I got hold of the rice placed as an offering on the altar and ate it.

**2)** Another time I was invited to help deliver the Mahachaad sermon<sup>3</sup> at Wat Noan Daeng in Phai Yai (BigBamboo) township. It so happened that my turn to read the sermon came at 11 a.m. By the time I had finished, it was after noon, so it was too late to eat. On the way home I was accompanied by a temple boy carrying some rice and grilled fish in his shoulder bag. A little after 1 p.m., feeling really tired and hungry, I told the boy to show me what was in his bag. Seeing the food, I couldn't resist sitting right down and finishing it off under the shade of a tree. I then returned home to the temple.

**3)** One day I went into the forest to help drag wood back to the temple for building a meeting hall. That night I felt hungry, so I had a meal.

I wasn't the only person doing this sort of thing. My friends were doing it all the time, but were always careful to cover it up.

During this period the thing I hated most was to be invited to chant at a funeral. When I was younger I would never eat in a house where a person had just died. Even if someone living in the same house with me went to help with a funeral, I'd keep an eye out, after he returned, to see from which basket he'd eat rice and from which dipper he'd drink water. I wouldn't say anything, but I'd be careful not to eat from that basket or drink from that dipper. Even after I was ordained, this habit stayed with me. I was 19 before I ever set foot in a cemetery. Even when relatives died — even when my own mother died — I'd refuse to go to the cremation.

One day, after having been ordained a fair while, I heard people crying and moaning in the village: Someone had died. Before long I caught sight of a man carrying a bowl of flowers, incense and candles, coming to the temple to invite monks to chant at the dead person's place. As soon as he entered the abbot's



quarters, I ran off in the opposite direction, followed by some of the newly ordained monks. When we reached the mango grove, we split up and climbed the trees — and there we sat, perched one to a tree, absolutely still. It wasn't long before the abbot went looking for us, but he couldn't find us. I could hear him losing his temper in his quarters. There was one thing I was afraid of, though: the slingshot he kept to chase bats from the trees. In the end, he had a novice come look for us, and when the novice found us, we all had to come down.

This is the way things went for two years. Whenever I looked into the books on monastic discipline, I'd start feeling really uneasy. I told myself, "If you don't want to leave the monkhood, you're going to have to leave this temple." At the beginning of my second rains retreat, I made a vow: "At present I still sincerely want to practice the Buddha's teachings. Within the next three months, may I meet a teacher who practices them truly and rightly."

In the beginning of November I went to help preach the Mahachaad sermon at Wat Baan Noan Rang Yai in Yaang Yo Phaab township. When I arrived, a meditation monk happened to be on the sermon seat. I was really taken by the way he spoke, so I asked some laypeople who he was and where he came from. They told me, "That's Ajaan Bot, a student of Ajaan Mun." He was staying about a kilometer from the village, in a forest of giant rubber trees, so at the end of the Mahachaad fair I went to see him. What I saw — his way of life, the manner in which he conducted himself — really pleased me. I asked him who his teachers were, and he answered, "Phra Ajaan Mun and Phra Ajaan Sao. At the moment, Ajaan Mun has come down from Sakon Nakhorn and is staying at Wat Burapha in the city of Ubon."

Learning this, I hurried home to my temple, thinking all the way, "This must be what I've been waiting for." A few days later I went to take leave of my father and preceptor. At first they did all they could to dissuade me from going, but as I told my father, I had already made up my mind. "I have to leave this village," I told him. "Whether I leave as a monk or a layman, I've still got to leave. My father and preceptor have no rights over me. The minute they start infringing on my rights is the minute I get up and go."

And in the end they let me go.

So at one in the afternoon, on a day in early December, I set out, carrying my necessary belongings, alone. My father accompanied me as far as the middle of a field. There, when we had said our goodbyes, we parted ways.

That day I walked, passing the town of Muang Saam Sib, all the way to Ubon. On my arrival, I was told that Ajaan Mun was staying at the village of Kut Laad, a little over ten kilometers outside the city. Again, I set out on foot to find him. It so happened that Phra Barikhut, a former District Official in Muang Saam Sib who had been dismissed from government service and was moving his family, drove past me in his truck. Seeing me walking alone on the side of the road, he stopped and offered me a ride all the way to the Ubon airport, the turnoff to Kut Laad. Even today I think of how kind he was to me, a total stranger.

At about five in the evening I reached the forest monastery at Kut Laad, where I learned that Ajaan Mun had just returned to Wat Burapha. So the next morning, after breakfast, I walked back to Ubon. There I paid my respects to Ajaan Mun and told him my purpose in seeking him out. The advice and assistance he gave me were just what I was looking for. He taught me a single word — *buddho* — to meditate on. It so happened that he was ill at the time, so he sent me to Baan Thaa Wang Hin (StonePalace Landing), a very quiet and secluded area where Phra Ajaan Singh and Phra MahaPin were staying along with about 40 other monks and novices. While there, I went to listen to their sermons every night, which gave rise to two feelings within me: When I thought of my past, I'd feel ill at ease; when I thought of the new things I was learning and experiencing, I'd feel at peace. These two feelings were always with me.

I became friends with two other monks with whom I stayed, ate, meditated and discussed my experiences: Ajaan Kongma and Ajaan Saam. I kept at my meditation all hours of the day and night. After a while I talked Ajaan Kongma into going off and wandering together. We went from village to village, staying in the ancestral shrines, until we reached my home village. I wanted to let my father know the good news: that I had met Ajaan Mun, that this was the life I was looking for, and that I had no intention of ever returning to live out my life there at home. I had once told myself, "You've been born a person: You'll have to work your way up to be better than other people. You've been ordained a monk: You'll have to try to be better than the monks you've known." Now it seemed that my hopes were being fulfilled. This is why I went home to tell my father: "I've come to say goodbye. I'm going for good. All my belongings I'm handing over to you. And I'm never going to lay claims on anything of yours." Although I hadn't made a firm decision never to disrobe, I *had* decided never to let myself be poor.

As soon as my aunt heard the news, she came to argue with me: "Don't you think you're going a little too far?" So I answered her, "Look, if I ever disrobe and come back to beg food from you, you have my permission to call me a dog."

Now that I had made a firm decision, I told my father, "Don't worry about me. Whether I stay a monk or disrobe, I'll always be satisfied with the treasures you've already given me: two eyes, two ears, a nose, a mouth, all the 32 parts of the body. It's an important inheritance. Nothing else you could give me could ever leave me satisfied."

After that, I said goodbye and set out for the city of Ubon. Reaching Wang Tham (CavePalace) Village, though, I found Ajaan Mun staying in the forest there, so I joined him, staying under his guidance for quite a few days.

This was when I decided to re-ordain, this time in the Dhammayutika sect (the sect to which Ajaan Mun belonged), in order to make a clean break with my past wrongdoings. When I consulted Ajaan Mun, he agreed to the idea, and so had me practice my part in the ordination ceremony. When I had it down pat, he set out — with me following — wandering from district to district.

I became extremely devoted to Ajaan Mun, because there were many things about him that had me amazed. For instance, there were times when I would have been thinking about something, without ever mentioning it to him, and yet he'd bring up the topic and seem to know exactly what my thoughts had been. Each time this happened, my respect and devotion towards him deepened. I practiced meditation constantly, free from many of the worries that had plagued me in the past.

After I had stayed under Ajaan Mun's guidance for four months, he set the date for my reordination at Wat Burapha in the city of Ubon, with Phra Pannabhisara Thera (Nuu) of Wat Sra Pathum (LotusPond Temple), Bangkok, as my preceptor; Phra Ajaan Pheng of Wat Tai, Ubon, as the Announcing Teacher; and Ajaan Mun himself as the Instructing Teacher, who gave me the preliminary ordination as a novice. I was reordained on May 27, 1927, and the following day began to observe strictly the ascetic practice of eating only one meal a day. After spending one night at Wat Burapha, I returned to the forest at StonePalace Landing.

When Ajaan Mun and Phra Pannabhisara Thera returned to Bangkok to spend the Rains Retreat at Wat Sra Pathum, they left me under the guidance of Ajaan Singh and Ajaan MahaPin. During this period I followed Ajaan Singh and Ajaan MahaPin on their wanderings through the countryside. They had been asked by Phraya Trang, the Prince of Ubon, to teach morality and meditation to the people of the rural areas. When the time came to enter the Rains Retreat, we stopped at OxHead Village Monastery in Yasothon district. It so happened that Somdet Phra Mahawirawong, the ecclesiastical head of the Northeast, called Ajaan MahaPin

back to the city of Ubon, so in the end only six of us spent the rainy season together in that township.

I was very ardent in my efforts to practice meditation that rainy season, but there were times I couldn't help feeling a little discouraged because all my teachers had left me. Occasionally I'd think of disrobing, but whenever I felt this way there'd always be something to bring me back to my senses.

One day, for instance, at about five in the evening, I was doing walking meditation, but my thoughts had strayed towards worldly matters. A woman happened to walk past the monastery, improvising a song — "I've seen the heart of the *tyd tyy* bird: Its mouth is singing, *tyd tyy, tyd tyy*, but its heart is out looking for crabs" — so I memorized her song and repeated it over and over, telling myself, "It's *you* she's singing about. Here you are, a monk, trying to develop some virtue inside yourself, and yet you let your heart go looking for worldly matters." I felt ashamed of myself. I decided that I'd have to bring my heart in line with the fact that I was a monk if I didn't want the woman's song to apply to me. The whole incident thus turned into Dhamma.

A number of other events also helped to keep me alert. One night when the moon was bright, I made an agreement with one of the other monks that we'd go without sleep and do sitting and walking meditation. (That rainy season there were six of us altogether, five monks and one novice. I had made a resolution that I'd have to do better than all the rest of them. For instance, if any of them were able to get by on only ten mouthfuls of food a day, I'd have to get by on eight. If any of them could sit in meditation for three hours straight, I'd have to sit for five. If any of them could do walking meditation for an hour, I'd have to walk for two. I felt this way about everything we did, and yet it seemed that I was able to live up to my resolution. This was a secret I kept to myself.)

At any rate, that night I told my friend, "Let's see who's better at doing sitting and walking meditation." So we agreed, "When I do walking meditation, you do sitting meditation; and when I do sitting meditation, you do walking meditation. Let's see who can last longer." When it came my turn to do walking meditation, my friend went to sit in a hut next to the path where I was walking. Not too long afterwards, I heard a loud thud coming from inside the hut, so I stopped to open the window and peek in. Sure enough, there he was, lying on his back with his folded legs sticking up in the air. He had been sitting in full lotus position, gotten sleepy, and had simply fallen backwards and gone to sleep. I was practically dropping off to sleep myself, but had kept going out of the simple desire to win.

I felt embarrassed for my friend's sake — "I'd hate to be in his place," I thought — but at the same time was pleased I had won.

All of these things served to teach me a lesson: "This is what happens to people who aren't true in what they do."

At the end of the rains, the group split up, each of us going off to wander alone, staying in cemeteries. During this period it seemed that my meditation was going very well. My mind could settle down to a very refined level, and one very strange thing that had never happened before was beginning to happen: When my mind was really good and quiet, knowledge would suddenly come to me. For example, even though I had never studied Pali, I could now translate most of the chants I had memorized: most of the *Buddhaguna*, for instance, the *Cula Paritta* and the *Abhidhamma Sankhepa*. It seemed that I was becoming fairly expert in the Dhamma. If there was anything I wanted to know, all I had to do was make my mind very still, and the knowledge would come to me without my having to think over the matter. When this happened, I went to consult Ajaan Kongma. He explained to me, "The Buddha never studied how to write books or give sermons from anyone else. He first practiced meditation and the knowledge arose within his heart. Only then did he teach the Dhamma that has been copied down in the scriptures. So the way you've come to know within yourself like this isn't wrong." Hearing this, I felt extremely pleased.

At the end of the rains, I thought of going to see my father again, because I felt that there was still a lot of unfinished business at home. Setting out on foot, I reached Baan Noan Daeng (RedHill Village), where I stayed at the ancestral spirit shrine. When the village people found me alone in the forest there, they sent word to my father. Early the next morning he came to see me, having set out from home in the middle of the night. He had prepared food for me, as best he knew how, but I couldn't eat it, not even to please him. I was sorry I couldn't, but I was now following the monastic discipline strictly — and it's a matter that should be followed strictly: the rule against eating flesh from an animal killed specifically for the sake of feeding a monk. Afterwards, whenever I thought about it, I'd start feeling so sorry for my father that tears would come to my eyes. When he saw that his son the monk wouldn't eat the food he had prepared, he took it off and ate it himself.

When he had finished, I followed him back to my home village, where this time I stayed first in the cemetery, and then later in another spot in the forest where the spirits were said to be very fierce. I stayed there for weeks, delivering sermons to people who came from many of the surrounding villages, and I did away with a lot

of their mistaken beliefs and practices: belief in sorcery, the worship of demons and spirits, and the use of various spells that Buddhism calls "bestial knowledge." I helped wipe out a good number of the fears my friends and relatives in the village had concerning the spirits in the ruins near the village and the spirits in the spot where I was staying. We exorcised them by reciting Buddhist chants and spreading thoughts of good will and loving kindness throughout the area. During the day, we'd burn the ritual objects used for worshipping spirits. Some days there'd be nothing but smoke the whole day long. I taught the people in the village to take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, to recite Buddhist chants and to meditate, instead of getting involved with spirits and demons.

There was another practice I had seen a lot of in the past that struck me as pointless, and so we figured out a way to wipe it out: the belief that the ancestral spirits in the village had to eat animal flesh every year. Once a year, when the season came around, each household would have to sacrifice a chicken, a duck or a pig. Altogether this meant that in one year hundreds of living creatures had to die for the sake of the spirits, because there would also be times when people would make sacrifices to cure an illness in the family. All of this struck me as a senseless waste. If the spirits really did exist, that's not the sort of food they would eat. It would be far better to make merit and dedicate it to the spirits. If they didn't accept that, then drive them away with the authority of the Dhamma.

So I ordered the people to burn all the ancestral shrines. When some of the villagers began to lose nerve for fear that there would be nothing to protect them in the future, I wrote down the chant for spreading good will, and gave a copy to everyone in the village, guaranteeing that nothing would happen. I've since learned that all of the area around the ancestral shrines is now planted with crops, and that the spot in the forest where the spirits were said to be fierce is now a new village.

As I stayed there for quite a while, teaching the people in the village, word began to spread. Some people became jealous and tried in various ways to drive me away. One day three of the leading monks in the area were invited to give a sermon debate. I was invited as the fourth. The three monks were: Phra Khru Vacisunthorn, the ecclesiastical head of Muang Saam Sib district; Preceptor Lui, the ecclesiastical head of Amnaad Jaroen district; Ajaan Waw, who had knowledge of Pali. And then there was me. The night before the debate, I told myself, "It's going to be a knock-down, drag-out battle tomorrow. Whoever takes you on, and however they do it, don't let yourself be fazed in the least." A lot of people went to hear the debate, but in the end it all passed peacefully without any incident.

Still, there were a number of monks and laypeople in the area who, thinking I was nothing but a braggart, kept trying to create trouble and misunderstandings between other monks and me. One day Nai Chai, claiming to represent the householders in Yaang Yo Phaab township, went to the offices of the District Official and denounced me as a vagrant. This simply increased my determination to stay. "I haven't done anything evil or wrong since coming here. No matter how they come at me, I'm going to stick it out to the very end." The outcome of it all was that the District Education Officer had no authority to drive me out of the village. I told the people that if there was any more of this sort of business, I wouldn't leave until my name had been cleared.

One day the District Official himself came out to check up on some government business, and spent the night in the village. The village headman, a relative of mine, told him about all that had been happening. The District Official's response was this: "It's a rare monk who will teach the lay people like this. Let him stay as long as he likes." From that point on, there were no more incidents.

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After a while, I took leave of my relatives and set out for Yasothon. There I met Ajaan Singh with a following of 80 monks and novices staying in the Yasothon cemetery, the spot where the jail is now standing. Soon afterwards a letter came from Phra Phisanasarakhun, the ecclesiastical head of Khon Kaen province at Wat Srijan (SplendorousMoon Temple), inviting Ajaan Singh to Khon Kaen. So the citizens of Yasothon, headed by Ajaan Rin, Ajaan Daeng and Ajaan Ontaa, rented two buses, and we all set out for Khon Kaen. Ajaan Bot, the first meditation monk I had met, went along as well. The first night we spent in Roi Et; and the second at Ancestor Hill in Maha Sarakham, a spot where the local people said the spirits were fierce. Crowds of people came to listen to Ajaan Singh's sermons.

I began to realize that I wasn't going to find any peace and quiet in these circumstances, so I took my leave of Ajaan Singh and, accompanied by a novice, went to visit my relatives — Khun MahaWichai, an uncle on my mother's side of the family — in Nam Phong district. When I arrived there I found a number of families in the area related to me. They were all glad to see me, and gathered around to ask news of the folks back home. They fixed up a place in a forest of giant trees on the bank of the Nam Phong River, and there I stayed for quite a few days. The novice who had come with me took his leave to visit his relatives back home in Sakon Nakhorn, so I stayed on alone in the forest, which was full of nothing but monkeys.

After a while I began to develop a persistent headache and earache. I told my Aunt Ngoen about this, and she sent me to see a nephew of hers, a policeman in Phon district. He in turn had a driver take me to Nakhorn Ratchasima, where I stayed at Wat Sakae. I spent three days looking for my relatives there, but couldn't find them. The reason I wanted to find my relatives was that I had my heart set on going to Bangkok to take care of my illness and to find Ajaan Mun. Finally a rickshaw driver took me to the government housing settlement for railway officials, where I met my cousin, Mae Wandee, the wife of Khun Kai. Everyone seemed glad to see me, and asked me to stay on to spend the Rains Retreat there in Nakhorn Ratchasima. I didn't accept their invitation, though, because as I told them, I was set on going to Bangkok. So my cousin bought me a train ticket to HuaLamphong Station in Bangkok.

As the train passed through the Phaya Yen Jungle and burst out into the open fields of Saraburi, I thought of my elder brother who had a family at the Nawng Taa Lo watergate, the one I had visited back when I was still a lay man. So when we stopped at Baan Phachi junction, I got off and walked all the way to my brother's house. On arriving, though, I learned that he had taken his family and moved to Nakhorn Sawan province. The only people left that I knew in the village were some friends and older people. I stayed there until the end of May, when I told my friends of my plans to go to Bangkok. They bought me a ticket and accompanied me to the station. I took the train all the way to Bangkok and got off when it arrived at HuaLamphong Station.

Never before in my life had I ever been to Bangkok. I had no idea of how to find my way to Wat Sra Pathum, so I called a rickshaw driver and asked him, "How much will you charge to take me to Wat Sra Pathum?"

"Fifty satang."

"Fifty satang? Why so much? Wat Sra Pathum is practically just around the corner!"

So in the end he took me for fifteen satang.

When I reached Wat Sra Pathum, I paid my respects to my preceptor, who told me that Chao Khun Upali had invited Ajaan Mun to spend the rains in Chiang Mai. So as it turned out, I spent the rains that year at Wat Sra Pathum.

My quarters were quite a ways away from my preceptor's. I made a resolution that Rains Retreat to practice meditation as I always had, and at the same time



not to neglect any of my duties in the temple or, unless it was really unavoidable, any of the services a new monk is supposed to perform for his preceptor.

I was very strict in practicing meditation that year, keeping to myself most of the time, my one thought being to maintain stillness of mind. I took part in the morning and evening chanting services, and attended to my preceptor every morning and late afternoon. I had noticed that the way he was living left a large opening for me to attend to him in a way that appealed to me — no one was looking after his bedding, cleaning his spittoons, arranging his betel nut, keeping his mats and sitting cloths in order: This was my opening.

So from that point on I observed my duties towards my preceptor as best I could. After a while I felt that I was serving him to his satisfaction, and had found a place in his affections. At the end of the rains he asked me to take on the responsibility of living in and watching over the temple storehouse, the Green Hall, where he took his meals. Although I had set my mind on treating him as a father, I had never dreamed that being loyal and good could have dangers like this.

So at the beginning of the hot season, I took leave of my preceptor to go out and find some seclusion in the forest. I left Bangkok, passing through Ayutthaya, Saraburi, Lopburi, Takhli, Phukhao, Phukhaa, all the way to Nakhorn Sawan where, passing through Thaa Tako district and around Boraphet Lake, I reached my brother's place. There I met not only my brother, but also many old friends from the days back when I was still a lay man.

During my stay in Nakhorn Sawan, I lived in a forest about half a kilometer from the village. One day I heard the calls of two elephants fighting, one a wild elephant and the other a domesticated elephant in rut. They battled for three days running, until the wild elephant could no longer put up a fight and died. With that, the elephant in rut went insane, running wild through the forest where I was staying, chasing people and goring them with his tusks. The owner of the elephant — Khun Jop — and other people in the area came to invite me to take shelter in the village, but I wouldn't go. Even though I was somewhat afraid, I decided to depend on my powers of endurance and my belief in the power of loving-kindness.

Then one day, at about four in the afternoon, the elephant came running to the clearing where I was staying and came to a stop about 40 meters from my hut. At the time, I was sitting in the hut, meditating. Hearing his calls, I stuck my head out and saw him standing there in a frightening stance with his ears back and his tusks gleaming white. The thought occurred to me: "If he comes running this way,

he'll be on me in less than three minutes." And with that, I lost my nerve. I jumped out of the hut and ran for a large tree about six meters away. But just as I reached it and had taken my first step up the trunk, a sound like a person whispering came to my ears: "You're not for real. You're afraid to die. Whoever's afraid to die will have to die again." Hearing this, I let go of the tree and hurried back to the hut. I got into a half-lotus position and, with my eyes open, sat facing the elephant and meditating, spreading thoughts of good will.

While all this was happening, I could hear the villagers yelling and crying to one another: "That monk (meaning me) is really in a fix. Isn't anybody going to help him?" But that was all they did, cry and yell. No one — not even a single person — had the courage to come anywhere near me.

I sat there for about ten minutes, radiating thoughts of good will. Finally the elephant flapped its ears up and down a few times, turned around and walked back into the forest. A few moments later I got up from where I was sitting and walked out of the forest into the open rice fields. Khun Jop and the others came thronging around me, amazed that I had come through without mishap.

The next day, crowds of people from all over the area came to see me and to ask for "good things": amulets. The word was that since the elephant had been afraid to come near me, I was sure to have some good strong amulets. Seeing all the commotion, I decided to cut short my stay, so a few days later I said goodbye to my relatives and headed back to Bangkok.

I reached Wat Sra Pathum in the month of May. During this, my second Rains Retreat there, my preceptor had me take over the temple accounts from Phra Baitika Bunrawd. At the same time, my companions talked me into studying for the Third Level Dhamma exams. This meant that I had a lot of added burdens. Not only was there my preceptor to attend to, but also the temple accounts and inventories to keep. On top of that, I had to study Dhamma textbooks and keep up my meditation. With all these added responsibilities, my state of mind began to grow a bit slack. This can be gauged by the fact that the first year, when any of the other young monks came to talk to me about worldly matters — women and wealth — I really hated it, but the second year I began to like it. My third year at Wat Sra Pathum I began to study Pali grammar, after having passed the Third Level Dhamma exams in 1929. My responsibilities had become heavier — and I was getting pretty active at discussing worldly matters. But when my way of life began to reach this point, there were a number of events, both inside and outside the temple, that helped bring me to my senses.

One day, towards the end of the second Rains Retreat, I discovered that more than 900 baht had disappeared from the temple accounts. For days I checked over the books, but couldn't find where it had gone. Normally I made a practice of reporting to my preceptor on the first of each month, but when the first of the month came around this time, I didn't go to see him. I questioned everyone who worked with me, but they all denied having any knowledge of the missing funds. Finally another possibility occurred to me: Nai Bun, a student who attended to my preceptor. Some mornings he would ask for the key to the Green Hall to keep while I went out on my alms round. So I asked Phra Baitika Bunrawd to question Nai Bun, who finally admitted to having stolen the money while I was out.

The whole affair was my preceptor's fault. One morning he had been invited to accept some donations on the day following a cremation at the house of a nobleman, but his ceremonial fan and shoulder bag were kept in my room, and since I had gone out for alms and taken the key with me, he couldn't get to them. So from then on he told me to leave the key with Nai Bun every morning before going out for alms, and this was how the money had disappeared. I was lucky that Nai Bun had admitted his guilt. I went back to check the books carefully and discovered that, of the missing funds, more than 700 baht had come from the temple funds, and the remainder from my preceptor's personal funds.

So on October 5th, now that everything was in order, I went to tell my closest friends, Phra Baitika Bunrawd and Phra Chyam, "I'm going to make a report to the abbot at five o'clock today."

"Don't," Phra Chyam said. "I'll make up for the missing money myself."

I appreciated his offer, but didn't think it was a good idea. It would be better to be open and aboveboard about the whole affair. Otherwise the boy would start developing bad habits.

My preceptor had gotten cross with both of my friends over the temple books many times before, so when the time came for me to make my report, they went to hide in their quarters, shutting their doors tight, leaving me to face my preceptor alone. Before I made my report, I went to the Green Hall, swept and scrubbed the floor, prepared the betel nut, spread out a sitting mat for my preceptor, and then sat there waiting for him. A little after four o'clock, he left the large new set of quarters built for him by Lady Talap, wife of Chao Phraya Yomaraj, and came to sit in the Green Hall. When he had finished his tea and betel nut, I approached him to make my report about the missing funds. Before

I had even finished my first sentence, he got cross. "Why have you waited till the fifth this month to make your report? Usually you make it on the first."

"The reason I didn't come on the first," I answered, "was because I had some doubts about the accounts and the people involved. But now I'm sure that the money is really missing — and I've found the guilty party."

"Who?" he asked.

"Nai Bun," I answered. "He's already confessed."

"Bring him here," he ordered, and then added, "This is embarrassing. Don't let word of this get out."

So Phra Baitika Bunrawd fetched Nai Bun, who admitted his guilt to my preceptor. The final outcome was that Nai Bun had to make up for the missing funds.

Now that this was all taken care of, I asked to resign my position so that I could go off to the forest to meditate. Before the affair had been settled, there had been one night when I couldn't get any sleep all night long. All I could think of was that I would have to disrobe and get a job to make up for the missing funds. At the same time, I didn't want to disrobe. These two thoughts fought back and forth in my mind until dawn. But when I broached the idea of resigning with my preceptor, he wouldn't let me go.

"I'm an old man now," he said, "and aside from you there's no one I can trust to look after things for me. You'll have to stay here for the time being."

So I had to stick it out for another year.

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The third Rains Retreat, my preceptor had me come stay in his new quarters to help fix up the place and assist him with his hobby: repairing clocks. My old duties I was able to pass on to Phra Chyam, which was something of a load off my mind. But looking at the state of my meditation, I could see that my practice had grown slack. I was becoming more and more interested in worldly matters. So I decided to put up a fight. One day it occurred to me, "If I stay on here in the city, I'll have to disrobe. If I stay a monk, I'll have to leave the city and go into the forest." These two thoughts became the theme of my meditation day and night.

One day I went up to a hollow space at the top of the chedi and sat in meditation. The theme of my meditation was, "Should I stay or should I disrobe?" Something

inside me said, "I'd rather disrobe." So I questioned myself, "This place where you're living now, prosperous in every way, with its beautiful homes and streets, with its crowds of people: What do they call it?" And I answered, "Phra Nakhorn — the Great Metropolis, i.e., Heaven on Earth."

"And where were you born?"

"I was born in DoubleMarsh Village, Muang Saam Sib, Ubon Ratchathani. And now that I've come to the Great Metropolis I want to disrobe."

"And in DoubleMarsh Village what did you eat? How did you live? How did people make their living? And what did you wear? And what were the roads and houses like?"

Nothing at all like the Great Metropolis.

"So this prosperity here: What business is it of yours?"

This was when I answered, "The people in the Great Metropolis aren't gods or goddesses or anything. They're people and I'm a person, so why can't I make myself be like them?"

I questioned myself back and forth like this for several days running until I finally decided to call a halt. If I was going to disrobe, I'd have to make preparations. Other people, before disrobing, got prepared by having clothes made and so forth, but I was going to do it differently. I was going to leave the monkhood in my mind first to see what it would be like.

So late in the quiet of a moonlit night, I climbed up to sit inside the chedi and asked myself, "If I disrobe, what will I do?" I came up with the following story.

If I disrobe, I'll have to apply for a job as a clerk in the Phen Phaag Snuff and Stomach Medicine Company. I had a friend who had disrobed and gotten a job there earning 20 baht a month, so it made sense for me to apply for a job there too. I'd set my mind on being honest and hard-working so that my employer would be satisfied with my work. I was determined that wherever I lived, I'd have to act in such a way that the people I lived with would think highly of me.

As it turned out, the drug company finally hired me at 20 baht a month, the same salary as my friend. I made up my mind to budget my salary so as to have money left over at the end of each month, so I rented a room in the flats owned by Phraya Phakdi in the PratuNam (Watergate) section of town. The rent was four

baht a month. Water, electricity, clothing and food would add up to another eleven baht, leaving me with an extra five baht at the end of each month.

My second year on the job my boss came to like and trust me so much that he raised my salary to 30 baht a month. Taking out my expenses, I was left with 15 baht a month. Finally he was so content with my work that he made me supervisor of all the workers, with a 40 baht salary, plus a cut of the profits, adding up altogether to 50 baht a month. At this point I was feeling very proud of myself, because I was making as much as the District Official back home. And as for my friends back home, I was in a position way above them all. So I decided it was time to get married so that I could take a beautiful young Bangkok bride back home for a visit, which would please my relatives no end. This was when my plans seemed to take on a little class.

So now that I was going to get married, what sort of person would she be? I made up my mind that the woman I married would have to have the three attributes of a good wife:

1. She'd have to come from a good family.
2. She'd have to be in line for an inheritance.
3. She'd have to be good-looking and have a pleasing manner.

Only if a woman had these three attributes would I be willing to marry her. So I asked myself, "Where are you going to find a woman like this, and how will you get to know her?" This is where things began to get complicated. I tried thinking up all sorts of schemes, but even if I actually did meet such a woman, she wouldn't be interested in me. The women who would be interested in me weren't the sort I'd want to marry. Thinking about this, I'd sometimes heave a heavy sigh, but I wasn't willing to give in.

Finally it occurred to me, "Wealthy people send their daughters to the high-class schools, like the Back Palace School or Mrs. Cole's. Why don't I go have a look around these schools in the morning before classes and in the evening when school lets out?"

So that's what I did, until I noticed an attractive girl, the daughter of a Phraya. The way she walked and the way she dressed really appealed to me. I arranged so that our paths crossed every day. In my hand I carried a little note that I threw down in front of her. The first time, she didn't pay me any attention. Day after day our paths crossed. Sometimes our eyes would meet, sometimes I'd stand in

her way, sometimes she'd smile at me. When this happened, I made it a point to have her get my note.

Finally we got to know each other. I made a date for her to skip school the next day so that I could show her around town. As time passed we came to know each other, to like each other, to love each other. We told each other our life stories — the things that had made us happy and the things that had made us sad — from the very beginning up to the present. I had a salaried job at no less than 50 baht a month. She had finished the sixth year of secondary school and was the daughter of a very wealthy Phraya. Her looks, her manner and her conduct were everything I had been hoping for.

Finally we agreed to become married secretly. Since we loved each other, I got to sleep with her beforehand. She was a good person, so before we were to be officially married, she told her parents. Furious, they threw her out of the house.

So she came to live with me as my wife. I wasn't too upset by what her parents had done, for I was determined to work my way into their affections.

We went to rent a flat in a better district, the Sra Pathum Watergate area. The rent here was six baht a month. My wife got a job at the same company where I was working, starting out at 20 baht a month, but she soon got a raise to 30 a month. Together, then, we were making 80 a month, which pleased me.

As time passed, my position advanced. My employer trusted me completely, and at times would have me take over his duties in his absence. Both my wife and I were determined to be honest and upright in our dealings with the company, and ultimately our earnings — our salaries plus my percentage of the profits — reached 100 a month. At this point I felt I could breathe easy, but my dreams still hadn't been fulfilled.

So I began to buy presents — good things to eat and other nice things — to take to my parents-in-law to show my good intentions towards them. After a while they began to show some interest in me, and eventually had us move into their house. At this point I was really pleased: I was sure to be in line for part of the inheritance. But living together for a while revealed certain things about my behavior that rubbed my parents-in-law the wrong way, so in the end they drove us out of the house. We went back to live in a flat, as before.

This was when my wife became pregnant. Not wanting her to do any hard work, I hired a servant woman to look after the house and help with the housework. Hired help in those days was very cheap — only four baht a month.

As my wife came closer to giving birth, she began to miss work more and more often. I had to keep at my job. One night I sat down to look over our budget. The 100 baht we had once earned was probably as much as we'd ever earn. I had no further hopes for a raise. Our expenses were mounting every day: one baht a month for electricity; 1.50 baht for water; charcoal and rice each at least six baht a month; the help, four baht a month; and on top of it all, the cost of our clothing.

After my wife gave birth, our expenses mounted still higher. She wasn't able to work, so we lost her percentage of the profits. After a while she became ill and missed work for an extended period. My employer cut her salary back to 15 baht a month. Our medical bills rose. My wife's salary wasn't enough for her needs, so she had to cut into mine. My old salary of 50 baht was now completely gone by the end of each month.

In the end, my wife's illness proved fatal. I had to borrow 50 baht from my employer which, along with my own savings of 50, went towards her funeral expenses, which totaled 80 baht. I was then left with 20 baht and a small child to raise.

What was I to do now? Before, I had breathed easily. Now it seemed as if life was closing in on me. I went to see my parents-in-law, but they gave me the cold shoulder. So I hired a wet nurse for the child. The wet nurse was a low-class woman, but she took awfully good care of the child. This led me to feel love and affection towards her, and ultimately she became my second wife.

My new wife had absolutely no education — she couldn't even read or write. My income at this point was now only 50 baht — enough just to get by. After a while my new wife became pregnant. I did my best to make sure that she didn't have to do any heavy work, and I did everything I could to be good to her, but I couldn't help feeling a little disappointed that life had turned out so differently from my original plans. After my new wife gave birth, we both helped to raise the children until both my first wife's child and my new wife's child were old enough to feed and take care of themselves.

This was when my new wife started acting funny — playing favorites, giving all her love and attention to her own child, and none to my first. My first child started coming to complain to me all the time that my new wife had been unfair in this way or that. Sometimes the two children would start fighting. At times I'd come home from work and my first child would run to me with one version of what had happened, my second child would have another version, and my wife still another. I didn't know whom to side with. It was as if I was standing in the middle, and my



wife and children were pulling me off in three different directions. My new child wanted me to buy this or that — eventually my wife and children started competing with one another to see who would get to eat the best food, wear the best clothes and squander the most money. It got so that I couldn't sit down and talk with any of them at all. My salary was being eaten up every month; my family life was like falling into a thorn patch.

Finally I decided to call a halt. My wife wasn't what I had hoped for, my earnings weren't what I had hoped for, my children weren't what I had hoped for, so I left my wife, was reordained and returned to the contemplative life.

When I came to the end of the story, my interest in worldly affairs vanished. The sense that life was closing in on me disappeared. I felt as free as if I were up floating in the sky. Something inside me sighed, "Ah!" with relief. I told myself that if this was the way things would be, I'd do better not to disrobe. My old desire to disrobe was reduced about 50 to 60 percent.

Throughout this period a number of other events occurred that helped turn my thoughts in the right direction. Some nights I'd dream that my old meditation teachers had come to see me: Sometimes they'd be fierce with me, sometimes they'd scold me. But there were four events — you'd have to call them strange, and they certainly were important in changing my thinking. I have to beg the reader's pardon for mentioning them, though, because there's nothing at all pleasant about them. But since they were good lessons, I feel they should go on record.

*The first event:* During the period when I was spending my nights thinking about worldly matters, there was one day I started feeling constipated, so that afternoon I took a laxative, figuring that if the medicine acted as it had before, I'd have to go to the bathroom at about 9 p.m. For some reason, it didn't work. The next morning I went for my alms round down the lane to Sra Pathum Palace. Just as I was coming to a house where they had prepared food to give to the monks, all of a sudden I had to go to the bathroom so badly I could hardly stand it. I couldn't even walk to the house to accept their food. All I could do was hold myself in and walk in little pigeon steps until I came to an acacia grove by the side of the road. I plunked down my bowl and hurried through the fence into the grove. I wanted to sink my head down into the ground and die right there. When I had finished, I left the grove, picked up my alms bowl and finished my round. That day I didn't get enough to eat. Returning to the temple, I warned myself, "This is what it's going to be like if you disrobe. Nobody's going to fix food to put in your bowl." The whole event was really a good lesson.

*The second event:* One day I went out early on my alms round. I crossed ElephantHead Bridge, passed Saam Yaek and turned down Phetburi Road. There was no one to place even a spoonful of rice in my bowl. It so happened that as I was passing a row of flats, I saw an old Chinese man and woman yelling and screaming at each other in front of their flat. The woman was about 50 and wore her hair in a bun. The old man wore his hair in a pigtail. As I came to their flat, I stopped to watch. Within about two seconds, the old woman grabbed a broom and hit the man over the head with the handle. The old man grabbed the woman by the hair and kicked her in the back. I asked myself, "If that were you, what would you do?" and then I smiled: "You'd probably end the marriage for good." I felt more pleased seeing this incident than if I had received a whole bowlful of food. That night I meditated on what I had seen. It seemed that my mind was regaining its strength and, bit by bit, becoming more and more disenchanted with worldly affairs.

*The third event:* It was a holiday. I had started out on my alms round before dawn, going down to the Sra Pathum Watergate market, and then up the lane behind the temple. This was a dirt lane where horses were stabled. Rain was falling and the road surface was slippery. I was walking in a very composed manner past the house of a lay person I knew who frequented the temple. My bowl was full of food and I was thinking very absent-mindedly of worldly matters — so absent-mindedly that I slipped and fell sideways into a mud hole by the side of the road. Both of my knees were sunk about a foot into the muck, my food was spilled all over the place, my body was covered with mud. I had to hurry back to the temple, and when I arrived I warned myself: "See what happens when you even just *think* of such things?" My heart was slowly becoming more and more disenchanted with worldly matters. My old opinions had reversed to the point where I now saw marriage as something for kids, not for grownups.

*The fourth event:* The next morning, I went out for alms taking my usual route down Phetburi Road. I came to the palace of His Highness Prince Dhaninivat. This prince made a habit of donating food to monks in general every day. It so happened that someone had set up a bowl of rice across the street from the palace that day, so I decided to accept rice from the new donors first. After accepting their rice, I turned around to cross the street, when one of Nai Lert's white buses came whizzing past, less than a foot from my head. The passengers on the bus started yelling and screaming, and I myself was stunned: I had just missed being killed by a bus. When I finally went to accept rice from the prince, I had to exert a great deal of self-control because I was shaking all over. I then returned to the temple.

All of these events I took to be warnings, because during that period my thoughts about worldly matters would start flaring up anywhere and at any time.

Now we come to the end of the Rains Retreat, 1930. During that third rainy season I had told myself, "You're going to have to leave Bangkok. There's no two ways about it. If your preceptor stands in your way, there'll have to be a falling out." So I made a wish: "May the Triple Gem and all the sacred things in the cosmos help me find another way out."

Another night, towards the end of the rains, I had been lying on my back, reading a book and meditating at the same time, when I fell asleep. I dreamed that Ajaan Mun came to scold me. "What are you doing in Bangkok?" he asked. "Go out into the forest!"

"I can't," I answered. "My preceptor won't let me."

Ajaan Mun answered with a single word: "Go!"

So I dedicated a resolution to him: "At the end of the rains, may Ajaan Mun come and take me with him out of this predicament."

It was just a few days later that Chao Khun Upali <sup>4</sup> broke his leg, and Ajaan Mun came down to pay his respects to him. A short while after that, Lady Noi, the mother of Chao Phraya Mukhamontri, passed away, and the funeral services were to be held at Wat Debsirin. Since Lady Noi had been one of Ajaan Mun's supporters when he was staying in Udon Thani, he made a point of attending her funeral. My preceptor and I were also invited, and I met Ajaan Mun up on the crematorium. I was overjoyed, but had no chance to have even a word with him. So I asked Chao Khun Phra Amarabhirakkhit where Ajaan Mun was staying, and he answered, "At Wat Boromnivasa." On the way home from the funeral I got permission from my preceptor to stop at Wat Boromnivasa to pay my respects to Ajaan Mun.

In the four years since my reordination, this was my first encounter with Ajaan Mun. After I had paid my respects, he delivered a short sermon to me on the text, "*Khina jati, vusitam brahmacariyanti*," which he translated in short as, "The Noble Ones, having freed themselves from the mental effluents, find happiness. This is the supreme holy life." That's all I can remember of it, but I felt that sitting and listening to him speak for a few moments gave my heart more peace than it had felt all the years I had been practicing on my own.

In the end he told me, "You'll have to come with me this time. As for your preceptor, I'll inform him myself." That was our entire conversation. I bowed down to him and returned to Wat Sra Pathum.

When I told my preceptor about my meeting with Ajaan Mun, he simply sat very still. The next day, Ajaan Mun came to Wat Sra Pathum and spoke with my preceptor, saying that he wanted to have me go with him up north. My preceptor gave his assent.

I began to get my necessary belongings together and to say goodbye to my friends and the temple boys. I asked one of the boys how much money I had left for my travel expenses, and he told me, "Thirty satang." That wasn't even enough to pay for the ride to HuaLamphong Station, which by that time had risen to 50 satang. So I went to inform Ajaan Mun, and he assured me that he would take care of everything.

The day before Lady Noi's cremation, <sup>5</sup> Ajaan Mun was invited to deliver a sermon at the home of Chao Phraya Mukhamontri, and afterwards received the following donations: a set of robes, a container of kerosene and 80 baht. Later, Ajaan Mun told me that the set of robes he gave to a monk at Wat Boromnivasa, the kerosene he gave to Phra MahaSombuun, and the money he gave to people who needed it, leaving just enough for two people's traveling expenses: his and mine.

After a while, when Chao Khun Upali finally let Ajaan Mun return north, we took the train to Uttaradit, where we stayed at Wat Salyaphong, a temple founded by Chao Khun Upali himself. Before getting on the express train at Hua Lamphong Station, we ran into Mae Ngaw Nedjamnong, who had come down to Bangkok — whether it was to attend Lady Noi's funeral or what, I don't know. Mae Ngaw was one of Ajaan Mun's old students, and she agreed to help look after our needs during the entire trip.

This was the period when Ajaan Tan was abbot of Wat Salyaphong. We stayed there a number of days, and then went to stay in the groves behind the temple, quite a ways from the monks' quarters. This was a quiet, secluded place, both by day and by night.

One day I got into a disagreement with Ajaan Mun and he drove me away. Although I felt riled, I decided not to let my feelings show, so I stayed on with him, attending to his needs as I always had.

The next morning — this was in early January, towards the end of the second lunar month — two monks came looking for Ajaan Mun with the news that one of

his followers was seriously ill in Chiang Mai. The two monks then continued on down to Bangkok, after which Ajaan Mun and I left Uttaradit for Chiang Mai. When we arrived we went to stay at Wat Chedi Luang (GreatChedi Temple).

The ill follower turned out to be a lay man — Nai Biew of San Kampheng district — who had become mentally deranged. His older brother and sister-in-law brought him to Wat Chedi Luang, and Ajaan Mun cured him with meditation.

That year I spent the Rains Retreat at Wat Chedi Luang. When we had first arrived, there were quite a number of our fellow meditation monks staying at the temple, but as the rains approached, they left one by one to stay in the hills. At first, Ajaan Mun was going to have me leave for the hills too, but I refused to go. I told him I had my heart set on staying with him and attending to his needs throughout the rainy season. In the end he gave his consent.

That was 1931, the year Chao Khun Upali died. I spent the rains very close to Ajaan Mun, attending both to his needs and to my own meditation. He in turn gave me a thorough breaking-in in every way. Each evening he had me climb up and sit in meditation on the north side of the Great Chedi. There was a large Buddha image there — it's still there today — and Ajaan Mun told me that it was a very auspicious spot, that relics of the Buddha had been known to come there often. I did as I was told in every way. Some nights I'd sit all night, without any sleep.

We stayed in a small hut in a banana grove. Lady Thip and Luang Yong, the Chief of Police, had had the hut built and presented to Ajaan Mun. Nai Thip, clerk in the Provincial Treasury, and his wife, Nang Taa, made sure that Ajaan Mun had plenty to eat every day.

I made a regular practice of going with Ajaan Mun when we went out for alms. As we would walk along, he'd constantly be giving me lessons in meditation all along the way. If we happened to pass a pretty girl, he'd say, "Look over there. Do you think she's pretty? Look closely. Look down into her insides." No matter what we passed — houses or roads — he'd always make it an object lesson.

At the time I was only 26. It was my fifth Rains Retreat and I was still feeling young, so he was always giving me lessons and warnings. He seemed very concerned for my progress. But there was one thing that had me puzzled, having to do with robes and other necessities that people would donate. He seemed reluctant to let me have anything nice to use. Sometimes he'd ask for whatever nice things I did have and then go give them to someone else. I had no idea what

he meant by all this. Whenever I'd get anything new or nice, he'd order me to wash and dye it to spoil the original color. Say I'd get a nice new white handkerchief or towel: He'd order me to dye it brown with dye from the heartwood of a jackfruit tree. Sometimes he'd have to order me several times, and when I still wouldn't obey, he'd go ahead and dye the things himself. He liked to find old, worn-out robes, patch them himself, and then give them to me to wear.

One morning I went together with him on our alms round, down past the Police Station. We happened to pass a woman carrying goods to the market, but my mind was in good shape: It didn't stray away from the path we were following. I was keeping complete control over myself. Another time when I was walking a little distance behind him — he walked fast, but I walked slowly — I saw him come to an old, worn-out pair of policeman's trousers thrown away by the side of the road. He began to kick the trousers along, back and forth — I was thinking all along that I had to keep my thoughts on the path I was following. Finally, when he reached the fence around the Police Station, he stooped down, picked up the trousers and fastened them under his robes. I was puzzled. What did he want with old trash like that?

When we got back to the hut, he placed the trousers over the clothes railing. I swept up and then set out the sitting mats. After we had finished our meal, I went into his room to arrange his bedding. Some days he'd be cross with me, saying I was messy, that I never put anything in the right place — but he'd never tell me what the right places were. Even though I tried my best to please him at all times, he was still severe with me the entire rainy season.

Several days later the old pair of trousers had become a shoulder bag and a belt: I saw them hanging together on the wall. And a few days afterwards, he gave them to me to use. I took them and looked at them. They were nothing but stitches and patches. With all the good things available, why did he give me this sort of stuff to use?

Attending to Ajaan Mun was very good for me, but also very hard. I had to be willing to learn everything anew. To be able to stay with him for any length of time, you had to be very observant and very circumspect. You couldn't make a sound when you walked on the floor, you couldn't leave footprints on the floor, you couldn't make noise when you swallowed water or opened the windows or doors. There had to be a science to everything you did — hanging out robes, taking them in, folding them up, setting out sitting mats, arranging bedding,

everything. Otherwise he'd drive you out, even in the middle of the Rains Retreat. Even then, you'd just have to take it and try to use your powers of observation.

Every day, after our meal, I'd go to straighten up his room, putting away his bowl and robes, setting out his bedding, his sitting cloth, his spittoon, his tea kettle, pillow, etc. I had to have everything in order before he entered the room. When I had finished, I'd take note of where I had placed things, hurry out of the room and go to my own room, which was separated from his by a wall of banana leaves. I had made a small hole in the wall so that I could peek through and see both Ajaan Mun and his belongings. When he came into the room, he'd look up and down, inspecting his things. Some of them he'd pick up and move; others he'd leave where they were. I had to watch carefully and take note of where things were put.

The next morning I'd do it all over again, trying to place things where I had seen him put them himself. Finally one morning, when I had finished putting things in order and returned to my own room to peek through the hole, he entered his room, sat still for a minute, looked right and left, up and down, all around — and didn't touch a thing. He didn't even turn over his sleeping cloth. He simply said his chants and then took a nap. Seeing this, I felt really pleased that I had attended to my teacher to his satisfaction.

In other matters — such as sitting and walking meditation — Ajaan Mun trained me in every way, to my complete satisfaction. But I was able to keep up with him at best only about 60 percent of the time.

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At the end of the Rains Retreat, Wat Boromnivasa arranged Chao Khun Upali's funeral, and nearly all the senior monks in Wat Chedi Luang went down to Bangkok to help. The abbot had Ajaan Mun watch over the temple in his absence. After the funeral was over, a letter came to Ajaan Mun, giving him permission to become a preceptor. When Ajaan Mun opened the letter, he found there was more: The letter asked him, in addition to becoming preceptor, to accept the position of abbot at Wat Chedi Luang. Chao Kaew Nawarat (Prince NineJewels), the Prince of Chiang Mai, was to make all the necessary arrangements. Would Ajaan Mun please take over the duties of the previous abbot? That, in short, was the gist of the letter. When Ajaan Mun finished reading it, he sent for me. "I have to leave Wat Chedi Luang," he said.

Two days after the end of the Rains Retreat he had sent me out on my own to a mountain in Lamphun province, a spot where he himself had once stayed. I camped a little more than ten days at the foot of the mountain, until one day at about three in the afternoon, while I was sitting in meditation, there was an incident. It was as if someone had come with a message. I heard a voice say, "Tomorrow you have to go stay up on top of the mountain."

The next day, before climbing to the top, I went to stay in an old abandoned temple, said to be very sacred. People had told me that whenever the lunar sabbath came around, a bright light would often appear there. It was deep in the forest, though — and the forest was full of elephants and tigers. I walked in alone, feeling both brave and scared, but confident in the power of the Dhamma and of my teacher.

I stayed for two nights. The first night, nothing happened. The second night, at about one or two in the morning, a tiger came — which meant that I didn't get any sleep the whole night. I sat in meditation, scared stiff, while the tiger walked around and around my umbrella tent. My body felt all frozen and numb. I started chanting, and the words came out like running water. All the old chants I had forgotten now came back to me, thanks both to my fear and to my ability to keep my mind under control. I sat like this from two until five a.m., when the tiger finally left.

The next morning, I went for alms in a small village of only two households. One of the owners was out working in his garden, and when he saw me he told me that a tiger had come and eaten one of his oxen the night before. This made me even more scared, so finally, after my meal, I climbed to the top of the mountain.

From the top, looking out, you could see the chedi of Wat Phra Dhatu Haribhunjai in the town of Lamphun. The mountain was named Doi Khaw Maw — Thumb Mountain. At its summit was a deep spring — so deep that no one has ever been able to fathom it. The water was crystal clear and surrounded by heads of old Buddha images. Climbing down about two meters from ground level, you reached the surface of the water. They say that a person who falls into the spring won't sink, and that you can't go diving down under the water. Women are absolutely forbidden to go into the spring, for if a woman does happen to enter the water she'll go into convulsions. People in the area consider the whole mountain to be sacred.

Ajaan Mun had told me that there was an important spirit dwelling in the mountain, but that it wouldn't harm or disturb me because it was acquainted with



the Dhamma and Sangha. The first day after reaching the top I didn't have anything to eat. That night I felt faint — the whole mountain seemed to be swaying like a boat in the middle of a choppy sea — but my mind was in good shape, and not the least bit afraid.

The next day I did sitting and walking meditation in the area around an old abandoned sanctuary. From where I was staying, the nearest village I could have gone to for alms was more than three kilometers away, so I made a vow: "I won't eat unless someone brings food here." That night I had a stomachache and felt dizzy, but not as bad as the night before.

At about five the next morning, just before dawn, I heard huffing and panting sounds outside the sanctuary. At first I thought it was a tiger, but as I listened carefully, it sounded more like a human being. That side of the mountain, though, was very steep — not too steep to climb up, but I can guarantee that it was too steep to go down. So who would be coming up here? I was curious, but didn't dare leave the sanctuary or my umbrella tent until it was light outside.

When dawn finally came, I went outside and there, by the side of the sanctuary, was an old woman — about 70 — sitting with her hands raised in respect. She had some rice wrapped in a banana leaf that she wanted to put in my bowl. She also gave me two kinds of medicine: some roots and pieces of bark. "Take this medicine," she said, "grind it down and eat it, while making a wish for your health, and your stomachache will go away." At the time I was observing the monks' discipline very strictly and so, since she was a woman, didn't dare say more than a few words to her. After I had finished eating — one lump of red glutinous rice and the roots and bark — I chanted some blessings for her and she left, disappearing down the west side of the mountain.

At about five in the afternoon a person came to the top of the mountain with a letter for me from Ajaan Mun. The letter said, "Come back right away. I have to leave Wat Chedi Luang tomorrow morning, because tomorrow evening the express train from Bangkok will arrive." I hurried down from the mountain, but night fell as I reached Paa Heo (GlenForest) Village, so I spent the night in the cemetery there. When I arrived at Wat Chedi Luang the next day, Ajaan Mun had already left.

I asked around, but no one seemed to know where he had gone — leaving me with no idea of where or how to find him. I had an inkling that he had headed north for Keng Tung, which meant I would have to leave for Keng Tung right

away, but I couldn't yet, because there were two things Ajaan Mun had said to me during the rainy season:

1. "I want you to help me in the steps of the practice, because I can't see anyone else who can." At the time I had no idea of what he meant, and didn't pay it much attention.
2. "The Chiang Mai area has been home to a great number of sages ever since the distant past. So before you leave the area, I want you to go stay on top of Doi Khaw Maw, in Buab Thawng Cave and in Chiang Dao Cave."

After staying a few days at Wat Chedi Luang, I left for Doi Saket district, where I stayed in Tham Myyd (Dark Cave) near Myang Awm village. This was a strange and remarkable cave. On top of the mountain was a Buddha image — from what period, I couldn't say. In the middle of the mountain the ground opened down into a deep chasm. Going down into the chasm, I came to a piece of teakwood placed as a bridge across a crevice. Edging my way across to the other side, I found myself on a wide rockshelf. As I walked on a ways, it became pitch dark, so I lit a lantern and continued on. I came to another bridge — this time a whole log of teak — reaching to another rock. This is where the air began to feel chilly.

Crossing this second bridge, I reached an enormous cavern. I'd say it could have held at least 3,000 people. The floor of the cavern was flat with little waves, like ripples on water. Shooting straight up from the middle of the floor was a spectacular stalagmite, as white as a cumulus cloud, eight meters tall and so wide it would have taken two people to put their arms around it. Around the stalagmite was a circle of small round bumps — like the bumps in the middle of gongs — each about half a meter tall. Inside the circle was a deep flat basin. The whole area was dazzling white and very beautiful. The air, though, was close, and daylight didn't penetrate. Ajaan Mun had told me that *nagas* came here to worship: The stalagmite was their chedi. I had wanted to spend the night, but the air was so close I could hardly breathe, so I didn't dare stay. I walked back out of the cave.

This mountain was about three kilometers from the nearest village. The people in the area said that at the beginning of the Rains Retreat the mountain would give out a roar. Any year the roar was especially loud there would be good rain and abundant harvests.

That day I went back to stay in a village on the border of Doi Saket district. After resting there a few days, I walked on to Baan Pong, where I met a monk named

Khien who had once stayed with Ajaan Mun. I asked if he knew where Ajaan Mun had gone, but his answer was no. So I talked him into returning with me to explore Doi Saket district.

We went to spend a night in a cave in the middle of the jungle, far away from any habitation. The cave was called Buab Thawng — GoldenGourd — Cave. This was because down in the cave was a place where fool's gold had seeped through a crack into the bottom of a pool of water. To reach the cave you had to go through ten kilometers of virgin forest. The people of the area claimed that there was a fierce spirit living in the cave. Whoever tried to spend the night there, they said, would be kept awake all night by the feeling that someone was stepping on his legs, his stomach, his back, etc. — which had everyone afraid of the place. When I heard this, I wanted to test the truth of the rumor myself. Ajaan Mun himself had told me that Bhikkhu Chai once came to this cave to spend the night, but couldn't get any sleep because he kept hearing the sound of someone walking in and out of the cave all night long.

It was a very deep cave but, still, Ajaan Mun had told me to come here and spend the night. The outcome of my stay was that there was nothing out of the ordinary. We didn't encounter anything unusual at all.

After leaving the cave, we went down to stay at a spot where we met another monk named Choei. After talking a while, we seemed to hit it off well, so I invited him to come with me and wander some more around the Doi Saket area. As for Phra Khien, he left us and returned to Baan Pong.

One day, as I was wandering with Phra Choei, some villagers built a little place for us to stay in the middle of a large cemetery. The cemetery was full of graves and dotted with the remains of old cremation fires. White, weathered bones were all over the place. Phra Choei and I stayed there for quite a long time.

After a while some villagers came and invited Phra Choei to go stay in another spot, which meant that I had to stay on in the cemetery alone. There were the remains of an old cremation fire about six meters from where I was staying.

A few days later, well before dawn, a villager came with a little cone of flowers and incense, saying that he was going to bring someone to stay with me as my disciple. I thought to myself, "At least now I'll be a little less lonely." I had been feeling scared for quite a few days running, to the point that every time I sat in meditation I'd start feeling numb all over.

Later that morning, after my meal, a large group of villagers came, bringing a corpse with them. The corpse hadn't been placed in a coffin, but was simply wrapped in a cloth. As soon as I saw it, I told myself, "You're in for it now." If I were to leave, I'd lose face with the villagers, but the idea of staying on didn't appeal to me either. Then the realization hit me: The corpse was probably my "disciple."

The villagers started the cremation that afternoon at about four, not too far from where I was staying, giving me a very good view of the corpse. When it caught fire, its arms and legs started sticking up into the air, as yellow as if they had been smeared with turmeric. By evening the body had fallen apart at the waist — it was still black in the flames. Just before nightfall, the villagers returned home, leaving me all by myself. I hurried back to my banana-leaf hut and sat in meditation, ordering my mind not to leave the hut — to the point where my ears went blank. I didn't hear any sound at all. My mind still had a certain amount of alertness, but no perception of where I was, of courage, of fear, or of anything at all. I stayed this way until daybreak, when Phra Choei happened back. Now that I had a companion I felt a little bit more secure.

Phra Choei had a habit of sitting in the hut with me and having Dhamma talks — he'd do the talking, I'd do the listening — but I could tell from the tone of his voice that he wasn't all he made himself out to be. Once a villager came and asked him, "Are you afraid of the dead?" Phra Choei didn't say yes or no. All he said was, "What's there to be afraid of? When a person dies, there isn't anything left at all. Why, you yourself can eat dead chickens, dead ducks, dead cows and dead water buffaloes without a second thought." That was the sort of thing he'd always be saying. I thought to myself, "What a show-off. He doesn't want other people to know he's afraid. Well, tomorrow we'll have to see just how brave he really is."

It so happened that a villager had come to invite one of us to accept donations at his home. Phra Choei and I agreed that I would accept the invitation while he stayed to watch over the hut. I left with the villager, but when I returned the next day, Phra Choei was gone. I learned that late the night before, after I had left, one of the villagers had brought the body of a dead girl to bury in the cemetery. Phra Choei, seeing this, immediately gathered his umbrella tent, his bowl and robes and ran away in the middle of the night. From that moment on, I parted ways with Phra Choei.

I headed back to Baan Pong, where I spent a few nights with Phra Khien, and then went on to a township called Huei Awm Kaew — the Encircling Crystal

Stream. There, I was told, were the ruins of an old temple, with lots of old Buddha images. Hearing this, I wanted to go have a look.

By this point I had gotten really fed up with lay people and monks. I no longer wanted to live with the human race. The one thought in my mind was to go off and live alone on a mountaintop. So when I reached Huei Awm Kaew, I stopped eating food, and began eating only leaves so that I wouldn't need to be bothered with human beings any more.

This turned out to be a fine spot, secluded and quiet, with a shallow stream meandering all around. One night while I was sitting in meditation with my eyes closed in a little dark hut, it seemed to me that a brilliant ball of light, about a meter and a half in diameter, came shooting out of the mountaintop and settled down next to the hut where I was staying — so I sat there meditating until dawn. I felt as if my breath had stopped. I was absolutely still, feeling free and at ease, and not the least bit sleepy.

A few days later I moved down to an island formed by the course of the stream. A villager nearby, on his own initiative, had built me a little hut there. The floor was just off the ground, and the walls were made of banana leaves. When I moved into the hut I resolved to make an all-out effort in my meditation. I went without sleep, and ate very little — only four handfuls of leaves a day.

The first day I felt fine and there were no incidents. The second day, at about 9 p.m., after I had said my chants and finished my walking meditation, I lay back for a little rest, letting my thoughts wander — and fell asleep. I dreamed that a woman came to me. She was plump, fair and good-looking, and was wearing a blouse and an old-fashioned skirt. Her name was Sida, she said, she was still single and she wanted to come live with me. I had the feeling that she wanted a husband, so I asked her, "Where do you live?"

"On top of a tall mountain," she answered. "It's a large place, with lots of houses. Life is easy there. Please be my husband."

I refused. She started pleading with me in all sorts of ways, but I stood my ground. So she suggested that we simply become lovers. Still, I wouldn't yield. In the end, when she could see that she wasn't going to get her way with me, we agreed to respect each other as good friends. And when we had reached an understanding, she said goodbye and vanished.

The next day, at about two in the afternoon, I bathed in the stream at a spot where a log had fallen across the water. One of the villagers had told me that this

was a very important stream, that there was a small chedi at its source. The strange thing about the chedi was that sometimes it was visible, sometimes it wasn't. Listening to the story, though, I hadn't paid any attention to it. Before taking my bath, I took some rocks and dammed up the stream so that it would flow over the log and I would have an easier time bathing. After my bath, I went and left the rocks where they were.

That evening, after I had finished my chants and my walking meditation — a little after 9 p.m. — I lay down for a short rest, meditating all the while, and another incident occurred. I felt as if someone were rubbing my legs with his hands, making me feel numb first up to my waist, and then all the way to my head. I had almost no sense of feeling at all, and thought I was going to lose consciousness. So I sat right up and entered concentration — my mind absolutely still, clear and bright. I decided that if this was death, I'd be willing to go. The one other thought that occurred to me was that I was going to pass out because I had been living on nothing but leaves.

As soon as my awareness was in place, it started expanding itself out through my body, and the feeling of numbness gradually began to dissipate — like clouds when they float past the light of the sun — until there was no trace of numbness left at all. My mind returned to normal, and then a light went shooting out from it, focusing on the log where I had bathed in the stream, telling me to get the rocks out of the way because the stream was a path the spirits took. So when I awoke next morning I went to the stream and removed the rocks, letting the water flow as before.

That night it seemed as if there were going to be another incident. Something struck the wall of my hut and shook it, but then that was all. I lay down to meditate, because I was feeling weak, and as I began to doze off I had a dream: Herds of strange-looking animals, about the size of pigs, were coming down from the waterfall at the source of the stream. Each had the bushy tail of a squirrel and the head of a goat. Huge swarms of them were coming down the stream, passing the spot where I was sleeping. After a few moments I saw a woman, about 30, wearing an indigo blouse and indigo skirt reaching just a little below her knees. She was carrying something — I don't know what you'd call it — in her hand, and she said that she was the spirit residing in the waterfall, that she had to go down to the sea like this constantly. Her name was Nang Jan.

For the next few nights I was very earnest in my meditation, but there were no more incidents.

After a while I returned to Baan Pong to a spot where Ajaan Mun had once stayed, and there ran into Phra Khien again. We decided that we would have to go together and search for Ajaan Mun until we found him. So, after saying good-bye to the villagers there, we set out for Chieng Dao (StarCity) Cave. Before reaching Chieng Dao mountain, we climbed up to stay in a small cave where Ajaan Mun had once stayed, and then went on, reaching Chieng Dao Cave the twelfth day of the waxing moon, the third lunar month (February 6). We made an all-out effort to meditate both day and night.

On the night of the full moon — Magha Puja — I decided to sit in meditation as an offering to the Buddha. A little after 9 p.m. my mind became absolutely still. It seemed as if breath and light were radiating from my body in all directions. At the moment, I was focusing on my breath, which was so subtle that I scarcely seemed to be breathing at all. My heart was quiet, my mind still. The breath in my body didn't seem to be moving at all. It was simply quiet and still. My mind had completely stopped formulating thoughts — how all my thoughts had stopped, I had no idea. But I was aware — feeling bright, expansive and at ease — with a sense of freedom that wiped out all feeling of pain.

After about an hour of this, teachings began to appear in my heart. This, in short, is what they said: "Focus down and examine becoming, birth, death and unawareness to see how they come about." A vision came to me as plain as if it were right before my eyes: "Birth is like a lightning flash. Death is like a lightning flash." So I focused on the causes leading to birth and death, until I came to the word *avijja* — unawareness. Unawareness of what? What kind of knowing is the knowing of unawareness? What kind of knowing is the knowing of awareness? I considered things in this manner, back and forth, over and over until dawn. When it all finally became clear, I left concentration. My heart and body both seemed light, open and free; my heart, extremely satisfied and full.

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We left Chieng Dao Cave three days later and then split up for a night, one of us staying in Paak Phieng Cave, the other in Jan Cave. These were very relaxing places to stay. No incidents. After that we set out for Fang, to stay at Tab Tao Cave, which at that time had no villages nearby. There we met an old monk, Grandfather Phaa. Reaching the base of the hill, we found banana and papaya orchards and a clear-flowing stream. There were two large open caves and one long narrow one. In one of the open caves were rows and rows of ancient Buddha images, and another enormous Buddha image that Grandfather Phaa was building himself.

When we first went to his quarters, we didn't find him, so we then went east, following the stream up the mountain. We came across an old man wearing maroon shorts and a maroon short-sleeved shirt. He had a large knife in his hand, with which he was cutting back the forest. His movements were vigorous and strong, like those of a young man. We walked towards him and called out, "Do you know where Grandfather Phaa is?" When he caught sight of us, he came quickly towards us — with the knife still in his hand. But when he sat down with us, his manner changed into that of a monk. "I'm Grandfather Phaa," he said. So we paid him our respects.

He led us back to his quarters, where he changed from his shorts and shirt into a dark set of robes with a sash tied around his chest and a string of rosary beads in his hand. He told us the stories behind each of the caves. "If you want to spend the Rains Retreat here with me, you can, seeing as you're students of Ajaan Mun. But you can't take me as your ajaan, because at the moment I'm growing bananas and papayas to sell in order to raise enough money to finish my Buddha image." <sup>6</sup> Still, he ate only one meal a day.

That evening he showed us around the banana and papaya groves, which he had planted himself. "If you feel hungry," he said, pointing to the trees, "you have my permission to take and eat as much as you like. Ordinarily, I don't allow other monks to touch them." It hadn't occurred to me that I'd want any of his fruit, but I appreciated his kindness. Every morning before dawn, he'd send one of his disciples to where we were staying with bananas and papayas for us to eat.

I noticed a lot of strange things about the area. The peacocks in the forest weren't at all afraid of Grandfather Phaa. Every morning doves would come to where he'd be eating, and he'd scatter rice for them to eat. Sometimes they'd allow him to touch them. Every evening monkeys would descend in hordes to eat the papayas he had spread out for them. If any villagers happened by on their way to worship the Buddha images, though, the animals would all run away.

To enter the long narrow cave, we had to light a lantern and climb up and down a narrow, crooked passageway. After about 30 minutes, we came to a small chedi, deep in the cave. Who built it, or when, no one knows.

After we had done what we felt was enough cave-exploring, we set out across the jungle and stopped at Kok River Village. This was a good-sized village with a tall hill to the east. At night it was very cold. All you could hear were the roars of tigers passing back and forth along the side of the hill. The village had no temple,



but it did have a sacred Buddha image, a little less than a meter across at the base, and very beautiful. Someone had brought it from the middle of the jungle.

After two nights in Kok River Village, we said goodbye to the villagers and set out across a large tract of virgin forest. We walked for three days before coming across another village. As soon as the people in Kok River Village had learned that we were planning to go, they tried to dissuade us because there were no places in the forest where we could go for alms. So I said, "That's all right. It's only two days. I can take it. All I ask for is enough water to drink." The morning of the day we were to leave, just as we were returning from our alms round in the village, we met a man who informed us that he was going to leave for Chieng Saen that day, and so would be able to accompany us through the forest.

Before we left the village, an old man came to warn us: "On your way through the forest," he said, "you'll come to a spot where there are a lot of spirit shrines. If it isn't yet dark when you reach there, don't stop. Go on and spend the night somewhere else, for the forest spirits there are really fierce. No one who spends the night in that area can get any sleep. Sometimes it's a bird, sometimes a tiger, sometimes a deer — always *something* to keep you awake all night."

So the three of us — Phra Khien, the lay man and myself — set out across the forest. And sure enough, along the way we came across the spot the old man had mentioned. Phra Khien, who had heard the old man's warning, said to me, "Than Ajaan, let's not stop here." But I told him, "We've got to. Whatever's here, we'll find out tonight." So we stopped and pitched camp by the spirit shrines. I had the lay man tear down all the shrines and set them on fire. "I'm not afraid," I said. "I've never seen a spirit who was any match for a monk" — but glancing over at Phra Khien, I could see his face turn pale.

Night fell. We built a fire and chanted the evening service. Then I said, "We all have to believe firmly in the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha." I made a vow to look for no more shelter that night than the shade of a tree, and found a piece of wood to use for my pillow. I was going to be tough with myself, and not shrink from any hardship. I ordered that we sleep fairly far apart, but close enough to hear if one of the others called out. "Don't be too intent of getting any sleep tonight," I said.

After that, each of us entered his umbrella tent, feeling really exhausted from the long day's journey. I sat for a while, doing some more chanting. The lay man slept. Phra Khien lay snoring and mumbling in his sleep for a while and then fell quiet. I began feeling really tired and so lay down too. After a moment, though,

a sound like someone whispering came to me and said, "Get up. Something's going to happen."

I got up with a start and, sure enough, heard a rustling noise about ten meters from where Phra Khien was sleeping. Lighting a candle, I called out to the others to get up. I then lit a fire and we sat there — the three of us, in the middle of the vast, silent forest — saying our chants. A moment after we started chanting there was a very peculiar-sounding birdcall. The old man in the village had said, "If you hear this sort of birdcall, don't lie down. Otherwise a spirit will come and suck your blood dry." So we all went without sleep, sitting up until daybreak.

In the early morning darkness, the lay man fixed rice porridge for us, and after we finished eating we went out for a look around. We found tiger tracks, marks of its digging, and a fresh pile of its dung. Nothing else happened that night.

We waited until it was bright enough to see the lines on our palms, and then set out through the forest. We walked all day until at nightfall we reached a small hill with a crystal-clear waterfall. The sound of falling water echoed throughout the area. We stopped here and rested for the night without any incidents.

The next morning, after we had finished our rice porridge, we set out again. At about 1 p.m. we stopped for rest under the shade of a tree. This is where the lay man said goodbye and hurried on ahead of us. We never saw him again. Phra Khien and I walked on until it was almost dark, when we came to a village. We asked the people there if they had seen anyone walk past their village earlier that afternoon, but it seemed that no one had.

The next day we left for Chieng Saen, where we spent a few days staying in an orchard before heading on to Chieng Rai. In Chieng Rai we stayed at a small cemetery outside of town and there met an old monk, Grandfather Myn Haan, who had been a follower of mine before his ordination. He introduced us to the chief of the Chieng Rai provincial police so that the chief of police could help us on our way back to Lampang. The chief of police seemed happy to help. He got us on a bus that we took as far as Phayao, where we got off and traveled on foot past Phaa Thai cave — the trail was really overgrown — and then on into Lampang. We spent one night at a small temple just to the southwest of the Lampang railroad station, and the next morning set out on foot along the railroad tracks.

We came to a cave at one point — a place named Tham Kaeng Luang (Grand Rapids Cave) — where we spent three nights. It was a comfortable place to stay, very peaceful and quiet. We went for alms in a nearby village, but no one paid

much attention to us. For two days we had nothing to eat but rice — not even a grain of salt.

The third day, before going out for alms, I made a vow: "Today if I don't get anything to eat with my rice, I'm not going to eat at all." Sure enough, I got nothing but a ball of glutinous rice. When we got back to the cave, I sat thinking about the trip ahead of us, and then said to Phra Khien, "Today I'm going to donate my rice to the fish. Even if somebody comes to donate heaps of food, I'm still not going to eat. How about you? Are you with me?"

"I'm afraid I can't go along with you," he answered. "I've had nothing but rice for two days now, and I'm starting to feel weak."

"In that case," I said, "I'm going on ahead. If you want to eat, you can stay here. Maybe someone will come with food for you." So I gathered my things and left. I told myself, "Today I'm not going to ask anyone for food, either by going for alms or by out-and-out asking. Only if someone invites me to have food will I be willing to eat."

After walking for an hour I passed a small village of three households. A woman came running out of one of the houses, raised her hands in respect and invited me into her home to have some food. "My husband shot a barking deer yesterday and I'm afraid of the sin. So I'd like to make merit with a monk. You've just *got* to come to my house and have something to eat."

I was feeling a little hungry from having had nothing but rice to eat for two days, plus not having had anything at all that morning, so I said to myself, "Okay. Go ahead and have a little barking deer." I accepted the woman's invitation, left the railroad tracks and sat down in a grove growing near her home. She invited me into the house, but I said, "This is where I'm sitting, so this is where I'll eat." She brought out two trays of food plus a basket of glutinous rice, and I ate my fill. When I finished I chanted blessings for her and then was on my way.

After two days of walking along the railroad tracks, I reached the town of Uttaradit. Although I had quite a few followers in town, I didn't want to tell anyone I had come, so I went on past the town and stayed in a cemetery near Wat Thaa Pho. I then spent two nights at Wat Thaa Sao, waiting for Phra Khien to catch up with me. When he didn't show up I decided that we had parted ways, and that neither of us had to worry about the other any more.

From there I went to stay in an old temple near Baan Dara (StarVillage) junction, south of Uttaradit. One afternoon at 2 p.m., after just a few days there, I

happened to be sitting in the sala, passing the time of day, when two people came in out of the sun to join me — a monk and a lay man. We started talking about what we were doing and where we were going. The two of them, it turned out, had a buried treasure map and were on their way to dig for the treasure, which according to the map was in Phitsanuloke. The lay man said that his name was Lieutenant Colonel Sutjai, and that he was a retired army officer. As evening came on, they left — where they went to stay, I have no idea.

Early the next morning, before dawn, I heard someone calling me from outside my room. "Now who could that be?" I thought. So I got up and looked out. There was Colonel Sutjai. "What are you doing here?" I asked him.

"I haven't been able to sleep all night," he said. "Every time I close my eyes, I see your face and I keep wondering how you're going to get all the way to Korat traveling alone. I can't help feeling sorry for you. So I'd like to give you ten baht towards your train ticket."

I told him I'd be pleased to accept his money, and had one of the temple boys come and take it to put in safe keeping. Later the following night the thought occurred to me that Colonel Sutjai might be playing a trick on me. "I bet that bill is counterfeit," I thought, so I asked the temple boy to fetch the bill and take a good look at it to see whether or not it was fake. He assured me it wasn't.

The next morning, before dawn, Colonel Sutjai came calling for me again. "I'm worried about the money I gave you," he said. "I'm afraid it won't be enough." Then he added, "When are you leaving for Korat?"

"Tomorrow," I answered.

So he promised, "I'll take you to the station and buy your ticket for you." Then he left. The next day he went and bought the ticket — it cost eleven baht — and put me on the train.

The train pulled into the Nakhorn Sawan station in the middle of the night. I didn't know where I would stay until I spotted an empty sala. I went there and hung up my umbrella tent, put down my bowl and sat down to rest for a while. A middle-aged man came along and asked if he could join me. "If he's a thief," I thought, "I'll be stripped of my bowl and belongings tonight, because I'm dead tired. I'll probably sleep like a log. But what the heck. Let him stay."

As it turned out, nothing happened that night. In fact, early the next morning the man bought some food to donate to me. At seven we boarded the train together,

heading south. He was a native of Kabinburi, in Prajinburi province, and had been up to see his daughter in Phichit.

When we reached Baan Phachi junction I changed trains for Nakhorn Ratchasima (Korat), arriving there at six in the evening. I went to stay with Ajaan Singh, who had founded a monastery and been living there for three years. I asked for news of Ajaan Mun, but Ajaan Singh had no idea of his whereabouts.

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I decided to spend the Rains Retreat that year in Nakhorn Ratchasima province. Just before the rains started, a lay person from Krathoag (now Chokchai) district came and asked Ajaan Singh for a monk to come and stay in his town. The layperson was Khun Amnaad Amnueykit, the District Official there in Krathoag. Ajaan Singh asked me to go, and I decided to accept the invitation. As it turned out, I stayed on, teaching the monks, novices and lay people in Krathoag for two years.

At the end of my first Rains Retreat there, I got news from home that my father was very ill, so I made plans to return home to visit him. Before I left, Khun Amnaad Amnueykit invited me to give a sermon at his home. This was the eighth day after the end of the rains (October 12). At about five in the evening, before I left for Khun Amnaad's house, there was a peculiar incident. A swarm of more than 100 squirrels came running into the monastery and gathered on the porch of the hut belonging to one of the monks, Phra Yen. Nothing like this had ever happened since my arrival in Krathoag, so before leaving the monastery I called all the monks and novices to my quarters for a meeting. "There's going to be an incident tonight, so I want you all to be on your toes. After you've finished the evening chanting,

**(a)** you are to return to your quarters, sit quietly and meditate. Don't sit around talking. Each person should keep to himself.

**(b)** If you have any personal business to take care of, like sewing robes, save it for another night."

I then left for the District Official's house. At seven that evening, after I had been on the sermon seat for half an hour, preaching to the District Official, civil servants and other townspeople about the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha and one's benefactors, two lay men from near the monastery came looking for me, but since I was sitting there preaching with my eyes closed, they didn't dare interrupt. After the sermon was over they informed the District Official

that someone had tried to stab Phra Yen, but he had received only a surface wound.

On hearing this, the District Official called his assistant and a number of policemen, and they went to see what was up at Bong Chii Cemetery Monastery. I went along with them. The officials were able to trace the suspect — a man named Nai In — to a village where they found him hiding out in a friend's house. The District Official had the police take both Nai In and his friend into custody.

The police continued to investigate the matter for several days, while we at the monastery ran our own investigation. We learned that since my coming to spend the rains there at Bong Chii Cemetery Monastery, the way I and the other monks in the monastery had conducted ourselves had received a great deal of praise from the District Official, civil servants, townspeople and most of the people in the nearby villages. Other temples in the area had become jealous as a result and, not wanting us to stay on there, had laid plans to frighten us away by doing us bodily harm.

As for the police, they tried to interrogate Nai In, but didn't get anywhere because he wouldn't confess. So finally the chief of police came and told me, "Whether or not he confesses, I'll still have to keep him behind bars for a while, because he's in my custody. Tomorrow I'll take him to the provincial prison."

Hearing this, I felt sorry for Nai In. To tell the truth, he was a scoundrel from way back, but I had had him run a number of errands for the monastery, such as helping us find firewood, so in a way he was a follower of mine. I thus asked the chief of police to bring Nai In and his friend to see me later in the day.

At about three in the afternoon the chief of police brought the two of them to the monastery. I said to Nai In, "If it's true that you're involved in this, I don't ever want you to do it again. No matter whether it's a case of a monk or a lay person, I want you to stop. If it's not true that you're guilty, then it means you're a good person. So today I'm going to ask the chief of police to give me Nai In. From today onwards I'll ask Nai In not to cause the monastery any trouble. May the chief of police please let Nai In go, so that there'll be no more animosity between us."

That was the end of the matter. From that day on, Nai In became very close to the monastery. If we ever had any errands to be run or work to be done, we could always call on him. As for the people in Chokchai who had once resented our presence, they now began to hold us in awe. The word got around: "One of Ajaan

Lee's student, Phra Yen, was stabbed full force with a scythe, and yet the blade didn't even enter the skin — just gave him a foot-long scratch. If his student is that invulnerable, just think what he's like!"

Actually, the truth of the matter was nothing like that at all, and had nothing to do with Phra Yen's being charmed or invulnerable or anything. What happened was simply that Phra Yen had taken a chair and a sewing machine that evening and placed them on the porch of his hut, which was about a meter off the ground. As he was sitting in the chair, sewing his robes, the attacker standing on the ground tried to stab him in the left shoulder with a long-handled scythe. The handle struck the chair, though, so the scythe left only a surface wound.

Afterwards I called the monks and novices together and drew a number of lessons from the incident. I finished by saying, "Don't lose your nerve if there are any more incidents. I want you all to stay here in peace. I'm going to go visit my father in Ubon."

I then set out for Ubon. Reaching home, I found my father seriously ill, wasting away from old age — he was now 69. I stayed close to him, nursing and caring for him for several months until the rains grew near, when I returned to spend a second Rains Retreat back at Bong Chii Cemetery Monastery. I later received news that he passed away in the middle of the rains, on September 8.

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Towards the end of the Rains Retreat, I began thinking more and more often of Ajaan Mun. I decided, without telling anyone, that I would have to leave the monastery that dry season. I went to Wat Salawan in Nakhorn Ratchasima to take my leave of Ajaan Singh, and he gave his permission for me to go, which pleased me immensely. I returned to Chokchai to say farewell to the monks, novices and lay people there. One of my very good friends, a person who had given a lot of solid support in helping to build and look after the monastery, told me, "If you don't come back here for the next Rains Retreat, I'm going to put a curse on you, you know." That was Doctor Waad, the town doctor in Chokchai. So I told him, "What do you want, after all I've taught you about impermanence?"

So then, with a handful of followers, I went deep into the Ijaan wilderness, passing the branch district of Nang Rong and reaching Phnom Rung mountain just inside the borders of Buriram province. We climbed the mountain and stayed for several days high on the summit.

There on the summit were a number of ancient stone temples and large stone pools filled with water. The mountain was far from any habitation. One day I went without food, but my meditation went well. A few days later we climbed down and spent a night by a pool at the foot of the mountain. The next morning we went for alms and then walked on for a number of days until we reached Talung district in Buriram. It so happened that Khun Amnaad Amnueykit had just been transferred here to be the District Official. We were both very happy to see each other. After staying for a few days, I took my leave of Khun Amnaad so that I could go into Cambodia.

On this trip there were five of us altogether — two boys, two other monks and myself. Khun Amnaad arranged temporary passports for us. We went down into Cambodia, traveling first to Ampil, then passing through a large jungle to Svay Chek, and from there on foot to Sisophon. After our arrival at Sisophon, a number of lay people came to discuss the Dhamma with me. They became very impressed and began to follow me in throngs. When the time came to leave, some of them — both men and women — began to cry.

While I was at Svay Chek there had been one person who held me in great esteem and who brought his daughter to talk with me every day. <sup>7</sup> His daughter told me that she was unmarried. The tone of their voices told me that they wanted me to settle down there. They'd be willing to help me in every way, they said. Just please stay. As the days passed, we seemed to take more and more of a liking to each other. When I could see that things were beginning to get out of hand, I realized that I'd have to be going, so I said goodbye and headed south for Sisophon.

From Sisophon we went on foot to Battambang, where we stayed in the cemetery at Wat Ta-aek, about a kilometer from town. In Battambang I met a lay man who knew Khun Amnaad Amnueykit. He gave me a hearty welcome and introduced me to a lot of people in town. After staying there a good while, we said goodbye and headed for the province of Siem Reap. We camped for a while at a cemetery in the forest, where a number of people came to donate food. From there we left for Angkor Wat, where we stayed and wandered about, looking at all the ancient ruins.

We spent two nights there. The first day we had a meal, the second day we decided not to, because there was hardly anyone to place food in our bowls when we went out for alms.



Leaving Angkor Wat we headed for Phnom Penh. Along the way we climbed a huge, tall mountain: a nice, quiet secluded place with plenty of drinking water. The mountain was called Phnom Kulen — Wild Lychee Mountain. At the summit were scores of wild lychee trees, bearing bright red fruits. About 20 small villages surrounded the base of the mountain. We stayed there a few days in a Vietnamese temple that had a Buddha image carved into the rock of a large overhanging cliff. While there, I took advantage of the opportunity to explore the nearby caves.

Near the temple was a village of about ten households that we were able to depend on for alms. Staying in the temple were two people — a Cambodian monk, about 50 years old and with only one good eye, and a lay follower. Whenever I had nothing else to, I'd sit and discuss Dhamma with the monk. As for the caves, there were two of them: one where I stayed with my following, and the other, about ten meters from the Buddha image, where a large tiger lived. At the time, though, since it was April, the tiger had gone down to live in the lowland forests. When the rains began, it would come back to stay in the cave. One afternoon I left the cave and returned to stay at the Vietnamese temple. Altogether we stayed there for about a week. We then left, going down the west side of the mountain. It took ten hours of climbing to get through the mountains before reaching the flatlands.

We then traveled around to the south of the mountain range and stopped in a forest near a village. There a lay person came to tell me a number of strange stories that really took my fancy. This is the gist of what he had to say: About 30 kilometers from the village were three mountains covered with streams and open forests. The strange thing about the mountains was that if anyone went to cut any of the trees, they would either die a violent death, become seriously ill, or suffer misfortune of one sort or another. Sometimes on the lunar sabbath, in the middle of the night, a bright light would come shooting out of the summit of the third mountain. It seemed that a number of times monks had gone to spend the Rains Retreat on top of the third mountain, but had had to leave in the middle of the retreat, either because of strong winds, rains or lightning strikes.

This being the case, he wanted me to climb to the top of the mountain to see what was there. So the next morning we set out for the third mountain. After climbing to the top, I looked over the area and found it to be a pleasant and inviting place to stay. The people in my following were afraid, though, and began crying that they didn't want to stay, so in the end we had to climb back down. On the way back we passed through a village and then went on to spend the night in a quiet forest nearby.

The next morning, when we went for alms in the village, an old woman carrying a bowl of rice came running after us, calling and waving her arms. We stopped and waited as she caught up with us, kneeled down and placed food in our bowls. After receiving her alms, we headed back to where we were staying, and she followed behind us. When she reached our campsite, she told us, "Last night, just before dawn, I dreamed that someone came and told me to get up and fix some food. A *dhutanga* monk was going to come by on his alms round." So she had gotten up and fixed food just as she had dreamed, and sure enough, met us as we were going for alms, which is why she had been so excited.

That evening the villagers had spread word among themselves to come listen to a sermon, and as darkness fell a lot of them came. By this time I had been wandering around Cambodia for more than a month, to the point where I was able to preach the Dhamma in Cambodian well enough that we could understand one another fairly well.

A few days later I learned from one of the lay people there that a Cambodian monk who had studied the Tripitaka and was expert in translating Pali wanted to come and quiz me on the Dhamma. "That's okay," I told him. "Let him come." And so the next afternoon he actually came. We discussed and debated the Dhamma until we were able to reach a good understanding of each other's practices and ways of conduct. The whole affair went by smoothly and peacefully, without incident.

I spent quite a few days in the area, to the point where I began to feel quite close to many of the lay people there. I then said farewell and started back to Sisophon. Quite a number of lay people, both men and women, followed after us, forming an escort that fell away by stages.

Reaching Sisophon we stayed for two nights and then went to visit a cave in a nearby mountain — a fine, secluded place. A Chinese monk was living there alone, so we sat and discussed the Dhamma. We hit it off so well that he invited me to stay and spend the Rains Retreat there. None of my following, though, wanted to stay on.

From there we walked to the border at Aranyaprathet, where we crossed back into Thailand. After staying a fair while in Aranyaprathet, we headed deep into the forest, skirting the mountain ranges, intending to cross into Nakhorn Ratchasima province via the Buphraam pass.

By this point it was nearing time to stop for the Rains Retreat. There was rain all along the way, leeches were everywhere, and traveling was by no means easy. We decided to come out around Pha-ngawb Mountain and on along through Wang Hawk — LancePalace — Pass until we reached Baan Takhro, Prachantakham district, there in Prajinburi province. The trail along Wang Hawk Pass, if we had kept on going, would have led us through another jungle and then across the border into Nakhorn Ratchasima province at the branch district of Sakae Lang. But we decided not to travel on because the rains were getting very heavy, and so spent the Rains Retreat there in Baan Takhro. This was the year 1934.

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Baan Takhro is set near the foot of a mountain by a large, deep stream that flows down into the district seat at Prachantakham. We spent the rains at the foot of the mountain. One member of my following — Bhikkhu Son — wasn't willing to stay there and so headed through Prajinburi and spent the rains at Kawk Mountain in Nakhorn Nayok province. This left just two of us to spend the rains together — along with the two young boys — in an old sala at the edge of the stream. In the course of the rains there were seven flash floods, sometimes with the water so high that we had to climb up and sleep in the rafters. We seemed to suffer a lot of hardships that year.

The village was thick with poison, and crawling with bandits and thieves: The people there made a steady practice of stealing water buffaloes and cows to kill for meat. I tried to teach them to abandon their evil ways and to do nothing but good, and eventually some of them actually gave up making poison and stopped killing large animals such as water buffaloes and cows. Word of this spread until it reached the ears of the ecclesiastical head of Prajinburi province at Wat Makawk.

At the end of the rains he came up looking for me and had me return with him to the town of Prajinburi. He was in need of meditation monks, he said, so I went along. He introduced me to the chief of police, as well as to the Provincial Governor, Luang Sinsongkhram. I overheard the governor say to the ecclesiastical head, "Ask him to stay here in the province to help teach the people and stamp out banditry in the out-lying districts." Hearing this, I said to myself, "You'd better get out of this province before they put you on a leash."

So I took my leave of the ecclesiastical head of Prajinburi province and took my group to stay in Grandfather Khen Cave in Ito Mountain. From there we headed to the branch district of Sra Kaeo (CrystalPool) in Kabinburi district, where we

went deep into the forest. We went to look over a cave in BigLion Mountain, but I didn't care for what I saw because the air in the cave was dark and stale. So we retraced our steps back down the mountain. That day we took a short cut through the forest, heading for a certain village, but got lost because we were traveling in the middle of the night. We kept walking until about 4 a.m., cutting through virgin forest so as to reach the village, but ended up back practically where we had started, near Sra Kaeo.

The next morning, after our meal, we went into the forest, heading for Chakan (YoungSavage) Mountain, which was about 15 kilometers from Sra Kaeo. Reaching the village at the foot of the mountain, we went to stay in Chakan Cave. The cave was a quiet, secluded spot, free from human disturbances, because the mountain abounded on all sides with fierce animals: tigers, elephants and bears. Deep in the quiet of the night, sitting in meditation, you could hear the calls of the elephants as they went about, breaking off tree branches with their trunks. There was a village about a kilometer from the mountain. We stayed there in the cave a good many days.

From there we cut through a giant forest — a stretch of 70 kilometers with no human habitation. It took two days to get through, and we had to spend two nights sleeping out in the middle of the wilds because there weren't any villages. We kept on going until we crossed the border into Chanthaburi province, passing through Baan Taa Ryang, Baan Taa Muun and on into Makham district. From there we skirted around the forest behind Sra Baab (SinPond) Mountain and reached Khlung district. In Khlung I learned that Khun Amnaad Amnueykit had left government service and was now living in retirement in Chanthaburi. This I was glad to hear.

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I passed through the city of Chanthaburi and went to stay in an open field to the south of town, by the canal to Baan Praduu, before going to visit Khun Amnaad at his home. He found me a quiet place to stay: a burial ground about 800 meters from town. This was an area of bamboo and *taew* trees, thickly overgrown with grass, with only one clearing large enough to stay in: the clearing where they held cremations. The place was called Khlawng Kung (ShrimpCanal) Cemetery. This was how I came to stay there. By this point there was only one other monk staying with me — an old monk who had followed me from Prajinburi — and one boy. The others had left to return home.

As the rains neared, a number of Chanthaburi people asked me to stay and spend the Retreat there, so I went to inform the ecclesiastical head of the province, but he wouldn't allow it. So I had Khun Amnaad go in person to inform the ecclesiastical head of the Southeast, Phra Rajakavi at Wat Debsirin in Bangkok. Phra Rajakavi sent a letter to the provincial head, having him give me permission to spend the rains there in the cemetery.

I first came to stay here in Khlawng Kung Cemetery on March 5, 1935. That first rainy season the practice of the Dhamma began to catch on among a number of different people in the city of Chanthaburi. A monk and a novice came to spend the rains with me. At the end of the rains we went off, wandering from place to place in the province, and even more people became interested in practicing the Dhamma. At the same time, though, a number of people — both monks and lay people — became jealous and resentful and started a full-scale campaign against me. Posters began appearing on the sign boards in the middle of town, making charges against me that became more and more serious as time went on.

One day an old woman, claiming to be a follower of mine, went through town taking up a collection, asking for money and rice, claiming that she had accompanied me on my wanderings. She canvassed the town until she came to the house of Prince Anuwat Woraphong. The Prince called her into his house to question her and afterwards started spreading invidious remarks about me, even though I was completely ignorant of what was going on. He talked to people on the street, in stores and in their homes, saying that I was a no-good vagrant monk, letting my followers wander about pestering people, taking up collections. This suddenly became a big issue all over town. I had no idea what had started the issue.

It so happened that Khun Nai Kimlang, the wife of Khun Amnaad, and Nang Fyang, both of whom knew well what sort of person I was, learned of the rumors and went straight to the home of Prince Anuwat, where they also found the provincial governor. They began to take issue with the Prince, saying, "You've been going around making vicious unfounded charges against our ajaan, and from now on we want you to stop!" This started a big scene right there in front of the provincial governor. Finally, after making an investigation, they discovered that the old woman was connected with the monks at Wat Mai, and was no follower of mine; and that I had never had any women accompany me on my wanderings. That was the end of the matter.

During my second rains in Chanthaburi there was another affair. This time a number of lay people went to the Supreme Patriarch at Wat Bovornives in

Bangkok and charged me with being a fraud. The Supreme Patriarch sent a letter to the provincial head, Phra Khru Gurunatha of Wat Chanthanaram, telling him to look into the matter. So I immediately copied down the information in my monastic identification papers and sent it to the Supreme Patriarch, who then told us to wait where we were, that he would come and see for himself after the end of the Rains Retreat.

And when the rains were over, he came to Chanthaburi. When I learned that the boat he was traveling on had docked at Thaa Chalaeb, I had a contingent of lay people go to greet him. He spent the night at Wat Chanthanaram and the next morning, after breakfast, came to see me at what was now Khlawng Kung Forest Monastery. I invited him to deliver a sermon to the lay people present, but he declined the invitation, saying, "I'm afraid I've never practiced meditation. How could I deliver a meditation sermon?" He then went on to say, "I've learned that a great number of people here hold you in very high esteem. Monks like you are hard to find." With that, he returned to Wat Chanthanaram and then to Bangkok.

During my third rainy season there, the people in Chanthaburi came out in even greater numbers to hear my sermons, to the point where Nai Sawng Kui, the owner of the bus lines, felt moved to announce that he would give a discount to anyone who took his bus to hear the sermons of this ajaan (meaning me). As for myself and the other monks and novices in the monastery, we could take his buses anywhere in town free of charge. Day by day, more and more people — including the provincial governor and district officials in every district — came to know me.

When the rains were over, I went out to wander through the various townships in every district of Chanthaburi province, teaching and delivering sermons to the people. When I returned to the provincial capital, I would go almost every Sunday to deliver sermons in the provincial prison. At that time Phra Nikornbodi was provincial governor; and Khun Bhumiprasat, the district official in Thaa Mai (NewPort). Both of them seemed especially eager to help me get about. Sometimes they would ask me to give sermons to prisoners, either in the monastery or in the district offices. On other occasions, they would ask me to give sermons to the people in the different townships in Thaa Mai district, especially in Naa Yai Aam, a densely forested area crawling with bandits and thieves. I made a constant effort to keep on teaching the people in this way.

The provincial capital continued to be thick with incidents and rumors concocted by people hot-eyed with jealousy, but none of this ever fazed me in the least. Sometimes Khun Nai Kimlang, a supporter I respected as if she were my mother,

would come to me and say, "They're going to make things hard for you in all kinds of ways. They'll either be sending women here, or else gangsters, looking for an opening to smear your name. <sup>8</sup> Are you up to the fight? If not, you'd better go live someplace else."

So I'd answer, "Bring on two more Chanthaburi's. I'm not going to run away. But I can tell you that as soon as there are no more incidents, I probably *will* want to run away."

I kept up my efforts to do good. Some villages in the province wanted meditation monks to come live on a steady basis, and in particular, Khun Bhumiprasat wanted monks to go live at Naa Yai Aam. I didn't have any monks to spare, but I promised to find some for him. I sent a letter to Ajaan Singh, asking for monks, and he sent down a group of five who then went to set up a monastery in Naa Yai Aam.

This was a really poor village. They were hard pressed to find even a shovel to dig post holes for the monks' quarters. After I had sent the monks to live there, I got together a contingent of lay people — headed by Khun Nai Hong, wife of Luang Anuthai, and Khun Nai Kimlang — to go visit them. When we reached the monks' residence in Naa Yai Aam and saw the destitute conditions under which the villagers and monks were living, Khun Nai Kimlang lost her temper: "Here we've brought monks out here to suffer and starve! Don't stay here," she told the monks. "Come back with us to Chanthaburi."

When Ajaan Kongma, the leader of the monks, heard this, he lost nerve and actually decided to return to Chanthaburi. As a result, the monastery fell vacant, with no monks staying on for the rains. After that, Ajaan Kongma went to start a monastery in Baan Nawng Bua — LotusMarsh Village — and trained the lay people there, and in this way helped to spread the Dhamma in Chanthaburi province.

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During the years I made Chanthaburi my home base, I wandered about through a number of other provinces as well. Once I went to Trat. I stayed next to the cemetery at Wat Lamduan along with a following of ten or so people from Chanthaburi. That night around 200 lay people came out to hear a sermon. Just as darkness was falling and I was getting ready to preach, there was an incident: Someone threw three huge bricks into the middle of the assembly. I myself had no idea what this was supposed to mean. Sounds of indignation spread through

the group. That was the year the war with the French started. I had been constantly hearing the sound of guns out off the coast, and as soon as the incident occurred, I thought of bullets. Some people got up and were getting ready to chase after the bandits, so I stopped them. "Don't get involved," I said. "Don't go after them. If they're good people, you should follow them, but if they're bad people, don't. Follow me instead. I'm not afraid of anything — including bullets, not to mention bricks.

*If you're shot in the mouth, it'll come out your rear,  
So there's no one in the world you should fear."*

As soon as they heard this, the whole group fell silent. I then delivered a sermon on the theme, "Non-violence is happiness in the world."

After we had stayed there a fair while, we went on to Laem Ngob district to visit the wife of the district official, who was related to one of the lay people in the group. Two days later, I got the group to take a boat across the strait to Ko Chang (Elephant Island), where we stayed deep in the quiet forest. After teaching them for a while, I took them back to Laem Ngob.

We went to stay in an area to the north of the district offices, under a giant banyan tree. Altogether there were almost twenty lay people with me. Each of us arranged his own place to stay. When we were all settled, at about three in the afternoon, I started feeling tired, so I entered my umbrella tent to rest for a while. I wasn't able to get any rest, though, because of all the noise the people were making — cutting firewood, talking, starting fires. So I got up from my meditation, stuck my head out of the tent and called out, "What's the matter with you all?"

Before I could say anything more, I saw a huge cloud of sea mosquitoes off the coast, heading for the shade of the banyan tree. It occurred to me, "I'm a person of good will. I haven't killed a living being since I was ordained." So I opened my mosquito netting, folded it up and said to all the monks and laypeople there, "Everyone put out your fires, right now. Light incense, fold up your mosquito netting and sit together in meditation. I'm going to meditate and spread good will to fight off the mosquitoes — without pulling any punches." Everyone obeyed. I gave a five-minute sermon on good will, and the cloud of mosquitoes dissolved away and virtually disappeared. Not a single one of them bit anyone in our group.

We spent the night there. In the evening a large number of lay people, including the District Official, civil servants and others in town, came to hear a sermon, so I preached the Dhamma to them.



After staying on for a fair while, we set out on foot through Khlawng Yai township and across Ito Mountain. Reaching Laem Yang, we met one of my followers who had brought a boat from Chanthaburi to transport plowshares. He invited us to return to Chanthaburi on his boat, The Golden Prince. His home was in Laem Singh (Lion's Point), not far from the town of Chanthaburi. So we returned to Khlawng Kung Forest Monastery and there I spent the Rains Retreat as usual.

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During the rains that year I fell ill. I came down with fierce stomach pains, and no matter what I took for them, they wouldn't go away. One night I sat up in meditation almost till dawn. At about 4 a.m. I fell half-asleep and dreamed, "My disease is a karma disease. There's no need to take any medicine." That is, while I was sitting in meditation, I felt absolutely still, almost as if I had fallen asleep, and a vision appeared: a birdcage containing a thin, famished dove. The meaning was this: I had once kept a pet dove and had forgotten to feed it for several days running. This karma was now bearing fruit, causing me to have gastritis. Therefore, there was only one way to cure it — to do good by way of the mind. I decided it was time to go off alone.

After the end of the Rains Retreat I went off wandering, teaching and preaching to the lay people as I went, by way of Thaa Mai all the way to Paak Nam Prasae, Klaeng district in Rayong province. There I stayed off to one side of the town. A lot of townspeople, mostly Chinese, came to make merit and donate food. There was one Chinese woman about 40 years old who came and said she wanted to shave her head and become a nun. "I want to go off wandering with you," she told me. She was already dressed in white and ready to be ordained. But an incident occurred: two of her sons came and pleaded with her to go back home. It seemed that she had another child, only two months old, but still she wasn't willing to go back. This created a big disturbance.

All that while it seemed that the lay people wouldn't leave me in peace. During the day, I had no time for myself. At night I had to preach.

One day I crossed over to the west of town, hoping to evade the Chinese woman, who had gone back home to gather her things. As I was going through town I passed one of her sons heading in the opposite direction. After I had finished my meal that day I decided to get away from people by going deep into a thorn-infested cemetery. Under the shade of a low tree I spread out a reed mat and lay down to rest. Before closing my eyes, I made a vow: "If it's not yet 2 p.m., I won't leave this spot."

After a moment or so there was a rustling sound up in the top of the tree. I looked up and saw that a nest of large red ants had broken open. This was because there was a vine wrapped around the nest. I had sat down on the base of the vine, and so now red ants were spilling out onto my mat, swarming all over me, biting in earnest.

I sat right up. They were all over my legs. I made up my mind to spread thoughts of good will, dedicating the merit to all living beings and making a vow: "Since becoming ordained, I've never even thought of killing or harming a living being. If in a previous lifetime I've ever eaten or harmed any of you all, then go ahead and bite me until you've had your fill. But if I've never harmed you, then let's call an end to this. Don't bite me at all."

Having made my vow, I sat in meditation. My mind was still — absolutely silent. The rustling sound of the ants disappeared. Not a one of them bit me. I really felt amazed at the Dhamma. Opening my eyes, I found them swarming in huge numbers in a line around the edge of the mat.

At about 11 o'clock I heard the voices of two people coming in my direction. As they came nearer, they suddenly started crying out in Chinese, "*Ai Ya! Ai Ya!*" I heard them beat themselves with branches. Laughing to myself, I called out to them, "What's the matter?"

"Red ants," they answered. "They're biting us." As a result, neither of them was able to get anywhere near me. When 2 p.m. finally arrived, I left my resting place and came out to where I had originally pitched camp. There I learned that the two Chinese who had come to see me were sons of the woman who wanted to go with me, so I sat and talked with them. They pleaded with me to help them, not to let their mother go with me, because the baby was still small and their father was an old man.

When evening came, the Chinese woman showed up, dressed in white, an umbrella in her hand and a bag over her shoulder. "I'm coming with you," she said. I tried to discourage her with frightening stories, but she answered bravely, "I'm not afraid of anything at all. All I ask is that you let me go with you."

So I said, "If I don't eat, what will you do?"

"I won't eat either," she answered.

"And what if I don't even drink water?"

"I won't either," she answered. "I'm willing to die if I have to." She continued, "I've been miserable because of my family for many years now. But as soon as I met you I felt at peace. Brave. Happy and free. Now I can even teach the Dhamma in your place."

To tell the truth, her Thai wasn't very clear at all. So I turned and started quizzing her. Her reasonings and explanations were pure Dhamma. It was amazing. When she finished, all the lay people present — who had heard plenty of Dhamma in their time — raised their hands to their foreheads in respect. But I felt heavy at heart for her sake.

Finally I had to tell her that women couldn't go with monks, and for the next few days I continued to instruct and console her. Ever since setting out from Chanthaburi — 31 days altogether — I had been suffering pains in my stomach every day, but as soon as this incident occurred they vanished.

I continued teaching her until she was willing to follow my instructions. Finally she agreed to return home. So I told her, "Don't worry. Whenever I can find the time, I'll be back to see you. I'm staying right nearby, in Khlawng Kung Forest Monastery." Up to that point she had had no idea where I was from, but as soon as I told her this, she seemed both pleased and content. So when we had reached an understanding, I returned as usual to Chanthaburi. The pains in my stomach were gone.

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When the rains came again, I stayed and taught the people in Chanthaburi as before. During my years in Chanthaburi I would go off at the end of the rains each year and wander through the nearby provinces, such as Rayong, Chonburi, Prajinburi, Chachoengsao, and then would return to spend the rains in Chanthaburi. In 1939, though, I decided to travel through India and Burma, and so made all the necessary arrangements to get a passport. That November I left Chanthaburi for Bangkok, where I stayed at Wat Sra Pathum. I contacted people in the various government offices and the British Embassy, and they were all helpful in every way. Luang Prakawb Nitisan acted as my sponsor, contacting the embassy, guaranteeing my financial standing and my purity vis a vis the rules of the Sangha and the laws of the land. When everything was in line with all the necessary legal procedures and I had all my necessary papers, I left for Phitsanuloke. From there I headed for Sukhothai and then on to Tak. In Tak I stayed in a temple while the lay person with me went to buy plane tickets to Mae Sod. He didn't succeed in getting the tickets, though, because all the flights were

booked full. (On this trip I was accompanied by a follower named Nai Chin who, though a little retarded, was good at making himself useful.)

The next morning, after our meal, we set out on foot from Tak and crossed over Phaa Waw mountain. By the time we reached Mae Sod we had spent two nights sleeping on the trail. In Mae Sod we stayed in a Burmese temple named Jawng Tua Ya — i.e., Forest Temple. There were no monks there, though, only a Shan hilltribesman who knew Burmese. We stayed with him a little over a week until I had learned a fair amount of Burmese, and then went on.

As soon as we had crossed the Moei River and reached the town on the other side, a man of about 30 came running to welcome us. He invited us into his truck, saying he would take us to where we wanted to go. He was Thai, a native of Kamphaeng Phet, and had left home and come to live in Burma for almost 20 years now. The two of us — Nai Chin and I — accepted his invitation and got into the truck.

We rode into a forest and started up a tall mountain, the road curving back and forth. It was 2 p.m. before we left the mountain range and reached level ground. We kept going until we reached Kawkareik (Jik Swamp), and just as darkness fell we reached his home. There we spent the night. At about 4 a.m. a Burmese woman brought some rice porridge to donate to me, and told me to eat it right then and there. I refused because it wasn't yet dawn, so she left and waited outside until it was light.

After daybreak, when I had finished my meal, the wife of the man in whose house we were staying got us onto the bus to Kyondo (Steamboat) Landing. From there we took the boat to Moulmein. The ride lasted about four hours. While we were on the boat, Indians and Burmese came to talk with me, but I couldn't understand much of what they were saying. At about four in the afternoon the boat reached Moulmein. From here we had to take another boat across the river to Martaban, a ride that took a fair while. Reaching the shore we could see the railroad station far in the distance.

The train wasn't going to leave until 7 p.m., we learned at the station, so we went to wait under the shade of a tree. A young man, about 30 years old and very well-mannered, came and approached us, saying, "You have special permission to sit and wait in the train before it leaves, because you're Thai and have come a long way." He called me "*Yodhaya Gong Yi.*"

So I said in English, "Thank you very much."

He smiled, raised his hands in respect, and asked in English, "Where do you come from?"

"I come from Siam."

Then we went to rest in the train car. Some of the railway officials came to chat with me, and we were able to understand one another fairly well, speaking in Burmese mixed with English. When the time came, the train left. We traveled by night, and the air was very cold. I slept all wrapped up in a blanket. Nai Chin sat up and watched over our things. When the train reached the station at Pegu, a woman about 30 or so got on and sat down right near where I was sleeping and started asking me questions in Burmese, some of which I could understand and some of which I couldn't. I sat up to talk with her, in order to be polite. I said in Burmese, "I'm going to Rangoon."

"Where will you stay?"

"Schwe Dagon."

We talked using sign language. She seemed quite taken with me. The train traveled on until about 5 a.m., when she got off. Nai Chin and I stayed on until the train reached Rangoon at dawn, just as the monks were going out for alms.

A lay person came running into the train car and helped us with our things, as if he knew us well. He invited us into his car. We got in and sat down without saying a word. He took us to Schwe Dagon Pagoda, where we found a place to stay. The man — his name was Mawng Khwaen — turned out to be a very faithful supporter all during our stay in Rangoon, looking after our needs and helping us in every way.

We stayed twelve days at the Pagoda and got to know a good number of Burmese lay people. We were able to converse and understand one another fairly well.

Nai Chin and I then left Rangoon, taking the boat at the city docks and heading on to India. The boat took two nights and three days to cross the Bay of Bengal, reaching the docks at Calcutta just at dark. On the boat I met a Bengali monk from Kusinara. We discussed the Dhamma, sometimes in Pali, sometimes in Bengali, sometimes in English. Sometimes in one sentence we'd have to use up to three languages before we could understand each other, starting out in Bengali, going on in Pali, and finishing off in English. It never occurred to me to feel embarrassed about not being able to speak correctly, though, because I

really *couldn't* speak correctly. Even what I could say, I couldn't pronounce properly. We seemed to become close friends during our time out on the ocean.

When we landed at the Calcutta docks we took a rickshaw to the Maha Bodhi Society Center, where we stayed in the Nalanda Square Buddhist Temple. There I made friends with a Thai monk, a student of Lokanatha named Phra Baitika Sod Singhseni, who helped get me oriented to India.

The Society gave me special privileges there during my stay. Living and eating conditions were very convenient. Altogether there were eight monks staying at the temple. We had to eat vegetarian food. When mealtime came we would sit around in a circle, each of us with a separate platter onto which we would dish our rice and curries. After I had stayed for a fair while I left to tour the ancient Buddhist holy places.

It made me heartsick to see the state of Buddhism in India. It had deteriorated to the point where there was nothing left in the area of practice. Some monks would be sleeping in the same room with women, sitting in rickshaws with women, eating food after noon. They didn't seem very particular about observing the monastic discipline at all. Thinking about this, I didn't want to stay on.

At that time India wasn't yet especially interested in Buddhism. According to figures gathered by the Maha Bodhi Society, there were just over 300,000 Buddhist in the country, and only about 80 monks — including monks from England, China, Mongolia, Tibet, Germany, etc. — living under very difficult conditions. Hardly anyone seemed interested in donating food to them.

We set out for Bodhgaya, taking the train from Howrah Station at 7 p.m. and arriving in Benares at eleven the next morning. From there we took a horse carriage to the Deer Park in Sarnath — the spot where the Buddha delivered his first sermon, the Wheel of Dhamma, to the five brethren — about eight miles from Benares. When we got there I felt elated. It was a broad, open area with old chedis and plenty of Buddha images kept in the museum.

We stayed there several days and then went on to pay our respects to the spot of the Buddha's *parinibbana* in Kusinara, which is now called Kasia. What was once a city had now become open fields. Riding in the bus past the broad fields, bright green with wheat, my eyes and heart felt refreshed. At Kasia we found the remains of old temples and the spot of the Buddha's *parinibbana*, which had been excavated and restored. There was a tall-standing chedi, not quite as large as the chedi at Sarnath, containing relics of the Buddha.

The next morning we went on to pay our respects to the site of the Buddha's cremation, about a mile from the spot of his *parinibbana*. This was now nothing but fields. There was an old ruined chedi — nothing but a mound of bricks — with a large banyan tree clinging to the ruins. A Chinese monk had fixed himself a place to stay up in the tree and was sitting in meditation there. That evening we returned to Kasia.

The next morning, after our meal, we took a bus to the train station and got on the train back to Benares. While I was staying in Sarnath I had a chance to see the Hindus wash away their sins, as they believe, on the bank of the Ganges, which flows right past the center of Benares. The old buildings of the city looked really bizarre. I once asked a professor of history and geography, and he told me that for 5,000 years the city has never been abandoned. It has simply been moved to follow the changing course of the Ganges.

This river is held to be sacred because it flows from the heights of the Himalayas. To bathe in its waters during their religious festival, they believe, is to wash one's sins away. In the old days, whenever someone was sick and about to die, they would carry him to the edge of the river. As soon as he breathed his last, they would give the corpse a shove and send it rolling into the water. Whoever was able to die this way, they felt, earned a lot of merit and would be assured against falling into hell. If a person wasn't able to die right there, his relatives would bring the cremation ashes to scatter on the water. At present, this custom has died out. All that remains is the custom of going to bathe and wash away one's sins during the festival on the full moon day of the second lunar month, which they hold to be an auspicious day.

If you go to watch, you'll see huge numbers of people dressed in their best clothes, their heads wrapped in cloth, coming in throngs down to the river. You'll hardly be able to get out of their way. When they reach the river, they pay their respects to their gods at the Hindu temples on the river bank.

Before bathing, the people have to worship Siva. Right in the middle of the temples are symbols of the male and female genitals, about the size of a rice-winnowing basket. The people come and sprinkle these with water, flowers, sweetmeats, silver and gold, and then go stand in lines at the water's edge. There you can see hairy yogis with long scraggly beards sitting in meditation on the river bank — some of them not wearing any clothes at all. The men and women who are going to wash away their sins will get into a boat until it's absolutely full. The boat is then rowed out into the middle of the river and overturned. Everyone bobs up and down in the water and this, they believe, washes away their sins.

Some people stand with their hands stretched to the sky, some stand on one leg, some turn up their faces to stare at the sun. If I were to give a full description of all their different beliefs and practices, there'd be lots more to tell.

That day I wandered around until dark and then returned to where I was staying in Sarnath.

Sarnath is a large, wide open area, at least 800 hectares in size, with clumps of trees scattered about and lots of ruins of old sanctuaries built entirely out of stone. People still go to worship the Buddha images in the ruins. Several years ago a Hawaiian woman, half-Caucasian, became so impressed with Anagarika Dhammapala that she gave him money to restore the area and build a center for the Maha Bodhi Society. In the area there are four temples:

1. A Singhalese temple. This is a branch of the Maha Bodhi Society. The executive secretary of the society is a monk, and the society's aim is to spread Buddhism throughout the world.

2. A Burmese temple.

3. A Chinese temple supported by Ow Bun Haw, owner of the Tiger Balm Drug Company. The monks in the temple are from Peking.

4. A Jain temple set right next to the chedi built by King Asoka. The spire of the chedi is now broken off, and what remains is only about 16 meters tall. Apparently it once held relics of the Buddha, but these are now placed in the museum at Calcutta.

I wandered around making a detailed survey of the whole area and became 100 percent convinced that the Buddha actually delivered the Wheel of Dhamma here. The spot where he sat while delivering the sermon is still marked. In another spot is a vacant, fallen-down sanctuary with the inscription, "Built by King..." And in the museum is a fragment of a stone column, about three or four meters tall and as large around as a mortar for pounding rice. There is also a very beautiful Buddha image carved out of stone, a yard across at the base, with the inscription, "Built by Asoka Maharaja."

After I had acquainted myself fairly well with the area, we went by train down to Bodhgaya. Getting off the train, we took a horse carriage through the streets of the town to the resthouse run by the Maha Bodhi Society. The town is broad open and very pleasant, with hills and a river — the Neranjara — flowing near the market. Although the river is shallow, it has water flowing all year around, even



in the dry season. A ridge of hills lies across the river, and in the middle of the ridge is a spot where the Buddha once stayed, named Nigarodharama. The remains of Lady Sujata's house are nearby. Further along is the Anoma River, which is very broad and filled with sand. In the dry season, when the water is low, it looks like a desert with only a trickle of water flowing through.

We turned back, crossed to the other side of the Neranjara and went on a ways to a chedi surrounded by a clump of flame trees. This spot — called Mucalinda — is where the Buddha sat under the shelter of a serpent's hood. In the area around the Bodhi tree where the Buddha gained Awakening are scores of Buddha images and tiny old chedis carved out of stone, which people of various sects still go to worship.

After staying a fair while in Bodhgaya, we returned to Calcutta for a short stay at the Nalanda Square Buddhist Temple. I then took my leave of all my good friends there and got on the boat at the Calcutta docks. This was March, 1940. The fumes of the coming World War were growing thick and nearing the combustion point in Germany. I saw a lot of battleships in the Indian Ocean as our boat passed by.

After spending three days and two nights out on the ocean, we reached the docks in Rangoon. We went to stay at the Schwe Dagon Pagoda, visited our old benefactors, and after a fair while took the train, heading back to Thailand. At that time there were no commercial flights, so we had to return by the route we had come. When we reached Mae Sod, I was feeling weary from having crossed the mountains, so we bought tickets for the Thai commercial flight from Mae Sod to Phitsanuloke. There we caught the train down to Uttaradit, where we stayed at Wat Salyaphong. After visiting the lay people and my old followers there, I went down to stay for a while at the Big Rock at Sila Aad (StoneDais), and then took the train to Bangkok. There I stayed at Wat Sra Pathum before returning to spend the rains, as usual, in Chanthaburi.

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Altogether I spent 14 rainy seasons in Chanthaburi, to the point where I almost came to regard it as my home. At present there are eleven monasteries that I founded in the province:

**1)** Wat Paa Khlawng Kung (Shrimp Canal Forest Monastery), Chanthaburi district;

**2)** Wat Sai Ngam (Beautiful Banyan Monastery), Baan Nawng Bua, Chanthaburi district;

3) Wat Khao Kaew (Chinese Boxwood Mountain Monastery), Chanthaburi district;

4) Wat Khao Noi (Little Mountain Monastery), Thaa Chalaeb;

5) Wat Yang Rahong (Stately Rubber Tree Monastery), Thaa Mai district;

6) Wat Khao Noi (Little Mountain Monastery), Thaa Mai district;

7) Wat Khao Jam Han, Laem Singh district;

8) Wat Laem Yang (Rubber Tree Point Monastery), Laem Singh district;

9) Wat Mai Damrong Tham, Khlung district;

10) Wat Baan Imang, Khlung district; and

11) Samnak Song Saam Yaek at the Agriculture Experimental Station near the waterfall on Sra Baab Mountain.

All of these place have monks living on a regular basis. Some of them are full-fledged monasteries, while the others are officially still just "monks" residences."

In 1941 the war with the French and the Second World War broke out. During the war and after, I wandered about in various provinces until 1949. With the war finally over, I thought of going back to India again. So in November of that year I got ready to apply for a new passport.

Going to India this time turned out to be complicated by the fact that the war was newly over. When I got ready to apply for my passport, I asked the person who looked after my funds, Khun Amnaad, how much money there was. His answer: "70 baht." But just the application fee for a new passport was 120 baht. This being the case, the lay people who knew of my plans came to dissuade me from going, but I told them, "I have to go."

"But 70 baht isn't enough for the trip!"

"The money isn't taking the trip," I told them. "I am."

With this, my followers understood that I really did have to go, and one by one they began to gather funds for my travel expenses. One day Phraya Latphli Thamprakhan, along with Nai Chamnaan Lyyprasoed, came to stay at the

monastery. When they learned I was going to India, we had the following exchange: Phraya Latphli put two questions to me: "1) Why go? Each of us already has the Dhamma inside. 2) Do you know their language?"

I answered, "Burmese and Indians are people, just like me. Are there any people in the world who don't know the language of people?"

Phraya Latphli: "How are you going to go? Do you have enough money?"

"Always enough."

Phraya Latphli: "What will you do if your money gives out?"

"It'll probably give out the way cloth gives out: a little bit at a time. Don't you think I'll know in advance before it's all gone?"

Phraya Latphli: "Do you know any English?"

"I'm 40 years old. If I studied English or Hindi, I bet I could do better than English or Hindi children."

We didn't have the chance to talk further, so Phraya Latphli added, "I was just testing you."

"No offense taken," I told him, "but I had to speak that way."

Not long after that, when the lay people, monks and novices had canvassed among themselves and come up with a little more than 10,000 baht to help with my travel expenses, I left Chanthaburi for Bangkok, where I stayed at Wat Boromnivasa. With the assistance of a number of my followers who were policemen — headed by Police Colonel Sudsa-nguan Tansathit — I started to apply for my passport and visas.

Getting my money exchanged took a lot of running around, and almost didn't succeed because at that time the price of the British pound on the black market had risen to 50 baht, while the official exchange rate was 35. We were sent from one place to another, and as things got more and more complicated we began to give up hope. So I made a vow: "I'm going to visit friends and the spots where the Buddha once dwelled. On my last trip things still weren't clear, so I want to go once more. If I'm really going to get to go this time, may someone come and help get my money exchanged."

Four days after I had made my vow, Nai Bunchuay Suphasi (now a lieutenant with the Mounted Police) showed up and asked me, "Than Phaw, have you been able to exchange your money yet?"

"No, not yet."

"Then I'll take care of it for you."

For a week after that he went around making contacts with the Treasury Ministry, the Education Ministry and the Interior Ministry. He received letters of recommendation from his friends and a letter of guarantee from the Assistant Minister of the Interior, Lieng Chayakaan, now a member of the Lower House, representing Ubon Ratchathani province. He then went to the National Bank, where at first he was told that my case "didn't qualify for permission to exchange at the official rate." So he went to consult Nai Jarat Taengnoi and Nai Sompong Janthrakun, who worked in the National Bank. Finally I was given permission to exchange at the official rate on the recommendation of Nai Jarat, who supported my request on the grounds that my trip was for the purpose of spreading Buddhism abroad, which was in the interest both of the nation and of the religion. I thus exchanged my money for, altogether, 980 pounds sterling.

Then, with my money exchanged, I applied for my passport and visas. In the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Nai Prachaa Osathanon, head of the Passport Office, took care of everything for me, including contacting his friends in the Thai embassies in Burma and India. I then applied for my visas at the British Embassy. Everything was now ready for me to go.

So in February, 1950, I left Thailand by plane. Nang Praphaa, a follower of mine who worked with Thai Airways, helped me get a ticket at a reduced rate, almost 50 percent off the full fare. The plane left Don Muang Airport at 8 a.m. I was accompanied on this trip by a monk named Phra Samut and a lay man, Nai Thammanun. At about 11 a.m. the plane reached the Rangoon Airport, where I was met by officials from the Thai embassy: M.L. Piikthip Malakun, Nai Supan Sawedmaan and Nai Sanan. They took me to stay in a sanctuary attached to the Schwe Dagon Pagoda. I stayed in Burma about 15 days, going around to see the sights in Rangoon — although there was little to see but bombed-out ruins. The Karen war was flaring up near Mandalay.

One day we went to Pegu to pay our respects to a large reclining Buddha image in a township near there. We met Burmese troops keeping a watch over the area. They were very helpful: Wherever we went, a contingent of twelve soldiers went

along. When we stopped for the night, they stayed as our bodyguard. We spent the night on Mutao Chedi, whose spire had broken off. All night long we heard nothing but the boom of the big guns, so I asked one of the soldiers with us, "What are they shooting?"

"They're shooting to frighten off the Communists," he answered.

Early the next morning two Burmese women came to talk with us, and then invited us to eat at their home.

After I had finished seeing the sights in Rangoon, I got ready to go on to India.

While I was in Rangoon I met a Thai, named Saiyut, who had been ordained as a monk in Burma. He took me to an old palace to meet a Burmese princess, 77 years old, the daughter of King Thibaw of Mandalay. We sat talking for a while. I described Thai customs to the princess, and she described Burmese customs to me. In the course of our conversation, she mentioned to me, "I'm Thai, you know," and then asked me in Thai, "Do you like *khanom tom*?" but didn't want to say much more than that. From what she said, I gathered that her ancestors had been carried off from Thailand when the Burmese sacked Ayutthaya. Her name was Sudanta Chandadevi.

She then asked a favor of me. "At the moment I have no more income," she said. This was because a new government had just come into power and cut the stipends of the old nobility. "Please take pity on me. You and I are both Thai. It would be good if you could put in a word for me at the Thai embassy."

"Don't worry," I told her. "I'll help."

So I took the princess' case to M.L. Piikthip Malakun. Both he and his wife were good-hearted people. M.L. Piikthip took me to see Phra Mahiddha, the Ambassador to Burma at the time. Meeting him was like meeting an old relative. The entire embassy staff was very helpful. Before I left for India I recommended that they help the princess both on an official and on a personal basis.

In March, 1950, I left Rangoon by plane, reaching Calcutta Airport at about four in the afternoon. The captain of the flight turned out to be an old friend — he has since died in an airplane crash in Hong Kong. When we took off he boasted that he could fly the plane any way I liked — high, low, reckless. He said that he'd take me up to 10,000 feet. We ran into a lot of turbulence near the Himalayan mountains, and the air got so cold I had to leave the cockpit, return to my seat and wrap myself up in a blanket.

When we landed we parted ways because airline personnel had special rights, unlike ordinary passengers. As for me, I had to have my things inspected, my health certificates inspected — but when it came to the "darkroom," they made a special exception in my case. Inside the "darkroom" the light was blinding. Everyone who went inside had to strip naked so that the officials could inspect him. But luckily there was a Sikh who, when he saw me stick my head into the room, smiled at me as a sign that he would help me out. As a result, I didn't have to be inspected.

We waited there at the airport until sunset, when a Westerner came and politely told us that a company car was about to come and pick us up. A moment or so later we piled our things into the car. We traveled a good many miles into Calcutta and went to stay at the Maha Bodhi Society. When we arrived we found that the executive secretary, an old friend of mine, wasn't there. He had taken some of the Buddha's relics to a celebration in New Delhi and then gone on to Kashmir. The monks who were staying at the Society, though, were very helpful in every way because I had been a member of the Society for many years. They fixed us a place to stay on the third floor of the building.

While there we spent many days contacting the immigration authorities before our visa papers could be straightened out. I stayed at the Maha Bodhi Society until it neared time for the rains, when I made plans to go on to Ceylon. I took my draft to the bank, but there learned that the bank that had sold me the draft had no branches in India. The bank therefore wouldn't accept the draft. They went on to tell me that to exchange the draft I would have to go all the way to London. This is when things started looking bad. I checked our funds — Nai Thammanun had about 100 rupees left. It was going to be hard to get around. Yet, at the same time, we had more than 800 pounds sterling with us that the Indian banks wouldn't accept because there was a lot of anti-British feeling at the time. They didn't want to use the British pound, and didn't want to speak English unless they really had to. So as a result, we were caught out in the rain along with the British.

Finally I made up my mind to chant, meditate and make a vow: May I receive some help in my monetary problems. And then one day, at about five in the evening, Nai Thanat Nawanukhraw, a commercial attache with the Thai consulate, came to visit me and asked, "Than Ajaan, do you have money to use?"

"Yes," I answered him, "but not enough."

So he pulled out his wallet and made a donation of 2,000 rupees. Later that evening my friend who was the executive secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society

returned and invited me up to his room for a chat. He gave me a warm welcome and then we talked in Pali. "Do you have enough money?" he asked. "Don't be bashful. You can ask for whatever you need at any time."

"Thank you very much," I answered in English, and he smiled in response. From that day on I was put at my ease in every way.

Just as the rains were about to begin, a monk who was a very good friend of mine — an official at Sarnath named Sangharatana — invited us to go spend the rains there, and so I accepted his invitation. The following morning he went on ahead, and then two days before the beginning of the Rains Retreat we followed along. At about noon the next day we reached his temple. My friends there had fixed places for us to stay, one to a room, in a large 40-room dormitory. Thus I spent the Rains Retreat there in Sarnath.

Things were made very convenient for us during the rains. The friends I had made during my first trip were still there. Eating arrangements were also convenient. Every day, early in the morning, they'd bring Ovaltine and three or four chappatties to your room, and just that was enough to fill you up. But then a little later in the morning they'd serve a regular meal with bean and sesame curries and rice — but no meat. We ate vegetarian-style, although some days there would be fish.

There was chanting every evening during the Rains Retreat. They chanted just like we do in Thailand, only very fast. When the chanting was over I'd go to pay my respects to the great ruined chedi to the north of the sanctuary. Some days I'd go into Benares to look at the temples of the Hindus, Tibetans, Burmese, Singhalese, etc. One night, towards the end of the rains, when the moon was bright, I went to sit alone in front of the sanctuary after we had finished our chants. I sat there in meditation in the middle of the bright, moonlit night, focusing on the top of the chedi, thinking of King Asoka, who had done so much for the religion. After I had focused on the chedi a long while, a brilliant light began to flicker and flash around the trees and the chedi. I thought to myself: "Relics of the Lord Buddha probably really do exist."

One day, when the rains were almost over, the officials of the Maha Bodhi Society invited us to go to the airport to meet a plane carrying relics of Phra Moggallana and Phra Sariputta that were on their way back from a celebration organized by the Indian government in New Delhi. So we all went along to the airport. When the plane landed, a little after 11 a.m., they had us get on the plane to receive the small bronze chedi containing the relics. We then took the chedi to the Sarnath

Maha Bodhi Society. I didn't ask for a chance to look at the relics because I wasn't really interested. Afterwards they sent the relics for safe keeping to the Calcutta office, and so I never got to see them.

After the rains were over I began receiving letters — some by special delivery, others by ordinary mail — from Thailand and Burma. The gist of them all was that they wanted me to return right away to Rangoon because Princess Sudanta Chandadevi was now receiving a stipend and was overjoyed. Her children had gotten their friends together and were planning to build a temple in Rangoon, so would I please come right away and help with the arrangements.

Learning this I hurried back to Calcutta, got my travel papers in order and flew to Rangoon. There I was met at the airport by members of the temple committee. They took me straight to the princess' palace, where a committee of 30 or so people were in the midst of holding a meeting. The committee — composed of old nobility, government officials, merchants and householders — was discussing plans to buy land for the temple: seven acres on a tall hill. The owner was willing to sell the land for around 30,000 rupees. When I had learned the general outlines of their proposal, I returned to stay, as before, at Schwe Dagon.

I then took the matter to the Thai embassy to seek their advice. By that time Phra Mahiddha had been transferred to another country, leaving M.L. Piikthip Malakun acting in his place. He told me that it would be good to handle the matter through official channels so that the embassy would be in a position to give its full cooperation. As for the temple committee, they were looking for help from Thailand because their objective was to build a temple Thai in every way. The chairman of the committee was an old man of about 70, a former politician who in the old days had commanded great respect. He was the mentor of U Nu, the prime minister of Burma. It seemed to me that the matter was sure to come through. I was put in contact with scores of Thai people in Rangoon, and everyone seemed enthusiastic about the project.

Not long afterwards, though, I started receiving frequent letters from Bangkok containing news that didn't sound very good, some of it having to do with Nai Bunchuay Suphasi, so I decided to return to Thailand in order to contact the Thai government and Sangha and inform them of the proposal on my own.

In December, 1950, I took a plane from Rangoon to Bangkok — the monk who had gone with me to India had already returned a good many days before. In Bangkok I stayed with Somdet Phra Mahawirawong (Uan) at Wat Boromnivasas. I informed the Somdet of the plans to build a temple in Rangoon. He thought the



matter over several days, and just as he was about to give me permission to fly back to Burma, I ran into interference. A number of monks, having heard the news that a temple was going to be built in Rangoon, started getting into the act, saying that Ajaan Lee wouldn't be able to succeed without them. They had received letters to that effect from Rangoon, they said. How they were able to know that, I have no idea. These monks were all titled, high-ranking ecclesiastical officials right here in Bangkok.

When I learned this, I dropped the whole matter and was no longer involved. I sent a letter to the Thai embassy in Burma, asking to withdraw from the proposal. That finished it off. To this day I have yet to see anyone build the temple.

This being the way things were, I left Wat Boromnivasa and returned to visit my supporters in Chanthaburi. During this period there were all sorts of people, jealous and angry with me, who tried to smear my name in every conceivable way, but I'd rather not name their names because I believe they helped me by making me more and more determined.

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With the approach of the rainy season I left Chanthaburi to return to Wat Boromnivasa, and then went to teach meditation to the lay people at Wat Saneha, Nakhorn Pathom province. From there I went to stay at Wat Prachumnari, Ratchaburi province, at the request of Chao Jawm Sapwattana, head of the temple committee. I stayed at this temple several days, and during that time there were a lot of very strange events.

One morning a woman of about 20 came and sat in front of the sermon seat. A moment later she went into convulsions. So I made some lustral water and sprinkled her with it. I started questioning her and learned that there was a spirit of a man who had died a violent death dwelling in the area, and that it would possess people, causing them to be covered with hives, each swelling about the size of your thumb. When I learned this, I had no medicine to give her, but I was chewing betel nut, so I took the chewed-up remains, threw them down next to her and had her eat them. The swellings disappeared. This happened altogether three different times, and there were a good number of witnesses each time.

Several days later, just as I was getting ready to leave, a woman named Nang Samawn, a niece of Nang Ngek in Bangkok, came to see me. She had once been ordained as a nun, but had later returned to lay life and married a former justice of the peace in Ratchaburi. She was about 40, and had a son aged 15. She held

me in great esteem: Whenever I came to the Bangkok area she would always come to seek me out. That day, at about five in the evening, she came with an offering of flowers, candles and incense, so I asked her, "What can I do for you, Mother Samawn?"

She answered, "I've come to ask you for a child."

As soon as I heard this, I started feeling uneasy, because there were only a few people present, and on top of that she was speaking in a whisper. So I said out loud, "Wait until more people come." I was thinking of the future — if she really did give birth to another child, I'd be in a spot. So I wanted the whole affair to be out in the open to make sure that everyone knew the facts of the case.

That evening, a little after 7 p.m., about 100 people came and congregated in the main meeting hall. Nang Samawn sat right nearby, to one side of the sermon seat. After I had given the precepts and delivered a sermon to the people, teaching them to meditate so that they could develop merit and perfect their character, Mother Samawn spoke up in a loud voice, "I don't want any of that. I want a child. Please give me a child, Luang Phaw."

"All right," I told her, "I'll give you a child." I answered her this way because I remembered a number of events in the scriptures. I then said, as if in jest, "Set your mind on meditating well tonight. I'm going to ask the gods and goddesses to bring you a child."

After she had finished meditating, she came and told me, "I feel really content and relaxed. I've meditated many times before, but it's never been like this."

"There you are," I told her. "You'll have your wish."

The next morning, I left Ratchaburi, taking the train as far as Prajuab Khirikhan. Khun Thatsanawiphaag went along as my follower. We spent the night in a cemetery near the station in Pranburi. The next morning, Khun That went to buy our tickets, with 120 baht in his pockets. This was right after the war, when they were using bank notes printed in America. The 100 baht bill and the 20 baht bill looked just alike. Khun That came back with the tickets, but without the 100 baht bill. He had mistaken it for the 20 baht bill, and so had given it to the ticket agent. He was all ready to return to the station to ask for the money back, but I stopped him. "I'd be too embarrassed to have you go," I said. He then got so upset that he was going to go back home, so I had to console him.

The cemetery where we were staying was on a tall forested slope. They had told us that no one could sleep there because the spirits were fierce, but we spent the night without incident.

From there we took the train to Surat Thani and went to stay on the slope of a tall hill near the train station. As night fell, people came to talk with us. I got to meet two characters named Nai Phuang and Nai Phaad. They came together, and Nai Phuang let me in on their secret.

"My home is in Nakhorn Pathom province," he said. "I used to be a big-time gangster, and killed a lot of people in my time. The last person was an old grandmother who died on the spot. Someone had told me that she kept 4,000 baht in cash under her pillow, so I snuck up to her room and stabbed her in the neck. But when I looked under her pillow, there was only 40 baht. From that day on, I felt so awful that I decided to give up crime. But even so, I still feel jumpy every time I hear a gunshot. Luang Phaw, could you help find me something to protect me from bullets?"

I told him, "If you really have sworn off crime, I'll give you something that'll make sure you don't die from a bullet."

He swore, "I've given it up for good," so I wrote down a *gatha* for him to repeat over and over to himself.

The next day, he came back and told me that his younger brother, along with a group of nine others, were in the process of fighting off the police in one of the outlying districts. Some of the group the police had already captured, but his brother was still on the loose. He was afraid that his name might get dragged into the affair, so what should he do? I told him to go straight to the police and lead them to his brother. He did everything as I told him to, and a few days later the entire group of bandits turned themselves in. Nai Phuang was able to get his brother out on bail. Eventually, when the case reached the courts, the entire group pleaded guilty. The court sentenced them to prison but, since they had admitted their guilt, cut their sentences in half.

I didn't feel very comfortable staying there in Surat because there were always shady characters coming to see me. I was doing nothing but good, but I was afraid that other people might start thinking I was aiding and abetting criminals, so I left, heading for Thung Song and then on to pay my respects to the Buddha's relics in Nakhorn Sri Thammarat. At this point Khun That took his leave to return

home to Bangkok. He bought my ticket, got me on the train, and I then traveled on alone.

That evening I reached the great chedi at Nakhorn Sri Thammarat and stayed at the monastery connected with it. A number of people there — including a monk who was a friend of mine living at the monastery — were interested in meditation, so I stayed on, teaching meditation for a while. I then left, heading for Songkhla province. Reaching Haad Yai, I went to stay in Pak Kim cemetery, which was all overgrown and very quiet. A few days later my friend, Phra MahaKaew, came looking for me, and found me there in the cemetery. We stayed on for a while, and then went out wandering by ourselves from township to township.

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That year I spent the rains at Wat Khuan Miid — Knife Mountain Monastery. I gave sermons and taught meditation to the monks, novices and lay people practically every night. After the rains were over and we had received the *kathina*, I headed back and stayed at Khuan Jong mountain, by a small village near Rien Canal.

One day I started seeing people pouring past in huge numbers. This went on for several days running, so I finally asked what was up. They told me that they were going to see the giant snake that had trapped a woman in its coils on Khuan Jong mountain. The word had gotten around that a giant snake with a red hood had trapped a woman in its coils at the very top of the mountain, and that until the allotted time came it wouldn't let her go. On hearing this bizarre story, people had become all excited and started coming out in huge numbers to see, swarming all over the area near where we were staying. But in Khuan Jong village itself, no one appeared to have heard the story at all. The whole thing was ridiculous.

After we had stayed there for a while, we went on to stay at Baan Thung Pha, Talaat Khlawng Ngae and Sadao district. At that time the police chief in Sadao had been shot and killed in a skirmish with the Chinese communist terrorists. While we were there, a lot of people came to see us during the day, but as evening fell they hurried back home, saying they were afraid the communists would attack. So I told them, "I want you all to come for a sermon tonight. I promise there'll be no attack." Just after nightfall — at about 8 p.m. — people came and filled the ordination hall of the temple where we were staying, so I gave a sermon and taught them meditation.

A few days afterwards we returned to Pak Kim cemetery in Haad Yai. This time a lot of Haad Yai people came out every night to receive the precepts, listen to sermons and practice meditation.

From there we returned to Nakhorn Sri Thammarat, stopping off at a meditation monastery in Rawn Phibun district, and then going on to stay in Thung Song. Nai Sangwed, a clerk in the Education Office, followed along as my student. We stayed at Tham Thalu (The Cave That Goes All the Way Through) for a while, and then went on to Chumphorn. From Chumphorn we caught the train to Phetburi. This was when I learned that Somdet Mahawirawong had been sending letters after me, asking me to return to Bangkok, so I went on to Ratchaburi and stayed at Wat Prachumnari. Luang Att, the governor of Ratchaburi province, and the district official of Ratchaburi City came looking for me, asking me to return to Bangkok because the Somdet at Wat Borom wanted to see me.

While I was staying at Wat Prachumnari, a monk at Khao Kaen Jan (Sandalwood Mountain) was captured by the authorities. I learned that four or five nuns from Baan Pong who were his followers wanted to come see me, but didn't dare because of the uproar over the monk. Although the story doesn't involve me, it's worth telling: It seems that the monk had told the nuns that his legs hurt from sitting in meditation and delivering sermons so much, so would they please massage his legs — and they actually started giving him massages. That's when the uproar started. The authorities looked into the matter and discovered that the monk had no identification papers, so they forced him to disrobe.

During my stay at Ratchaburi, Mae Samawn came out to see me. "I'm over two months pregnant," she said, and then went on, "I'd like to dedicate the child to you right now, because it's your child, and not my husband's." She seemed dead serious about what she was saying. I didn't respond in any way, but I did feel surprised. She hadn't had a child in 15 years, so how had it come about?

From there I returned to Bangkok and stayed at Wat Boromnivasa. I happened to arrive just as the Somdet fell ill, so I helped look after him.

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While I was at Wat Boromnivasa this time a large number of people from Bangkok, Thonburi and Lopburi came to practice meditation. One day there was a strange event. A woman named Mae Khawm, a native of Lopburi, came and presented me with three relics of the Buddha.

"Where did you get them?" I asked her.

"I asked for them from the Buddha image right over your pillow," she told me. This Buddha image belonged to Nai Udom, who had brought it down from Keng Tung during World War II. From what he had told me, it seems that there have been a lot of strange events connected with this image.

Here I'd like to back up to tell the history of the image. Originally Nai Udom was a person who never felt much respect for monks. He was a government official working with the Radio Division of the Mass Communications Department. During World War II he went along with the Thai Army, headed by General Praphan, to Keng Tung. One day he went to set up quarters in an old temple with a group of enlisted men. That evening, after lying down but before going to sleep, he saw a bright light shooting out from the shelf over his pillow, so he sprang up to see what was there. At the time he was the sort of person who, even though he was staying right next to sacred objects, never showed them any respect. But that day he became curious. He craned his neck up to see what was on the shelf, and there he found a gold-alloy Buddha image, about eight inches tall and three inches across at the base, black and glistening as if it had been polished every day. Seeing it, he grabbed it and put it in his suitcase. From that day on, his fortunes improved greatly. People started helping him, and he began to have more than enough money to spend. He got the money from people native to that area.

When the war was over he headed back to Thailand. On the way back, he spent a night on the bank of the Mae Jan river. That night the Buddha image entered his dreams and said, "Dom, you bastard, you're going to take me across the river, but I'm not going to stand for it."

Nai Udom didn't pay any attention to the dream. "What power could a metal Buddha have?" he thought. In the end, he brought the image back to Chanthaburi, retired from government service and set himself up in business as a merchant. During this period, he started looking wan and unhealthy. Life was becoming more and more of a hardship.

After a while his wife and children started falling ill, one after another. Nothing seemed to cure them. "Luang Phaw" entered his dreams again. "I'm staying here with you against my will," he said. "You're going to have to take me back to my home!"

That year it so happened that I had gone out wandering in Prajinburi province, staying at YoungSavage Mountain. Around April I crossed the wilderness and returned to Chanthaburi. When Nai Udom learned that I had returned, he came

running to see. "I'm really in a mess, Than Phaw. My children are sick, my wife is sick, I don't have any money, and now this Buddha image enters my dreams and tells me to take him back to Keng Tung where I found him. What should I do?"

""Luang Phaw" is a forest Buddha," I answered him. "He likes staying where it's peaceful and quiet. If you want, have him come stay here with me."

So Nai Udom brought the image and left it with me — whether he actually gave it to me or simply left it with me for safe keeping, I couldn't tell for sure. I kept it and showed it respect as a matter of course. From that day on, all the illnesses in his family disappeared, and in 1952 he moved to Bangkok. There are a good many more strange things connected with this Buddha image, but this is all I want to say about it for now.

After the event with Mae Khawm I became curious about the Buddha's relics and how they came about. Never during my life as a monk had I ever been interested in them at all, but I did accept the relics from Mae Khawm and treated them with respect. Later I learned that she had received more relics, but by then I had put the Buddha image away in the Raam Khae quarters at Wat Boromnivasa. And as for myself, I had taken my leave of the Somdet and gone to Lopburi province.

That year I celebrated Visakha Puja at Wat Manichalakhon in Lopburi. On that day I said to myself, "If I don't see the Buddha's relics appear with my own eyes, I won't believe in them, because I have no idea whether or not they're for real." I made a vow to sit in meditation until dawn. I set out four receptacles and made the following invitations: "1) May sacred relics of the Buddha — from his ears, eyes, nose and mouth, which were the sources of his splendor — if they really exist, come to this altar tonight. 2) May relics of Phra Sariputta, one of the Buddha's important disciples, also come. 3) May relics of Phra Moggallana, whose powers were equal to those of the Buddha, also come. 4) May relics of Phra Sivali, a monk of good will who was safe at all times wherever he went, also come. If these relics really exist, may they come and appear. If I don't see anything appear tonight, I'll give away all the relics that people have presented to me."

That night I went without sleep and sat in meditation until dawn. At about 4 a.m. I had a feeling that there was a bright red light flashing right where I had placed the receptacles. At daybreak I discovered relics in each of the receptacles. The room where they were placed had been locked up tight from sunset to dawn — no one would have been able to enter, and I myself hadn't gone in. I felt really taken aback: This was the first time anything like this had happened in my life. Quickly I wrapped the relics in cotton wool, placed them in a pouch and kept them with

me. Altogether I received three relics of Phra Sariputta, three of Phra Sivali, two of Phra Moggallana and seven of the Buddha. Some were the color of milky quartz, some were black, some a dark yellowish gray. The ones Mae Khawm had given me, though, were the color of pearls. I took them with me as I headed north. As time passed, a number of other things occurred that I'd rather keep to myself for the time being.

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As the rains approached I went to stay in Mae Rim district, Chiang Mai province. I had made up my mind to go deep into the forest, and so, leaving Mae Rim, I went to Baan Paa Tyng, which took a day of walking. From there I went deep into the wilderness, up the mountains and down, reaching my destination at what must have been no later than four in the afternoon. This was a spot where one of my students had once spent a Rains Retreat, and that year I spent the rains there.

It was a village of Karen and Yang hilltribesmen, with about six or seven households. There was no level ground at all — nothing but mountains and hills. The place where I stayed was at the foot of a hill, a little less than a kilometer from the village, near a flowing stream. The weather was bitter cold both day and night. I reached there the day before Asalha Puja, and on the day we took our vows to spend the rains I started coming down with a fever.

This was a really primitive place. The people were all hilltribesmen, and my basic diet that rainy season consisted of salt, peppers and rice — that was all. No fish or meat. During the latter half of July I became seriously ill. Some days I almost lost consciousness.

One morning, at dawn, I tried to get up to go out for alms, but couldn't. I felt dizzy and faint and was shivering so violently that my hut started shaking. I was all by myself — the monks with me had all gone out for alms. So I went to warm myself by a fire and began to feel a bit better.

I suffered like this all through the rains. I could hardly eat at all. During the entire three months, I was able to eat no more than ten mouthfuls of food a day. Some days I couldn't eat anything at all. But my body and mind felt light, and my heart was at ease — not the least perturbed by my illness.

My symptoms got more serious on July 29. I started running a high fever and felt really faint — numb all over my body. This made me begin to have doubts about my survival. So I got up and took out my pouch of relics, wrapped it in an old



worn-out shoulder cloth and placed it up high on a shelf. Then I made a resolution: "If you really are sacred, give me a sign. If I'm going to die here, I want you all to disappear." I then entered my umbrella tent and stilled my mind.

At dawn the next day I found the pouch and shoulder cloth in opposite sides of the room, but none of the relics were missing. They were still there, scattered all over the shelf where I had placed them. It looked as if I probably wouldn't die that year, but would still be sick for a while longer.

One day I was thinking over events in the past and started feeling disgusted. So I made a resolution: "I'd like some good resources to have at my disposal in the future. If I don't acquire them, I don't want to leave the forest. 1) I want to attain supranatural powers. If I can't, may I go all the way in seven days. Even if my life is to end during those seven days, I'm willing to give it up as an offering. 2) Wherever there are any good, quiet, restful spots, may the forest spirits lead me there." After making my resolution I sat in meditation. A vision appeared: a bright light and a cave reaching clear through a mountain. It occurred to me, "If I enter this cave, I'll probably go all the way through." But just as I decided to go right then and there, I started feeling so faint that my body swayed. I had to grab hold of one of the posts in the hut — so that was as far as I got.

After that, my illness slowly began to recede. One day I took one of my followers out looking for wood to make into charcoal so that I could have a fire to keep myself warm at night. The next day a boy from the village told me, "It's not good for a sick person to go looking for firewood. There's an old saying that a sick person looking for fire-wood is looking for wood for his funeral pyre." The boy's name was Teng, and he was a little deranged. He went on to say, "I really have it hard. Every night spirits come and pull my legs and won't let me get any sleep." I didn't pay him any attention.

Late one night, when it was quiet and I was feeling really ill, I set some charcoal stoves all around myself. After I had dozed off for a moment, a woman dressed in white, followed by two girls and carrying a white flag covered with a long string of Chinese characters, came towards me and said, "I'm queen of the deities. If you live here, you have to bow down to me." I wasn't willing to bow down, seeing as I was a monk. Still, she insisted. We had a long argument, but I stood firm. Finally she left the hut, climbed the hill and disappeared. I meditated in comfort for the rest of the night.

Another day a while later — September 16 — I had a dizzy spell early in the morning. Afterwards I didn't have the strength even to come down from the hut,

and couldn't eat any food. At about one in the afternoon I got up and sat by the window. The hut was at the foot of the hill, and the stream flowed right past the window. All around the hut the ground was cleared and clean — it was swept every day.

A lot of things happened that day: 1) There was a foul stench unlike anything I had ever smelled before. 2) A big green foul-smelling fly came and landed right on my face. It looked to me as if I were going to die. I sat in meditation until the fly flew away and the stench vanished. I began to have doubts about my survival, so I made a vow: "If I'm going to die, I want a clear sign. If I have the potential to live on and be of use, I also want a sign."

After I had made my vow, I sat facing west, looking out through the window with my mind under control. After a moment, two doves came flying to the window. First a male dove came from the south, made a sharp cry and landed on the sill. A moment later a female dove came from the north. They fluttered their wings and cooed to each other. They seemed cheerful and confident. And then, after another moment, the clouds that had been covering the sky parted and bright sunlight came pouring through. Not since the beginning of the rainy season had there been even as much as 30 minutes of sunlight in a single day. The entire three months the sky had been dull, always covered by clouds and fog. But now the sun shone down all bright and dazzling. The calls of the birds echoed clearly through the forest. My heart felt refreshed. I came to the conclusion: "I'm not going to die."

One night afterwards, towards the end of the rains, I went down to do walking meditation to the south of my hut and a vision appeared to me. I saw myself and an elephant tumbling around in the water. Sometimes I'd be on top of the elephant, sometimes he'd be on top of me. A moment later, in the same vision, a sermon seat came floating through the air, about six meters off the ground. It was painted a dull red and covered with cloth from India interwoven with gold. The vision seemed to say, "Please climb onto the sermon seat. All your aspirations will be fulfilled." But there was no one in the vision. "This is no time for lies," I thought, and the vision disappeared.

Right at the very end of the rains I practiced walking around the foot of the hill but I'd get tired and faint. My ears would start ringing and I'd almost pass out. If this was the way things were, I wouldn't be able to leave the mountains after the rains were over. So I made a resolution: If I'm going to live on and be involved with humanity, may I be able to get out of the mountains. But if my involvement is over, I'll write a letter bidding farewell.

By the day after the end of the Rains Retreat, my illness seemed to be over. My symptoms weren't even twenty percent of what they had been before. The next day, the hilltribesmen accompanied us out of the forest, carrying our things and at the same time crying in a way that was really heartrending.

That had been a damp, chilly place to stay. Even salt, if you didn't keep it shut tight in a container, would dissolve away. We ate hilltribe food all throughout the rains. They'd take bamboo shoots, calledium leaves and tubers, stew them until they were mushy, then add salt, rice and pounded chili peppers — leaves, stems and all — and boil it all down together in a pot. This was the sort of fare we had to eat. In all the years since my ordination, this rainy season was the ultimate in primitiveness as far as food was concerned. Even their peppers were strange: When you swallowed one, it would be hot all the way down to your intestines. And yet the hilltribes people themselves were all large and stocky. I had thought that they would be dark and sickly, but they turned out to be fair and plump. They had an admirable culture. There was no quarreling, and none of the people in the village ever raised their voices. They refused to use things bought in the market. Mostly they used things they had made themselves. Their crops were vegetables and wild rice, because there was no level land for growing white rice.

After the rains I returned to Mae Rim and then went down to the city of Chiang Mai. The only symptom remaining from my illness was an irregular heartbeat. The lay people who had been most concerned about my condition and had from time to time sent supplies from Chiang Mai to where I was staying in the forest — Khun Nai Chusri and Mae Kaew Run — brought me spice medicine for my dizzy spells. After staying in Chiang Mai at Wat Santidham for a while, I went down to stay at Phra Sabai Cave in Lampang, where a student of mine had spent the rains.

While there I began to have the feeling that I would have to return to Bangkok. The Somdet was seriously ill and I'd have to stay with him. But there was something inside me that didn't want to go. One night I vowed to have an answer to the question of whether or not I should go to Bangkok. I sat in meditation until dawn. At about 4 a.m. I felt as if my head had been cut off, but my heart was bright and not afraid. After that my illness was virtually all gone. I returned to Bangkok and stayed at Wat Boromnivasana. At the time, the Somdet was very ill and gave me an order: "You'll have to stay with me until I die. As long as I'm still alive, I don't want you to leave. I don't care whether or not you come to look after me. I just want to know that you're around." So I promised to stay. Sometimes I'd wonder about what karma I had done that had me cooped up like this, but

then I'd remember the caged dove I had dreamed about in Chanthaburi. That being the case, I'd have to stay.

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Once I had made up my mind to stay, the Somdet asked me to come and teach him meditation every day. I had him practice *anapanasati* — keeping the breath in mind. We talked about a number of things while he sat in meditation.

One day he said, "I never dreamed that sitting in *samadhi* would be so beneficial, but there's one thing that has me bothered. To make the mind still and bring it down to its basic resting level (*bhavanga*): Isn't this the essence of becoming and birth?"

"That's what *samadhi* is," I told him, "becoming and birth."

"But the Dhamma we're taught to practice is for the sake of doing away with becoming and birth. So what are we doing giving rise to more becoming and birth?"

"If you don't make the mind take on becoming, it won't give rise to knowledge, because knowledge has to come from becoming if it's going to do away with becoming. This is becoming on a small scale — *uppatika bhava* — which lasts for a single mental moment. The same holds true with birth. To make the mind still so that *samadhi* arises for a long mental moment is birth. Say we sit in concentration for a long time until the mind gives rise to the five factors of *jhana*: That's birth. If you don't do this with your mind, it won't give rise to any knowledge of its own. And when knowledge can't arise, how will you be able to let go of unawareness? It'd be very hard.

"As I see it," I went on, "most students of the Dhamma really misconstrue things. Whatever comes springing up, they try to cut it down and wipe it out. To me, this seems wrong. It's like people who eat eggs. Some people don't know what a chicken is like: This is unawareness. As soon as they get hold of an egg, they crack it open and eat it. But say they know how to incubate eggs. They get ten eggs, eat five of them and incubate the rest. While the eggs are incubating, that's "becoming." When the baby chicks come out of their shells, that's "birth." If all five chicks survive, then as the years pass it seems to me that the person who once had to buy eggs will start benefiting from his chickens. He'll have eggs to eat without having to pay for them, and if he has more than he can eat he can set himself up in business, selling them. In the end he'll be able to release himself from poverty.

"So it is with practicing *samadhi*: If you're going to release yourself from becoming, you first have to go live in becoming. If you're going to release yourself from birth, you'll have to know all about your own birth."

As soon as I said this, he understood and began to beam. He seemed both pleased and impressed. "The way you say things," he said, "is really different from the way other meditation monks talk. Even though I still can't put what you say into practice, I can understand you clearly and have no doubts that what you're saying is true. I used to live near Ajaan Mun and Ajaan Sao, but I never benefited from them the way I've benefited from having you stay with me. There seem to be a lot of surprising things that occur when I sit in meditation."

After that he seemed to be interested in meditating for long periods of time — sometimes two hours at a stretch. While he was meditating, he'd have me speak Dhamma to go along with his meditation. As soon as his mind would be quiet and steady, I'd start speaking — and his mind seemed to behave right in line with what I'd be saying. One day he said, "I've been ordained for a long time, but I've never felt anything like this."

From then on I never had to give him any more long talks. As soon as I'd say two or three words, he'd understand what I was referring to. As for me, I was pleased. One day he said, "People who study and practice the Dhamma get caught up on nothing more than their own opinions, which is why they never get anywhere. If everyone understood things correctly, there wouldn't be anything impossible about practicing the Dhamma."

As I spent the rains there with the Somdet my mind was at ease as far as having to explain things to him was concerned. He told me, "In the past I never thought that practicing *samadhi* was in any way necessary." Then he added, "The monks and novices — and the lay people as well — haven't benefited enough from having you here. If you can, I'd like you to find the time to teach them too."

He then informed the senior monks in the temple of his intention, and this was how the meditation-training sessions at Uruphong Hall came about. The first year, 1953, a number of lay people, monks and novices from other temples came and joined in the sessions. Thao Satyanurak came to stay at Nekkhamma House, the home for nuns at the temple, and practiced meditation with good results. Her mind gave rise to such unusual realizations that she decided to stay on at Wat Boromnivasa until her death.

At the end of the rainy season I took leave of the Somdet to go out wandering in the provinces. His illness by that time had abated somewhat. That year I returned to Wat Boromnivasa in time for Visakha Puja.

That night I went to sit in meditation in the ordination hall, and there was another event: I saw relics of the Buddha come and appear. Earlier in the evening the thought had occurred to me, "My eyes are small. I'd like to have great big eyes, able to see for miles and miles. My ears are small. I'd like to have great big ears, able to hear all around the world. My mouth is small. I'd like to have it wide, able to give a sermon that would echo for five days and nights." With this in mind, I decided to adopt three practices: 1) For a wide mouth, don't eat a lot or speak a lot on important days. 2) For big ears, don't listen to matters that aren't worth your while. "Cut off your mouth," i.e., go without food. "Cut off your ears," i.e., don't pay attention to anything at all. 3) For big eyes, go without sleep.

So with this in mind, I decided to go without sleep on Visakha Puja. A little after 5 a.m. a lot of the Buddha's relics came to me there in the ordination hall.

I spent the rains with the Somdet again. That year lay people came out for the meditation sessions in even larger numbers than the year before. A number of bad events, though, began to interfere because some of the monks had become envious and started looking for ways to spoil things. I'd rather not name names, though. Whoever wants to learn the details can go ask Thao Satyanurak or the Somdet.

One evening at about seven, a monk named Phra Khru Palat Thien came to my quarters and said in a low voice, "I hope you aren't upset, Ajaan. I'm on your side all the way."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it, but I don't know of anything that would make me upset. Tell me what's up."

So he gave me the details and then added, "The rumor has already reached the Somdet. If he has any doubts about you, he'll probably call you to his quarters for questioning. If and when he calls you, let me know. I'll stand up for you." As it turned out, though, the Somdet never said a word about the matter, and never asked me even a single question. We simply kept on discussing the Dhamma as always.

An anonymous letter appeared and made the rounds:

*Writing texts is Phra Khru Dhammasaan's daily habit.  
Ajaan Lee's is instructing his young ladyfriend.  
Old gray-haired MahaPrem would like to be abbot,  
While Luang Ta Paan babbles on without end.*

Phra Khru Dhammasaan was given a thorough grilling as a result of the letter — people believed he had written it as an attack on me. I had no idea of what was going on. There seemed to be a lot of things unworthy of monks going on, but I didn't pay them any attention.

The day after the rainy season was over, MahaNarong came to see the Somdet and then came down and asked permission to copy down the information in my identification papers. When he had finished, he returned to the Somdet and told him that the Director's Office at Mahamakut Buddhist University had sent for the information so that they could arrange for me to be given the title of Phra Khru. The Somdet sent for me. "This is what they have to say," he told me. "What do *you* have to say?"

"I'm the sort of monk who, if it's not necessary, has never wanted to have anything to do with this sort of thing. Whatever good I've done has been for the sake of the group as a whole."

So he told me, "I'll answer them myself." And then he added, "I'll tell them, "Phra Ajaan Lee came to stay here because I asked him to, and he has stayed on out of respect for me. For you to arrange a title for him will, as I see it, drive him away from me."" That, he said, was how he would answer them.

"Good," was my reply. As a result, the whole idea was abandoned for the time being.

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As time passed, the Somdet's health improved, so I took my leave of him to go off and find some seclusion as was my custom.

That year was the 100th anniversary of the founding of Wat Supatwanaram, the first Dhammayut monastery in the Northeast. The Somdet told me, "I want you to go help in the celebration. I'm going to give them the relics you've presented to me as a souvenir from Wat Boromnivasa." Saying this, he went to look at the relics he had placed on the altar over his pillow, and discovered that more than 40 had come on their own into the glass bell. I said I would present them all to him. "This is really strange," he said. "Never in my life as a monk has anything like this

ever happened before." He said he would send them all to Wat Supat, and had me choose which ones to send in his name, and which ones in mine. When he said this, I decided to go help in the celebration as a token of my appreciation for his kindness.

The celebration at Wat Supat turned out to be a major event. The government donated a large sum of money to help, and announced that all those in Bangkok who were going in an official capacity would leave the city together on March 18. The notice announcing this was signed by Field Marshal Phin Chunhawan, Minister of Agriculture, and General Luang Sawat, Minister of Culture.

One day, when I was in Lopburi, I learned that there had been a change in plans, so I hurried down to Bangkok. When I arrived, the Somdet called for me. "They've changed the schedule," he told me. "I want you to go with them. I'll give you the relics. They'll be your responsibility."

I didn't say anything one way or the other, but after I had returned to my quarters and thought things over, I realized that I couldn't follow the Somdet's orders. I went to see him.

"I can't go," I told him. "The notice published with the government seal says that on the 17th the relics will be set out for public viewing here at Wat Boromnivasa. Now the plans have fallen through. I've already distributed the notice, and on the 17th large numbers of people will be coming. If I leave beforehand, I'll be in for a lot of criticism. That's why I can't go."

None of the senior monks, it turned out, were going. The problem was caused by Nai Chao. It seems that Field Marshal Phin had mentioned that he'd like to leave a day early and stop off for the night in Nakhorn Ratchasima, giving the soldiers, policemen, government officials and people in general there the chance to pay their respects to the relics. Nai Chao hadn't informed the ecclesiastical authorities, and this is why there had been a mistake in the printed schedule.

As a result I didn't go with the first train, because the Somdet had told me, "Stay here. If anyone comes, take the relics and display them in the main hall." I agreed to do as he said. That night I placed three relics, larger than lettuce seeds and the color of pearls, on a glass tray, and took them to display in Uruphong Hall. This person and that person wanted to look, because they had never seen any relics before. When I opened the cotton wool and they saw the three relics, this person poked at them, that person picked them up — and so two of them disappeared, leaving only one.



The next day I took the express train to Ubon along with a group of others, 14 in all. Reaching Ubon, we went to help in the anniversary celebration, which included the laying of the cornerstone for the Mahathera building to be constructed there in Wat Supat.

One night there was an incident at a little after 10 p.m. A group of about 50 of us were sitting in meditation in the ordination hall when a light appeared, flashing on and off like a fluorescent bulb. We all opened our eyes and two or three people found relics in front of them. As it got later, more and more relics appeared. People both inside and outside the ordination hall were puzzled and one by one began to suspect a fraud. When it got fairly late we stopped for the night.

The next day rumors spread through town. A man who had never before set foot in a monastery came to tell me that the night before, he had dreamed that loads and loads of falling stars had dropped into Wat Supat. I thought to myself, "If there really are sacred objects connected with Buddhism, I want them to show themselves."

That evening Nai Phit, of the Provincial Fisheries Bureau, brought a friend, a lady teacher, to come and see me. The teacher started asking me a lot of bizarre questions and in the end announced that she was going to leave her husband and come follow me, because the Dhamma I taught was so amazing. Her husband, Nai Prasong, worked in the Ubon branch of the Government Savings Bank, and was a Christian. Thinking that his wife had become mentally unbalanced, he had made a habit of following along wherever she went. People would ask him, "If you're Christian, what are you doing in a Buddhist ordination hall?"

The teacher became even more reckless and bold, and came to sit just a meter away from me. I was sitting on a chair, and her husband was sitting about three meters off to one side. Altogether there were about 50 people in the hall. So I made a vow: "Today may the power of sacred objects come and help me, because there is a rumor going around, concerning the relics of the Buddha, that I'm tricking and deceiving the people. With news like this, there's no one I can turn to, unless the deities and sacred objects can help me. Otherwise Buddhism is in for contempt and derision." At the time, Chao Khun Ariyagunadhara was sitting in front of the major Buddha image. All the other monks had left, because it was so late.

I then had everyone sit in meditation and added, "Whoever doesn't believe, just sit still and watch." After a moment or so, I had the feeling that sacred objects had come and were circling all around, so I ordered everyone to open their eyes,

and told Nai Prasong. "Open your eyes and look at me. I'm going to stand up." I then stood up and shook out my robes and sitting cloth for him to see, at the same time thinking, "May the deities help me so that he won't be able to hold our religion in contempt." Then I said in a loud voice, "Relics of the Buddha have come. People sitting right in front of me will receive them. But when you open your eyes, don't move a muscle. I myself won't move."

As soon as I had finished speaking there was the ping of something small falling on the floor of the hall. A woman got up to pounce on it, but it sprang from her grasp and came near to where I was sitting. Another person came running after it, but I ordered him to stop. Finally the object came to rest in front of the teacher, so I told her, "It's yours. Nai Prasong, watch carefully." The teacher picked it up: It was a setting from a ring, very finely done — an object that had once been offered in worship to the Buddha's relics.

As time passed, the teacher would sit there, sometimes with her eyes closed, sometimes with them open, but she'd say, "Luang Phaw, you've taken me up to sit on top of a mountain." "All I can see is my own skeleton, but how can that be if I'm still alive?" "Even though I have a salary of 500 baht a month, I've never known the happiness I feel sitting here right now." The things she'd say got wilder and wilder all the time.

In the end, no fewer than ten people received relics of the Buddha that night. All the people there had their eyes wide open and the place was well lit. Just before daybreak, Nai Phae came to me, clutching in his fist a set of relics that he then gave to me, saying he had received them the night before. I turned them all over to Wat Supat.

The celebration lasted five days and five nights. One day they arranged a raffle for donating sets of robes to monks who had come to join in the celebration. There were a lot of people in Ubon who still mistrusted me, but none of them were open about it. One person who *was* open about it was Mae Thawngmuan Siasakun. She made a vow: "If this ajaan is really honest and sincere, may he draw my set of robes in the raffle." When we drew the raffle tickets, it turned out that I actually did draw her set of robes.

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With the celebration over, I returned to Bangkok and then went to wander around from place to place. When the time came to stop for the rains, I returned as always to be with the Somdet. That rainy season his illness was much worse. He

didn't sit in meditation much at all. Most of the time he'd meditate lying down. After the rains he passed away.

During the rains he was very sick. His asthma flared up and he couldn't get any sleep. One night at about 2 a.m., a monk came running for me. All the monks and novices were in an uproar because the Somdet had told them to go for the doctor, but here it was late in the middle of the night — how could they go for the doctor? Chao Khun Sumedhi had had the monk go for me instead so that I could reason with the Somdet, for the Somdet wouldn't listen to anyone else.

So I went up to the Somdet and asked him, "What medicine did you take today? How many tablets? How many times?"

"I can't breathe," was his answer.

I felt his body. He was fiery hot. I learned that he had taken one tablet too many. The doctor had told him to take one tablet twice daily, but he hadn't felt like going to all that trouble, and so had taken two tablets at once. Now he had a bad case of heartburn, and could hardly breathe. I told him, "I've seen this sort of thing before. It's not serious. In about 15 minutes it'll pass."

A moment later he closed his eyes and entered *samadhi*. Monks and novices were sitting around on all sides. After a while he said, "I'm fine now. You don't have to go for the doctor."

During the cold season his asthma flared up again. One morning he sent a novice to fetch me. At the time I had visitors, so the novice simply spoke to me and left. The Somdet then asked him, "Is Ajaan Lee here in the temple?"

"Yes."

"In that case he doesn't have to come. My mind is at rest. If he leaves the temple, though, go after him and have him come back."

At about five in the evening he sent the novice to look in on me. The novice didn't say anything to me because I was sitting in meditation. He returned to the Somdet and said, "Ajaan Lee is in." A little later, at about six, he came for me again. This time I hurried up to see the Somdet. He made a number of directives concerning the temple, and then lay still. I went downstairs for a moment.

Suddenly there was a commotion upstairs, so I hurried up again. Along with the Somdet in the room were the monk who was nursing him and Chao Khun

Dhammapitok. Looking at the Somdet's condition, I knew he wouldn't last. Monks and novices were running around in confusion, and the doctors were all upset. One of them had stuck his finger down the Somdet's windpipe to remove some phlegm, but to no avail. When I could see that there was no hope, I ordered the doctor to stop: "Don't touch him." And a moment later, the Somdet breathed his last.

When we had finished washing the body, we met for consultation, and the following day arranged for the ceremonial bathing of the corpse.

The temple committee then began the merit-making ceremonies. They asked me to be in charge of the kitchen, which I agreed to do. Khun Nai Tun Kosalyawit was my assistant. The first seven days we didn't have to draw on the temple funds at all because so many people came and made voluntary contributions. Altogether the merit-making lasted 50 days. During this period we drew on temple funds from time to time. After the 50 days were over I decided I'd have to go off for a rest.

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On the 10th of April I left for Lampang to help with the ceremonial marking of the boundaries of the ordination hall at Wat Samraan Nivasa, which lasted for several days. When the ceremonies were over I went to stay in Phra Sabai Cave. My old stomach problems began to flare up: I had a bad case of diarrhea and fierce pains in my stomach. Word reached the city of Lampang that I was in bad shape.

One day I went to rest in the inner cave. I saw a rock stuck in the mouth of the cave, 20 meters off the ground. The thought occurred to me that I'd like to build a chedi there in the cave. I called to the lay people staying with me to help push the rock out of the cave, which they were able to do. We then dug a hole and cut away at the rock floor until about 1 p.m., when a car arrived. The people in the car said that they had come to take me to the hospital, but I had already recovered from my illness without realizing it. I told them that we were going to build a chedi. Before leaving the cave, I stood at its mouth and looked out to the southwest, to a range of deep green forested mountains. Seeing the fresh green of the trees, I thought of the Bodhi tree, and that it would be good to plant three Bodhi trees there at the mouth of the cave. I mentioned this to the monks and novices, and then returned to Lampang.

From there I went on to Uttaradit, because a lay person had come up looking for me, asking me to return to Uttaradit because an old woman — a student of

mine — had started babbling incoherently for several days. I went to stay in Uttaradit a fair while, helping the woman, and then went on to Phitsanuloke, where I stayed at Wat Raadburana, near the home of a woman who was an "adopted child" of mine. The story of this adopted child is worth telling, although it dates back to the year I spent the rains with the hilltribes people at Baan Phaa Daen Saen Kandaan (The Cliff Village in the Land of Really Primitive Hardship) in Chiang Mai.

The woman's name was Fyyn; her husband's was MahaNawm. One day I had gone to teach meditation at Wat Aranyik, located in a forest six kilometers outside of Phitsanuloke. A lot of government officials, shopkeepers and people in general had come to practice *samadhi*, including the chief of police, Luang Samrit; Luang Chyyn, Khun Kasem, Captain Phaew — all of them people really earnest about practicing meditation. We were sitting, discussing the Dhamma, when someone came and said to me, "Please come and visit a sick person in my home." I agreed to go. The chief of police then drove us there in his car.

When we arrived they told me that a *dhutanga* monk had come down from the north, made some lustral water for them, and then told them, "I'm afraid I can't cure you, but a monk who can will be coming soon." He had then left and continued on his wanderings. As soon as MahaNawm had heard that I was in the area, he had come looking for me. Talking with him, I learned that his wife, Mae Fyyn, had been ill for three years now, ever since she had lain by the fire after childbirth. They had spent more than 8,000 baht on injections, but nothing had cured her. All she could do for the last three years was simply lie there: She couldn't get up at all. For the past year she hadn't been able to speak. She couldn't even move. Hearing this, I told MahaNawm that I'd go have a look

As soon as I set foot in the door, I saw the woman raise her hands feebly in a *wai*. I didn't give a thought to her condition, but simply sat in *samadhi*. Mae Fyyn said two or three words, moved herself a little, raised her hands in another *wai*, sat up and then kneeled down by her pillow. "Get well," I told her. "Be done with your old karma."

That day I ordered her to pick up a match and light me a cigarette, and she was able to do it. I told the people in the house not to feed her the following day, simply to place some rice and curry down next to her. She'd be able to feed herself.

The next day, her husband came to the temple to present food to me. When he returned home, he found that she had finished her breakfast, washed the dishes

and was able to get up and crawl around. I went to see her that afternoon, but found that the neighbors had all brought jugs and pots to get some of "that fantastic lustral water." Seeing this, I felt ill at ease, and so hurried back to Bangkok.

We kept in touch by letter, though. A month afterwards, Mae Fyyn was able to get up and walk. The second year she was able to go to the nearby temple and donate food to the monks. The third year she came down to stay at Wat Boromnivasa — walking all the way from HuaLampong train station to Wat Borom, and walking every day from where she was staying to hear sermons at the meditation hall, perfectly normal in every way. Altogether, it was an amazing affair.

From Phitsanuloke I went on to Phetchabun to visit a student who had set up a monastery at Lom Kao district with the help of District Official Pin. After staying in seclusion for a fair while, I went with some others into the forest.

We crossed mountains and streams for several days and then stopped to rest on the slopes of a hill. From there we followed the lower slopes of the hills until we reached a tall mountain covered with a bright open forest. Off in the distance I could see a towering peak called Haw Mountain. My companions had gone on ahead; I was following behind. Thinking of Haw Mountain, my mind was at peace. I thought of a treasure that was beyond my powers: "I'd like to be able to levitate to the peak of Haw Mountain." I stood still there for a moment, my bowl hanging on a strap from my shoulder, and dreamed that a cloud came down out of the sky while a faint voice said to me, "Don't think about it. When the time comes, it will happen on its own." The vision then disappeared.

During this trip I was really thirsty. On all sides of the trail were nothing but packs of foxes, due to the fact that we were so far from human habitation. We kept on going and stopped off at Baan Wang Naam Sai (ClearWater Village). We then cut across the forests and streams, and when we came out of the forest, we arrived at the Phaa Bing Range, a place where Ajaan Mun had once stayed. This was an area of caves and small hills. We spent quite a few days there.

Late one night, when it was quiet and still, I was sitting in meditation until I felt like I was going to doze off, and suddenly there was an incident. I saw a mountain peak covered with trees to the west of Phuu Kradyng. A gigantic man, wearing a dark yellow cloth tied around his waist, was standing on the mountain and holding up the sky with his hands. I was standing under his arm. He said, "In the

future, life will be hard for humanity. They will die from poisonous water. This water will be of two kinds:

1. Fog and dew that will hurt the crops wherever it forms. People who eat the crops may become sick.

2. Rain. If you come across strange rain water, i.e.,

a. reddish rain water or

b. yellowish rain water with a peculiar taste,

don't drink it. If you do, you'll come down with diarrhea and a rash. If you drink a great deal, you may die."

This was the first point he had to say. The second point: He gestured off to the northeast. I saw a giant spring of water shooting out of the ground. Wherever its waters flowed, people became ill. If they used this water to irrigate fruit trees, the trees would become diseased. The life-span of people would become shorter and shorter.

The third point: Something strange began to happen on the mountain top. In whatever direction he spread out his hand, the trees would be leveled in rows. "What does this mean?" I asked.

"Adults with no sense of morality will suffer in the future."

"Can any of this be prevented?"

"The diseases caused by water, if caught in time, aren't serious. Otherwise they'll cause death within three, five or nine days."

"Will I be affected?"

"No, because you appreciate the virtues of your elders. I'll give you the formula for the cure. If you hear that any of these diseases have appeared, go quickly to help."

I asked him, "Can't you tell them the cure yourself?"

"I could," he said, "but it wouldn't do any good. You have to make the medicine yourself. Take tamarind fruits, remove the shells and soak them in a salt solution. Then pour off the water and give it to the diseased people — or have them drink

the brine from pickled garlic. The disease will go away — but you have to make the medicine yourself." He went on to say that his name was Sancicco Devaputta.

This happened in 1956.

After we left Phaa Bing Range and had gone to stay in a nearby township, the people there came with a strange story to tell. The night before, a cloud of mist had passed through a tobacco field, and the leaves of the tobacco plants had all fallen off. Another time, I heard that in Thoen district, Lampang province, villagers had drunk rain water the color of tea, and more than ten of them had died. Both of these stories seemed uncanny because they were in line with my dream.

After that we went on to Wang Saphung district and then climbed the great Phuu Kradyng Plateau, after spending a night at the foot of the plateau. Altogether there were five of us, two boys and three monks. We climbed the plateau, reaching the edge of the top at about 7 p.m. From there the walk to our campsite was a little more than three miles. The air on the plateau was chilly, and the whole area was covered with pines. As soon as we reached the top, it rained, so we all looked for places to stay. I spotted a pine log that had fallen into a patch of tall grass and so I climbed up to lie on the log. The others had run off to find shelter elsewhere. That night there was both wind and rain, which meant that I didn't get any sleep all night long.

At dawn we came out looking for one another, and then searched for a place to stay. We found a small cave with a fine rock ledge and a tiny well filled with rainwater from the night before. There we stayed in solitude.

The plateau was a great broad plain, seven kilometers square. Once you were up there, you felt as if you were on level ground. The whole plateau was covered with pines and tall grasses — but with no other kinds of trees, although there were many kinds of trees on the lower slopes. This, I would gather, was because the top of the plateau was solid rock. You could tell from the fallen pines: Their roots had crept along the crevices in the rock.

This was a really restful, quiet place to stay. Every day at 5 p.m. when it didn't rain, we'd get together to sit in meditation on the rock ledge. I'd think to myself, "I don't want to return to the world of human beings. I'd like to live on in the woods and the wilds like this. If possible, I'd like to attain supranatural powers or, if I don't attain them, may I die within seven days, entering *nibbana* on the seventh. Otherwise, may the deities take me off to live in solitude, far from the



congregating spots of humanity for at least three years." Every time I'd start thinking like this, though, the rain would start to fall, and we'd have to go back into the cave.

One of the other monks with us, named Phra Palat Sri, had never gone out into the wilds before. All along the way he had talked like a salesman, which had me annoyed. In other words, he liked to talk about worldly matters. Whenever we reached a village that looked poor, he'd bring out his "Lopburi has loads of fish" story for the villagers to hear. He'd tell them that pickled fish from Lopburi was sold as far away as Chaiyaphum province. This annoyed me. We had come out for solitude, not to sell pickled fish. I'd have to keep after him about this, but he had more years in the monkhood than I. When we'd go to stay on a mountaintop, he'd like to build a fire to warm himself — when I was asleep. He wouldn't dare do it when I was awake. <sup>9</sup> While warming himself, he'd get the two boys, Man and Manu, to join him and talk.

After we had stayed for a few days, the group started getting less and less quiet. The first day had been fine: No one dared talk because they were afraid of the tigers and elephants that were plentiful on the plateau. After the fifth day our rice ran out, so we got ready to go down the plateau.

When we reached level ground, we stopped to rest for a while. A person who worked for some Westerners saw us and came to spread out a mat for me to sit on. I didn't accept the offer, so he invited Phra Palat Sri to sit on the mat, which he did. A moment later we heard thunder, even though the sky was sunny, and in that very instant a branch from a nearby tree came crashing down less than a foot from Phra Palat Sri's head. Phra Palat Sri, his face pale, jumped up from where he had been sitting. "That," I told him, "is what happens to people who don't have any self-restraint." From that point on, Phra Palat Sri became a very quiet person.

After that we went on and stopped to spend the night at a school near Phaa Nok Khao (Owl Cliff). My followers were all tired out. Late that night, when it was quiet, I could hear the sounds of people sneaking out into the forest, so the next morning I asked one of the monks what they had been up to the night before, and was told, "We took your palm sugar. We've been carrying it for days now, but haven't had any, so last night we boiled it in water and drank it all up."

When we had finished our meal that morning, we left to cross through a large forest. Before setting out, I made up my mind: "I'm going to ride my own car all the way to Chumphae district," which was 80 kilometers away. "I won't accept

any offers to ride in a car or truck. I'm going to look for solitude in the forest." A few minutes later, after we had gone about a kilometer along the road, a car went whizzing past and then stopped about 200 meters ahead of us. A woman came running in our direction and said, "Please accept a ride in our car. We've just bought it."

I looked at the faces of the others: They all wanted to accept the ride, but I didn't agree to it. The woman pleaded with us for a long time, but I still didn't accept the offer.

We walked along — our umbrella tents and bowls slung over our shoulders — through the heat and the sun. After about four kilometers I spotted a hill with a spirit shrine ahead, and so stopped to rest and explore the caves there. A woman came along with a child in her arms and three dead lizards slung over her shoulder, which she placed near the spot where I was resting. I thought of asking her for one of the lizards, but didn't dare say anything.

After I had rested for a moment, a parcel post truck from Loei came past, with Nai Man and Phra Palat Sri sitting in it. The driver stopped, jumped down from the truck and came running towards me. "I've seen you walking along the road for several days now," he said. "Please accept a ride from me." He pleaded with me for several minutes, saying "I won't ask for any fare, not even from the boys." One of my followers had gone on ahead; one was trailing behind. "Thank you," I told him "but we can't accept your offer." So my followers who were in the truck had to get out.

We walked into the Laan Wilds, an area of virgin forest. At about five in the afternoon, Phra Palat Sri had an attack of dysentery, so I gave him permission to ride on ahead and wait for us at Chumphae. Nai Man couldn't walk any further — he was barely able to drag himself along — so I gave him permission to take the ride to Chumphae and wait for us there too. So that left three of us: myself, Phra Juum and Nai Manu, a boy from Uttaradit.

We reached our resting place — a village called Baan Krathum — after dark, at about 8 p.m. We had trouble finding a place to stay, and ended up camping in the woods near a stretch of water. Up the next morning, we went for alms in the village and then, after our meal, traveled on.

After we had walked for about a kilometer the sun became so fierce that we stopped for a while to rest in the shade. At around five in the evening the sky became dark and ominous. It looked like rain. Nai Manu wasn't willing to spend

the night in the forest, and so asked permission to ride on ahead to Khon Kaen, but when he went to wave down a ride, no one would stop for him. After a short while a storm blew up, with heavy winds and rain. The boy went for shelter to a house nearby. Later that night the roof of the house blew off in the wind.

Meanwhile, Phra Juum and I had walked on, looking for shelter along the roadside. I spotted a shack, a meter by two and a half meters wide, and thatched with grass. The rain was pouring down and the wind was blowing branches off the trees, so I called to Phra Juum and we went to stay in the shack. Phra Juum opened his umbrella tent and rested under one half of the roof. I stood resting under the other half. A gust of wind came, tore off the half of the roof under which Phra Juum was resting, and carried it away into the middle of the fields. A moment later a tree came crashing down. Phra Juum came running to my half of the shack. Seeing that we couldn't stay there any longer, we went running for a clump of bushes that gave us enough space to crouch, shivering and cold, for about an hour until the rain stopped and the wind died down. Our robes and things were soaking wet. We went and found another shack, lit a fire and spent the night there. During the night, it rained again.

The next day the boy wasn't able to walk on any further, so we had him ride on ahead to wait for us at Chumphae, leaving just the two of us, Phra Juum and myself, to walk on by ourselves. At about five that evening we reached Chumphae. Phra Palat Sri's dysentery still hadn't cleared up — his face was pale and sickly — so we stayed on at Chumphae until he had recovered somewhat.

I received news that the date for the Somdet's cremation had been set, and that it was to take place fairly soon, so I took the express train from Khon Kaen to Bangkok. This was in June, 1956.

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Reaching Wat Boromnivasa, I learned that the ecclesiastical authorities had met for consultation concerning the Somdet's cremation. That very day there had been a meeting of eleven senior monks to appoint a committee to run the cremation, after which they had gone to meet with the Isaan Society in the Green Hall. About 100 members of the society were present at the meeting, which was chaired by Nai Lyan Buasuwan. When I reached the Green Hall, I could see Chao Khun Dhammapitok and Chao Khun Dhammatilok sitting in on the meeting, but they weren't saying anything at all. All I could hear was the voice of Doctor Fon Saengsingkaew. I stood and listened outside, but didn't like what I heard. They

were making plans to collect money in the name of the Somdet to build a mental hospital for Doctor Fon in Ubon.

So I entered the meeting, sat down, excused myself and then said, "The matter you're discussing makes me really sad. I helped take care of the Somdet for three years, and now he's been dead for over 100 days, and yet with all the ajaans and members of the society sitting here, I haven't heard anyone make any mention of plans for the cremation. I understand you've budgeted 700,000 baht for the hospital, but I haven't heard anyone set a budget for the Somdet. This makes me really sad, which is why I've asked your permission to speak."

As soon as I had finished, Doctor Fon said, "I went to see Field Marshal Phin to tell him that we didn't have enough money to build the hospital, and that I'd like to collect money in connection with the cremation in order to augment our funds. He agreed that it would be a good idea, and contributed 10,000 baht of his own, which is why I brought up the matter."

So I responded, "Phin, schmin, I don't know anything about that. All I know is that we haven't met here to discuss a hospital. We've met to discuss a corpse."

Hearing this, Doctor Fon got up and walked out of the meeting.

Nai Lyan sat still for a moment, and then said, "In that case, what do the ajaans have to say?" Chao Khun Dhammatilok, Chao Khun Nyanarakkhit and the others all sat absolutely still. Nai Lyan asked again, "What would the ajaans have us do?"

So I answered, "It's not that I'm against the hospital, but I feel that it should be brought up afterwards, because the Somdet's body is still lying around smelling up the place, and so should be taken care of first."

When I finished speaking, Khun Nai Tun raised her hand in agreement from the back of the room.

In the end we had the secretary record the following three points as the consensus of the meeting:

- 1.** However the money is to be collected, have it go towards the cremation until the committee in charge feels that it has enough.
- 2.** If there is any money left over, appoint a committee to consider handing the excess over to the hospital.

**3.** If the committee doesn't see fit, the money needn't go to the hospital.

When these three points had been recorded, someone asked, "Who's going to run the cremation?"

None of the monks responded, so I answered for them, "The monks of Wat Borom."

MahaWichien, who worked with the Culture Ministry, spoke up. "You're monks. If you run the cremation, how will you handle the money?"

I answered, "I have lots of hands. I'm just afraid there won't be any money for them to collect. I don't know how to handle money myself, but I have followers who do."

That silenced MahaWichien.

In the end we decided to do away with the old committee and set up a new one headed by Chao Khun Dhammapitok. The meeting was then adjourned.

The next morning I passed by the quarters of Chao Khun Dhammapitok and he called me into his room. "There are some things I'd like to tell you concerning the Somdet," he said. "I've kept them secret and haven't told anyone else at all." He then went on to say, "Right before he died the Somdet 1) told me to be in charge of his funeral after he died; 2) turned over all of his belongings to me; and 3) told me to help take charge of the monks and novices in Wat Borom."

"That's good to hear," I told him. Afterwards we held a meeting of the monks in Wat Borom, at which the Somdet's orders were made public. Chao Khun Dhammapitok was then given responsibility for running both the funeral and the temple as a whole.

Before leaving the meeting, I spoke up. "I'd like to beg your pardon, but I was so disgusted yesterday I couldn't stand it. When the Somdet was alive no one ever spoke of his hospital; after he died no one spoke of his cremation — but started speaking about the hospital instead. If what I said was improper or wrong or caused any hard feelings, then I'll take my leave of the temple and ask not to be involved in the funeral."

Chao Khun Dhammapitok then pleaded with me not to leave, and told me, "There was nothing wrong with what you said." I thus joined in and helped with the funeral until it was over.

Not long afterwards, the cremation was held at Wat Phra Sri Mahadhatu in the Bang Khen district of Bangkok. The Somdet had been the first abbot of this temple when it was built by the government. After the cremation, I went to spend the rains at Naa Mae Khao (WhiteMother's Field) at what is now called Wat Asokaram.

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Where Wat Asokaram stands today was originally called WhiteMother's Field. The owners, Sumet and Kimhong Kraikaan, donated about 22 acres over a period of two years — 1954 and 55 — for the purpose of building a monastery. We then set up quarters and had one of my followers, Phra Khru Baitika That, go to look after the place in my absence along with five other monks. Thus when the monastery was first founded we had six monks staying there.

In 1956, after the Somdet's cremation, I went there to spend the rains. During this period I began making plans for the festival celebrating 25 centuries of Buddhism in 1957 (2500 B.E.). Actually, I had already been thinking about the matter for a long time, ever since the year I left the forest at Baan Phaa Daen Saen Kandaan in Chiang Mai.

During the years that I was contemplating holding a festival to celebrate 25 centuries of Buddhism, I had gone off wandering to a number of places. One night, while staying at Phra Sabai Cave in Mae Tha district, Lampang, I went into a deep cave behind Phra Sabai Cave and lit a series of kerosene lanterns that I placed in a row in front of the Buddha image there. Directly in front of the image was a floor of wooden planks. As for myself, I went to sit on a large rock and faced the wall of the cave. I kept the lanterns lit bright all night long. I made a vow: "This will have to be a big festival, but I don't have any resources. Should I go ahead with it or not? May the Dhamma inspire the answer to appear in my heart. Or may the deities who watch over the nation, the religion and the King, and the deity who guards the Emerald Buddha — which lies at the heart of the nation's spirit — help show me the way."

That night at about 2 a.m., while my mind was rested and at ease, there was an incident: a sudden clatter from in front of the Buddha image. It was the sound, not of falling rock, but of shattering glass. I waited for a moment and then got up to have a look. I walked around about three to four meters from where I had been sitting. The entire cave was lit — a small circular cave, no more than eight to nine meters wide, ten to fifteen meters tall, and with an opening leading to the open

air overhead. After walking around inspecting the area and not seeing anything, I returned to my original spot and continued sitting in meditation.

While sitting, I dozed off and dreamed. A deity came to me and said, "You don't have to worry about the festival, but you'll have to hold it. Whenever you do it, it will be a success." After that I didn't give much thought to the matter. I stayed on there in seclusion for a fair while. Then, before I left, I mentioned to the monks there that I'd like to find three Bodhi trees to plant in front of the cave.

Afterwards I returned to Lopburi and stayed at Wat Khao Phra Ngaam (Beautiful Buddha Mountain Monastery). I had arrived there in time for Magha Puja, and so led a group of lay people from Bangkok and Lopburi in a three-day ceremony. I taught the Dhamma to a contingent of about 300 soldiers, led a candle procession around the great Buddha image, and then we all sat in meditation. I made a vow: "Concerning the festival celebrating 25 centuries of Buddhism: I don't know why, but my mind seems to keep dwelling on the matter." I then vowed to donate my life on the day of the full moon — i.e., to go without food; and to donate my eyes — i.e., to go without sleep. But in spite of my efforts, nothing happened until it was about to grow light.

At about 5 a.m. I dozed off for a moment and dreamed: The earth opened wide beneath me, revealing a scattered heap of broken red bricks deep underground. Something inside me said, "This is a spot where relics of the Buddha were once enshrined, but the shrine is now nothing but a rubble of bricks underground. Therefore, you will have to help build a chedi to enshrine relics of the Buddha after the festival celebrating 25 centuries of Buddhism. Otherwise your old karma won't be done with."

This was followed by another dream: Once, in the distant past, the Sangha was planning an important meeting in India, but after we had all agreed to the date, I hadn't joined in the meeting. The meeting concerned plans for a celebration of the Buddha's relics. It was to be a very important celebration, but I didn't join in. So my friends placed a penalty on me: "In the future you will have to gather relics of the Buddha and enshrine them in a chedi at one place or another, for the sake of Buddhists yet to come." With this dream in mind, my thoughts about going ahead with the festival celebrating 25 centuries of Buddhism grew more and more earnest.

The next day, in the dim light before dawn, I made a vow: "If my holding the festival celebrating 25 centuries of Buddhism will be a success, may the number of Buddha's relics I have with me reach a total of 80, equal to the years of the

Lord Buddha's life." (When I made the vow I had just over 60 relics.) When I finished my vow, it was dawn. After my meal I took out my pouch and counted: exactly 80.

The following night I climbed to sit in meditation at the base of the great Buddha image on the slope of the mountain. I stayed up all night, sitting in *samadhi* and doing walking meditation around the image. I set out a tray, along with flowers, candles and incense, and made a vow: "If the festival celebrating 25 centuries of Buddhism is to be a success, may more of the Buddha's relics come — from anywhere at all." At dawn, about ten tiny relics had come, mixed together with red gemstones. Quickly I put them into a container. I didn't tell anyone, but thought to myself that the festival would probably be a success.

That year — 1956 — I returned to spend the rainy season at Wat Asokaram. After the rains were over I received news that three Bodhi trees had sprouted in front of Phra Sabai Cave in Lampang. At present the trees are four meters tall and very striking — growing out of the jutting rock.

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Plans for the festival celebrating 25 centuries of Buddhism became more and more firm during the rainy season at Wat Asokaram in 1956. Up to that point I hadn't decided where to hold the festival, because it was going to be a large affair, but after looking around I decided, "We'll have to hold it right here at Wat Asokaram."

There were going to be two celebrations: the one I would do in conjunction with other Buddhists and the one I would do on my own. *The celebration held in conjunction with other Buddhists* would succeed on one of three levels, i.e., low, moderate or high. This was a thought I didn't mention to anyone else, simply an observation I kept to myself. When the festival was over, it turned out to have been only a moderate success. Had it been a high-level success I would have built a ceremonial umbrella for the Buddha image at Khao Phra Ngaam.

*The celebration I would do all on my own.* Celebrating on my own would be very good, but wouldn't be of any benefit to people at large. This sort of celebration could be done in one of three ways:

a) The lowest level: Escape from humanity and hide away in the forests and wilds for three years before returning to be involved with people again.



b) The moderate level: Go deep into the forest alone and meditate in earnest for three months with no worries or responsibilities.

c) The highest level: Tie a red cloth around my neck for seven days. In other words, within seven days I would try to do good in one of two ways: (1) attain all of the eight cognitive skills (*vijja*) to use as tools in my work of spreading the Buddha's teachings. (2) If I can't succeed at (1), may I go all the way on the seventh day, at the same time relinquishing my life with no hope of return. Only in this way would I have done with the karma I dreamed about having made with my friends in the past.

By the end of 1956 the time for the festival was drawing near, but I had already made some advance preparations, such as producing the "Bodhi leaf" Buddha amulets copied from an image I had seen in Benares when I was traveling through India. I had materials gathered from scores of places: earth from the Buddhist holy places in India; fragments of votive tablets once cached away in old chedis, donated by friends and followers from various provinces — Lopburi, Phitsanuloke, Phijit, Sukhothai, Suphanburi, Ayutthaya, Phetchabun, Songkhla, Ubon Ratchathani, Thaad Phanom district and Bangkok. I had fragments of ancient Buddha images from Prajinburi and ancient lustral water made by wise men in the past. These I mixed into a paste along with powdered dried flowers and ashes of burnt paper on which Dhamma passages had been written.

Using this paste we cast two types of images by (1) pressing the paste into a mould and then allowing it to dry; (2) mixing the paste with clay, pressing it into a mould and baking it in a kiln. I thought to myself, "We're going to have to produce at least one million images." When we were finished at the end of the rains in 1956, we counted to see how many we had. Altogether there were more than 1,100,000.

Late one night when it was quiet, a strange vision appeared to me. I was sitting pressing Buddha images from a mould when a relic of the Buddha came and displayed a sign over my bed. It was similar to the Bodhi leaf image I was making, but the image I was making represented the Buddha delivering the Dhammacakka sermon — i.e., with both hands raised. But in the vision, the Buddha had both hands in his lap. I had a new mould made patterned after the vision and named it the "Bodhicakka." I still have this relic with me, and haven't yet enshrined it. Later another relic the shape of a Buddha image sitting in meditation came as well. This I also still have with me.

Another time, when I had been sitting in meditation at Lopburi, in the quiet just before dawn, another Buddha relic had appeared; and at around 5 a.m. a statuette of King Asoka made of dark, pinkish gray cut glass came falling down in front of me, so I sketched a copy of it. This, too, I still have with me.

After a number of strange events like this had occurred, I called together the monks who were my closest disciples and announced, "We're going to have to hold the festival celebrating 25 centuries of Buddhism right here in Wat Asokaram." I came to this final decision right then, during the middle of the rains, 1956.

Once I had made my decision, I checked to see how much money was in my account. There turned out to be a little more than 200 baht. Nevertheless, I made orders to begin construction: putting up temporary shelters, making ceremonial umbrellas, etc. As soon as we set to work, contributions started coming in. When we had finished two shelters, our money ran out. At the time, I had gone to Chanthaburi. When I returned to Wat Asokaram, Police Colonel Luang Wiraded Kamhaeng came to inform me, "We're almost all out of money, Than Phaw. Where are we going to get more?"

I laid out the following plans for the festival:

### **"I. Purposes of the Festival:**

#### **A.**

**1.** To make 912,500 Buddha images (equal to the number of days in 2,500 years) and then raise the number to 1,000,000, each one inch tall and made of either stucco or baked clay, to be distributed free of charge to all people who come and join in the festival. Whatever images are left over will be buried in the foundations of the chedi that is to be built.

**2.** To make five large images representing the Buddha at the moment of his Awakening, delivering the first sermon (the Dhammacakka), delivering the final sermon before totally entering *nibbana*, totally entering *nibbana*, and sitting in meditation. (This last is to be the major image in the ordination hall.)

**3.** To make small images, 500 each of silver, gold and gold bronze, each weighing about four grams, to be placed in the chedi as a gift to our descendants.

**B.** To finance a complete set of the Buddhist Canon — Sutras, Vinaya and Abhidhamma — translated into Thai.

**C.** To ordain 80 monks, 80 novices, 80 *upasakas* (lay men wearing white and observing the eight precepts) and 80 nuns (lay women wearing white and observing the eight precepts). If larger numbers of people are ordained, so much the better. Each person is to be ordained for at least seven days. Ordination ceremonies will be held from May 12 to May 20, 1957. Whoever desires to be ordained should give the following information to the ordination committee: name, address, age, date of birth, and whether or not you will be able to supply your own requisites. The committee will arrange to find requisites for all those unable to supply their own. Whoever would like to sponsor an ordination of any kind is welcome to inform the committee. The cost of requisites is as follows: for *upasakas* and nuns, 100 baht; for novices, 150 baht; for monks, 300 baht. Those wishing to be ordained may apply at the Wat from now until April 15, 1957.

**D.** When the festival is over, there will be one further aim: to build a chedi as a memento of our having participated in this important anniversary, and to enshrine relics of the Buddha, Buddha images, copies of the scriptures and other objects related to Buddhism. This chedi will be a cluster of thirteen spires built on three levels, four spires to each level, with a central spire on the uppermost level. The central spire will be the largest — 6 meters square and 26 meters tall. The surrounding spires will be smaller. The laying of the foundations for the chedi will begin before the festival. The location will be at Wat Asokaram, Samut Prakaan, which is planned to be a center for instruction in the practice of meditation for monks, novices, lay men and lay women in the years to come.

## **II. Merit-making ceremonies to be held during the Festival:**

**A.** Monks will chant consecration chants, eight monks a day, for seven days. Monks will sit in *samadhi*, presiding over the consecration of sacred objects, eight monks a day for seven days.

**C.** Five sermons relating the history of the Buddhist Councils will be delivered, one sermon per day. The passages in response to each sermon will be chanted by 40 monks. This will be to dedicate merit to relatives and ancestors who have passed away.

**D.** Food will be donated to the 500 monks and novices invited to participate in the first seven days of the festival. Afterwards, food will continue to be donated to monks and novices until the two weeks of the festival are over. The second week approximately 300 monks and novices will be fed each day.

**E.** During the first seven days there will be a candlelight procession in celebration each night.

**F.** On Visakha Puja — May 13, 1957 — a ceremony will be held to enshrine objects in the foundations of the chedi.

**G.** Mahayana services will also be held, i.e., three days of *kong tek* (merit-making services for the dead) and sermons in line with Mahayanist beliefs.

There will also be other merit-making ceremonies in addition to those listed here.

In addition, temporary shelters for monks and novices, as well as shelters for lay men and lay women will be built, along with a kitchen to be used for the duration of the festival."

After I had written down the above program, we set to work implementing the plans step-by-step. I showed the plans to a number of my followers. They would all shake their heads and say, "Than Phaw, where are you going to get the money for a big affair like this?" But I would think to myself, "We're going to do good. Good-hearted people are sure to come and help. We won't have to go canvassing for funds."

When I had returned from Chanthaburi and the date for the festival was approaching, a stream of people started coming to help contribute money. Altogether we received almost 100,000 baht. One person, Dr. Yut Saeng-uthai, was afraid that we wouldn't be able to carry out our plans, and so went on his own to ask for help from the government. He got to talk with the Minister of Cultural Affairs, General Luang Sawat, who at the time wasn't acquainted with me, but who was kind enough to say, "If you need money, I'll make the arrangements." Khun Ying Waad Lekhawanit-Dhammawithak came to tell me about this. My response: "We don't need the money."

Construction work continued and contributions kept coming in without our ever issuing any requests for funds. All we did was print up flyers to let my followers know of the plans and schedule for the festival.

Preparations within the monastery were virtually complete. Suni Changkhamanon, Sawm Achakun, Thawngsuk and Mae Kimhong Kraikaan took responsibility for building the sala in which the festival was to be held. Seeing that it wouldn't be large enough, we added thatched roofs on all four sides, which Colonel Luang Wiraded together with the monks and novices helped build. In addition we built a temporary kitchen and a large number of temporary shelters.

The kitchen was a little over 30 meters long, 6 meters wide and roofed with thatch. There were five shelters for monks and novices, five each for lay men and lay women, each shelter 80 meters long and 10 meters wide with thatched roofs and walls. Construction of the shelters cost more than 100,000 baht; the festival sala, 165,000 baht; repair of the roads around the monastery — financed by Khun Ying Waad — 60,000 baht. Total construction costs thus came to more than 300,000 baht, and there were a great many other things we had to purchase for the festival as well. Our money kept running out, but at the same time contributions kept coming in. [10](#)

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By April, preparations were in full swing. A large number of monks, novices and lay people began gathering from the outlying provinces. The numbers of people applying for ordination — both men and women — kept swelling until they were well over the goals we had originally set.

On May 11, 1957, we began the ordination ceremonies. To ordain the monks, we invited a number of preceptors: Somdet Mahawirawong (Juan), Wat Makut Kasatriyaram; Phra Phrommuni, Wat Bovornives; Phra Sasanasophon, Wat Rajadhipasa; Phra Dhammatilok, Wat Boromnivasa; Phra Dhammapitok, Wat Phra Sri Mahadhatu; and Phra Nyanarakkhit, Wat Boromnivasa. In addition, we had preceptors who were old friends or disciples of mine. The ordination ceremonies turned out to be a large-scale affair, so I turned the whole program over to Ajaan Daeng, who trained the new monks-to-be throughout the festival and who also acted as preceptor. In addition, Phra Khru Wiriyang from Chanthaburi and Ajaan Sila of Sakon Nakhorn helped act as preceptors, preparing the monks-to-be and arranging their requisites until the end of the festival.

All in all, so many people came to help financially with the ordination ceremonies that we didn't have to spend any of the monastery funds set aside for the purpose — to the point where we ran out of monks-to-be for them to sponsor. We had to announce over the loudspeaker that we could no longer accept contributions from those volunteering to sponsor ordinations.

Sponsors for the ordination ceremonies contributed altogether 138,000 baht. The ordinations lasted from the 11th to the 29th of May, and the number of people ordained in each category was as follows: 637 monks, 144 novices, 1,240 nuns, 340 "Brahmanis" (women wearing white, observing the eight precepts, but not shaving their heads), 34 *upasakas* (men wearing white, shaving their heads

and observing the eight precepts) and 12 "Brahmans" (men wearing white, observing the eight precepts, but not shaving their heads). Altogether, 2,407 were ordained.

The daily schedule throughout the festival ran as follows: "Morning: After the meal, 1) chanting in homage to the relics of the Buddha; 2) chanting of blessings; 3) sitting in meditation. Afternoon: 1) chanting in homage to the Buddha's relics; 2) chanting in celebration; 3) sitting in meditation or a sermon. 4:00 Rest. 5:00 Gathering at the sala; chanting in homage to the Buddha's relics; candlelight procession; consecration chants; chanting in celebration; sitting in meditation until midnight. This schedule is to be followed until the end of the festival."

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During the course of the festival the thought occurred to me that we should donate a *phaa paa* to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, to compensate for one of my plans that had fallen through: In the beginning I had thought of setting up a central fund for the Thai Sangha, and so had prepared a proposal that I submitted to Somdet Phra Mahawirawong (Juan) of Wat Makut. The essence of the proposal was that we would request every titled monk in Thailand to voluntarily relinquish his monthly stipend for one month to form a central fund for the Thai Sangha as a memento of our having celebrated 25 centuries of Buddhism. I myself would gather additional contributions to add to the fund. I asked the Somdet to take this matter to the executive council of the Sangha to see whether or not they would approve it.

I was really pleased by the Somdet's immediate response: "I'll gladly donate my entire monthly stipend. If there's anything else you need for the festival, I'll be glad to help."

"That's the spirit!" I thought to myself.

The Somdet ultimately gave his approval to the proposal and so presented it to the executive council. Later, though, I learned that this and that member of the council had raised objections, and so it fell through.

In that case, I decided, we'd do better to donate a *phaa paa* to the Emerald Buddha. I contacted H.H. Princess Pradisathasari, asking her to act as sponsor for 16 *phaa paas*, one of which would go to the Emerald Buddha. She said she would be glad to help. She gave us every form of assistance, having not only members of her household but also other nobility — including members of the Privy Council — help give a full-scale welcome to the *phaa paas*.

So we gathered together more than 30,000 baht in funds, from which we gave a little over 300 baht to each of the 15 *phaa paas*. The remainder — 24,122.30 baht — we donated to the Emerald Buddha to set up an endowment fund entitled, *The 2500 Anniversary Fund, donated by followers of Ajaan Lee, Wat Asokaram*. The interest from the fund was to help with the upkeep of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Afterwards we gathered additional contributions that we added to the fund, bringing the total endowment to more than 50,000 baht.

On May 20th we began the festive procession, carrying Buddha images, relics of the Buddha and the 16 *phaa paas* from Wat Asokaram to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. H.H. Princess Pradisathasari had given orders for officials from the Royal Household to welcome us. After the procession circumambulated the ordination hall three times, the Princess and members of the Privy Council arrived to accept the *phaa paas*. She had given orders for the royal kitchens to prepare food to be presented to the 15 senior monks invited to receive the *phaa paas*. Most of the monks were from temples that had in the past been under the sponsorship of Rama IV. After presenting the monks with their mid-day meal, the Princess presented them with the 15 *phaa paas*.

With the ceremonies over, we led the procession from the Temple of the Emerald Buddha to Wat Phra Sri Mahadhatu in Bang Khen district in order to receive saplings from the Great Bodhi tree in India, which we had requested and been granted by the government. Arriving at Wat Phra Sri Mahadhatu, we conducted the ceremonies for receiving the two saplings and carried them in a procession three times around the ordination hall. Then we led the procession to the Buddharaksa Gardens in Bang Bua Thawng (GoldLotus Town), Nonthaburi, where we held a one-night celebration in honor of the relics of the Buddha and the Bodhi trees.

The following morning, May 21st, after our meal, we took the Buddha images, relics of the Buddha and Bodhi trees in a boat procession from GoldLotus Town down along the Chao Phraya River to the landing at the Provincial Offices in Samut Prakaan. There we were given a rousing welcome by a contingent from Wat Asokaram, along with the provincial governor, civil servants and other Buddhists.

Our procession then went from the Provincial Offices back to Wat Asokaram, arriving in the afternoon to a welcoming contingent headed by Chao Khun Amornmuni, ecclesiastical head of Chanthaburi province. We circumambulated the sala three times and then entered the area where the consecration services were being held. After paying homage to the Buddha images, relics of the Buddha,

Bodhi trees and chedis, we stopped for a short rest. At 6 p.m. we rang the bell and met in the sala for chants in celebration, consecration chants and a candlelight procession. Huge numbers of people came to join in the celebration.

The following morning, May 22, we held ceremonies for planting four Bodhi trees at Wat Asokaram — the two we had received from Wat Phra Sri Mahadhatu, plus two from India. Since then, my followers have returned from India with two more Bodhi trees that they donated to the Wat. At the moment there are altogether six descendants of the Great Bodhi tree growing in Wat Asokaram.

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The festival continued. One day funds started running out, and so the festival committee met for consultation. Nang Kimrien Kingthien and Khun Nai Tun Kosalyawit prepared a letter asking for help from the government. They brought the letter and read it aloud to me. The gist of it was that they were going to ask the Prime Minister, Field Marshal Paw Phibunsongkhram, to help donate 50,000 baht. Before they had even finished reading the letter, I told them to throw it into the fire right then and there. "If there isn't enough to eat in this festival," I told them, "I'm willing to starve." As it turned out, the money kept coming in and our funds never ran out.

People came to provide food for the monks at the festival — sometimes three days at a time, sometimes seven. Some brought Thai food; others, Chinese food. The consecration ceremonies lasted for 15 days, with Major General Phong Punnakan, Chief of the Army Transportation Bureau, acting as sponsor throughout the festival. Khun Ying Waad Lekhawanit-Dhammawithak arranged transportation and gifts for the ten Chinese monks who came to chant three days, and provided food for 355 monks seven days running. There were two Mahayana sermons, and *kong tek* services for three nights. There was also a *loi krathong* ceremony and a raffle. Khun Nai Thawngsuk Chumpairoad provided food for 300 monks for seven days. In addition, a number of Chinese people came and helped provide vegetarian food for several days. People came to sponsor, altogether, eleven re-enactments of the Buddhist Councils and made donations totaling 5,000 baht at each re-enactment.

On top of all this, people came to donate cups, plates and saucers, rice, firewood, charcoal — everything — to the festival kitchen. For the most part, the kitchen didn't have to buy much. Most things were provided by donors. As a result, the kitchen spent no more than 5,000 baht for food each day. My followers all helped to the full extent of their abilities.



In the area of medical care we received help from General Thanawm Upathamphanon, Chief Army Medical Officer, and his wife, Khun Ying Sutjai, who sent doctors and orderlies throughout the festival to provide medical treatment for those who needed it. And as for security, Police Colonel Sudsa-nguan Tansathit, head of the Police Public Safety Department, sent traffic police and a fire truck to help throughout the festival.

Time passed and everything went well. Money became less and less of a problem, the daily schedule proceeded according to plan, the ordination ceremonies continued every day, and the weather cooperated throughout. There were no untoward incidents, aside from a few minor occurrences not worth mentioning.

On May 13, Visakha Puja, a number of sponsors had four Buddha images cast, each image 80 cm. across at the base. Khun Ying Waad sponsored two images; Phraya Lekhawanit-Dhammawithak, one; and Colonel Luang Wiraded Kamhaeng and his wife, Khun Nai Noi, one — at a cost of 6,790 baht per image. Nai Kuanghang Sae Hia, along with his wife and children, donated a fifth image that they had had cast on Magha Puja at a cost of 34,000 baht, including the celebration costs. The Wat didn't have to spend any money for the casting of these images. The sponsors covered all costs, which for the five images totaled 61,160 baht.

As for the entertainment offered during the festival, hardly anyone paid any attention to it because most of the people had come to participate in the religious activities. A group of my Chinese followers brought a Chinese opera company to perform three nights. Wari Chayakun from Haad Yai brought a Manora dance-drama company and a shadow puppet company to perform throughout the festival, two movie screens were set up, and a *maw lam* singing group from the Northeast came to perform one night and then had to close down from lack of interest. None of these activities cost us anything, because groups of my followers had sponsored them on their own initiative.

We continued to celebrate in this way, with chanting, candlelight processions, meditation sessions and sermons. We invited a number of high-ranking ecclesiastical officials, such as Somdet Mahawirawong of Wat Makut and Phra Sasanasophon, to deliver one sermon apiece. In addition, we had sermons of our own, some of which I delivered, and some by Ajaan Tyy. These activities continued until May 29, 1957.

At the end of the festival our accounts read as follows:

Total income: 840,340.49 baht

Total expenditures: 533,326.75 baht

Assets remaining: 307,013.74 baht

All of this was money that people had donated on their own initiative. In addition we also received non-liquid assets — such as ordination sponsors who arranged requisites on their own — which were handled by the finance committee. The re-enactments of the Buddhist councils, food donated to the monks, gifts for the monks who chanted, the casting of the Buddha images, the construction of the sala, the repair of the road leading to the Wat, the Mahayana services: All of these came in the form of non-liquid assets that, altogether, we estimated roughly at more than 300,000 baht.

All in all, the monks and lay people who joined in the festival came from 45 provinces.

Thus the Festival Celebrating 25 Centuries of Buddhism in the year B.E. 2500 came to a close.

Afterwards, right before the rains, another sponsor — Nai Thanabuun Kimanon, along with his wife and children — had another Buddha image cast and donated to the Wat to celebrate the year B.E. 2500, at a cost of 75,000 baht. The image was more than two meters across at the base. They also built a dais for it and conducted celebration ceremonies that, added to the cost of the image, totaled more than 150,000 baht.

A number of the monks, novices and nuns ordained during the festival stayed on for the rains, continuing to practice the Dhamma together. At the end of the rains many of them returned home, although a number of them are still currently ordained. As for myself, when the rains were over, I went to visit many of the places where there were friends and followers who had come to participate in the festival.

Later I went to Lampang, in hopes of building a chedi at Phra Sabai Cave. (This was when I first saw the three Bodhi trees that had sprung up there, and it made me very glad. They are tall trees now.) Chao Mae Suk of the Lampang Royal House, along with Khun Nai Kimrien Kingthien, Mae Liengtao Janwiroad and a contingent of lay men and women joined together with a group of my followers — both lay people and monks — to complete the chedi. We then enshrined relics of the Buddha there in the cave, and brought an Indian Bodhi tree to plant at the cave's entrance.

From there I went on to Chiang Mai, Uttaradit, Phitsanuloke, Nakhorn Sawan and Lopburi.

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I make it a practice to wander about during the dry season every year. I do this because I feel that a monk who stays put in one monastery is like a train sitting still at HuaLampong station — and everyone knows the worth of a train sitting still. So there's no way I could stay in one place. I'll have to keep on the move all of my life, as long as I'm still ordained.

Some of my companions have criticized me for being this way, and others have praised me, but I myself feel that it brings nothing but good. I've learned about the land, events, customs and religious practices in different areas. In some places it may be that I'm more ignorant than the people there; in other places and with other groups, it might be that I know more than they, so there's no way I can lose by traveling about. Even if I just sit still in the forest, I gain by it. Wherever I find the people know less than I do, I can be their teacher. In whatever groups I find that I know less than they do, I'm willing to be their student. Either way I profit.

At the same time, living in the forest as I like to do has given me a lot to think about.

**1)** It was a custom of the Buddha. He was born in the forest, attained Awakening in the forest, and totally entered *nibbana* in the forest — and yet how was he at the same time able to bring his virtues right into the middle of great cities, as when he spread his religious work to include King Bimbisara of Rajagaha.

**2)** As I see it, it's better to evade than to fight. As long as I'm not superhuman, as long as my skin can't ward off knives, bullets and spears, I'd better not live in the centers of human society. This is why I feel it's better to evade than to fight.

People who know how to evade have a saying: "To evade is wings; to avoid is a tail." This means: A tiny chick, fresh out of the egg, if it knows how to evade, won't die. It will have a chance to grow feathers and wings and be able to survive on its own in the future. "To avoid is a tail:" This refers to the tail (rudder) of a boat. If the person holding the rudder knows how to steer, he'll be able to avoid stumps and sand bars. For the boat to avoid running aground depends on the rudder. Since this is the way I see things, I prefer living in the forest.

**3)** I've come to consider the principles of nature: It's a quiet place, where you can observe the influences of the environment. Wild animals, for example, sleep differently from domesticated animals. This can be a good lesson. Or take the wild rooster: Its eyes are quick, its tail feathers sparse, its wings strong and its call short. It can run fast and fly far. What do these characteristics come from? I've made this a lesson for myself. Domesticated roosters and wild roosters come from the same species, but the domesticated rooster's wings are weak, its call long, its tail feathers lush and ungainly, its behavior different from that of the wild rooster. The wild rooster is the way it is because it can't afford to let down its guard. It always has to be on the alert, because danger is ever-present in the forest. If the wild rooster went around acting like a domestic rooster, the cobras and mongooses would make a meal of it in no time. So when it eats, sleeps, opens and closes its eyes, the wild rooster has to be strong and resilient in order to stay alive.

So it is with us. If we spend all our time wallowing around in companionship, we're like a knife or a hoe stuck down into the dirt: It'll rust easily. But if it's constantly sharpened on a stone or a file, rust won't have a chance to take hold. Thus we should learn to be always on the alert. This is why I like to stay in the forest. I benefit from it, and learn many lessons.

**4)** I've learned to reflect on the teachings that the Buddha taught first to each newly-ordained monk. They're very thought-provoking. He taught the Dhamma first, and then the Vinaya. He'd begin with the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, followed by the five basic objects of meditation: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth and skin. Then he'd give a sermon with four major points:

a) Make a practice of going out for alms. Be an asker, but not a beggar. Be content with whatever you are given.

b) Live in a quiet place, such as an abandoned house, under a projecting cliff face, in a cave. People have asked if the Buddha had any reasons for this teaching, but I've always been convinced that if there were no benefits to be gained from these places, he wouldn't have recommended them. Still, I wondered what the benefits were, which is why I've taken an interest in this matter.

c) The Buddha taught monks to make robes from cloth that had been thrown away — even to the point of wearing robes made from the cloth used to wrap a corpse. This teaching made me reflect on death. What benefits could come from wearing the cloth used to wrap a corpse? For a simple answer, think for a

moment about a corpse's things: They don't appeal to anyone. No one wants them — and so they hold no dangers. In this point it's easy enough to see that the Buddha taught us not to take pride in our possessions.

d) The Buddha taught that we should use medicines near at hand, such as medicinal plants pickled in urine.

These teachings of the Buddha, when I first heard them, sparked my curiosity. Whether or not I would benefit from following them, there was one thing I was sure of: that the Buddha was not the sort of person who would hold blindly to anything, and that he would never teach anything without good reason. So even if I wasn't totally convinced of his teachings, I should at least respect them. Or if I didn't yet have confidence in my teacher's ability, I owed it to him and to the traditions of the Sangha to give his teachings a try.

I was reminded of the words of MahaKassapa, who asked to be allowed to follow such ascetic practices as living in the forest, eating one meal a day (going out for alms) and wearing robes made from thrown-away rags all of his life. The Buddha questioned him, "You've already eradicated your defilements. What is there left for you to strive for?"

MahaKassapa answered, "I want to observe these practices, not for my own sake, but for the sake of those yet to come. If I don't follow these practices, who will they be able to take as an example? If a person teaches by example, the students will learn easily, just as when a person teaches students how to read: If he has pictures to go along with the text, the students will learn much more quickly. My observing these practices is the same sort of thing."

When I thought of these words, I felt sympathy for MahaKassapa, subjecting himself to all sorts of hardships. If you were to put it in worldly terms, you could say that he was already a multimillionaire, deserving a soft bed and fine food, but instead he slept and ate on the ground, and had only coarse food to eat. Thinking of his example, I'd be ashamed to look for nothing more than creature comforts. As for MahaKassapa, he could have eaten fine food and lived in a beautiful home with no danger of his heart's being defiled. But — and it's not surprising — he was more concerned with benefiting those who came after.

All of these things have given me food for thought ever since I was first ordained.

Speaking of living in the forest, I've learned a lot of unusual lessons there. Sometimes I've seen death close at hand and have learned a lot of lessons —

sometimes from seeing the behavior of animals, sometimes from talking to people who live there.

Once there was an old man who told me of the time he had gone with his wife to tap tree sap deep in a large forest. They happened to run into a bear and a fight ensued. The wife was able to get up a tree in time, and then called down to her husband, "If you can't fight it off, lie down and play dead. Don't make a move."

When her husband heard this, he came to his senses and so fell back on the ground, lying absolutely still. Seeing this, the bear climbed up astride him, but then let go of him and simply stood looking at him. The old man lay there on his back, meditating on the word, "*buddho, buddho,*" and thinking, "I'm not going to die. I'm not going to die." The bear pulled at his legs and then at his head, and then used its nuzzle to push him left and right. The old man kept his joints loose and didn't react in any way. After the bear had decided that the man was dead, it left. A moment or so later the man got up and walked home with his wife. His head was all battered and bloody, but he didn't die.

When he had finished telling me the story, he added, "That's the way forest animals have to be. If you can't fight, you have to play dead."

Hearing this, the thought occurred to me, "No one is interested in a dead person. Since I live in the forest, I should play dead. Whoever praises me or attacks me, I'll have to be still — quiet in thought, word and deed — if I want to survive." This can also be a good reminder in the way of the Dhamma: To free yourself from death, you have to play dead. This is a good lesson in *maranassati*, keeping death in mind.

Another time, early one morning when I was staying in the middle of a large forest, I took my followers out for alms. As we were going through the forest, I heard a mother chicken cry, "*Kataak! Kataak!*" Since she didn't fly away, I figured she probably had some baby chicks, so I sent the boys to run and look. This frightened the chicken and she flew away over the trees. The boys saw a lot of baby chicks running around, but before they could catch them, the chicks scurried into a large pile of fallen leaves. There they hid themselves and lay absolutely still. The boys took a stick and stirred around in the leaves, but the chicks didn't move. They didn't even make a peep. Although the boys kept looking for a while, they couldn't find even a single chick. I knew that the chicks hadn't gone anywhere. They had just pretended to be fallen leaves. So as it turned out, of all those little tiny chicks, we couldn't catch a one.

Thinking about this, I was struck by their instincts for self-preservation, and how clever they were: They simply kept themselves quiet in a pile of fallen leaves. And so I made a comparison for myself: "When you're in the wilds, then if you can keep your mind still like the baby chicks, you're sure to be safe and to free yourself from dying." This was another good lesson.

In addition to the animals, there are other aspects of nature — such as trees and vines — that can set you thinking. Take vines, for instance. There are some that don't turn in any direction but right. Observing this, I've made it a lesson for myself. "If you're going to take your mind to the highest good, you'll have to act like the vines: i.e., always to the right, for the Buddha taught, *"Kaya-kammam, vaca-kammam, mano-kammam padakkhinam"* — going to the right in thought, word and deed. You'll always have to go right — by keeping yourself above the defilements that flare up and consume the heart. Otherwise you'll be no match even for a vine."

Some kind of trees make themselves quiet in ways we can see: We say that they "sleep." At night, they fold up their leaves. If you go lie under them, you'll have a clear view of the stars in the nighttime sky. But when day comes, they'll spread out their leaves and give a dense shade. This is a good lesson for the mind: When you sit in meditation, close only your eyes. Keep your mind bright and alert, like a tree that closes its leaves and thus doesn't obstruct our view of the stars.

When you can think in this way you see the value of living in the forest. The mind becomes confident. Dhamma that you have studied — or even that you haven't — will make itself clear because nature is the teacher. It's like the sciences of the world, which every country has used to develop amazing powers. None of their inventions or discoveries came out of a textbook. They came because scientists studied the principles of nature, all of which appear right here in the world. As for the Dhamma, it's just like science: It exists in nature. When I realized this I no longer worried about studying the scriptures, and I was reminded of the Buddha and his disciples: They studied and learned from the principles of nature. None of them followed a textbook.

For these reasons I'm willing to be ignorant when it comes to texts and scriptures. Some kinds of trees sleep at night and are awake during the day. Others sleep by day and are awake by night. The same is true of forest animals.

Living in the forest, you also learn from the vapors that each plant exudes. Some plants are good for your health, some are bad. Sometimes, for example, when I've been feverish, I've gone to sit under certain kinds of trees and my fever has

disappeared. Sometimes when I've been feeling well I've gone to sit under certain kinds of trees and the elements in my body have become disturbed. Sometimes I've been hungry and thirsty, but as soon as I go sit under certain kinds of trees, my hunger and thirst disappear. Learning from trees in this way has caused me to think about the traditional doctors who keep a statue of a hermit on their altars. Those hermits never studied medical textbooks, but were able to teach about medicines that can cure disease because they had studied nature by training their minds the same way we do.

Similar lessons can be learned from water, earth and air. Realizing this, I've never gotten very excited about medicines that cure disease, because I feel that good medicines are everywhere. The important point is whether or not we recognize them, and this depends on us.

In addition there is another quality we need in order to take care of ourselves: the power of the mind. If we are able to keep the mind quiet, its ability to cure disease will be tens of times greater than that of any medicine. This is called *dhamma-osatha*: the medicine of the Dhamma.

All in all, I can really see that I've gained from living in forests and other quiet places in order to train the mind. One by one I've been able to cut away my doubts about the Buddha's teachings. And so, for this reason, I'm willing to devote myself to the duties of meditation until there is no more life left for me to live.

The gains that come from training the mind, if I were to describe them in detail, would go on and on, but I'll ask to finish this short description here.

\* \* \*

Coming now to the present, I've begun work on making Wat Asokaram a permanent base for people yet to come. On December 5, 1956, while staying at Wat Asokaram, I was given a rank and a title — Phra Khru of the first order, with the title, "Phra Khru Suddhidhammacariya" — without my having known or even thought about it beforehand. In December, 1957, I learned that, again without warning, I had been given the rank of Chao Khun, with the title, "Phra Suddhidhammaransi Gambhiramedhacariya," so I have decided to spend the rains at Wat Asokaram ever since.

In 1959 I started feeling ill in the middle of the rains. Thinking of my illness, I began to grow discouraged about living on. There were days when my thoughts would turn away from my followers and be concerned only with myself alone: I



would see places where I could find quiet and solitude as the highest form of happiness. Sometimes my illness would recede; sometimes I'd be sick all night long, but I was able to bear with it. I had sharp pains in my stomach, and there was one day when I ran a very high fever for many hours. So when the rains were over I came to rest at Somdet Phra Pin Klao Hospital.

My first stay was for three days — November 2-5, 1959 — but after returning to the Wat I had a relapse, and so I re-entered the hospital on Tuesday, November 10. Since then my illness has slowly subsided.

One day, lying in bed, I thought to myself: "I want the fact that I've been born to be useful both to myself and to others. Even if I were to be born into a world where there is no sickness, I'd want to be of use both to the world and to the Buddha's teachings all of my life. But here I'm sick, so I'd like my sickness to be of use both to myself and to others." With this in mind, I wrote the following letter:

Concerning my food, I don't want anyone to worry. The hospital has everything I could want. So if anyone feels inspired to bring food, I ask that he or she take the cost of the food and the amount of money it would cost to bring it here, and use the money to make merit in some other way, e.g., to compensate for all of the hospital's medicine I've used or, if there is money left over, to help pay for the poor and destitute who need hospital care. Wouldn't that be a better way to think?

The building where I'm staying is a special building. It hasn't yet been opened to other patients. The doctors have given me the best possible care and attention, without asking for even a single cent. Therefore, whoever has good intentions should think this over.

In conclusion, I'd like to donate some beds to the hospital as a memento. Whoever would like to help can contact either me or the Director and Assistant Director of Somdet Phra Pin Klao Hospital.

*Phra Ajaan Lee*  
Special Room  
Somdet Phra Pin Klao Hospital  
(The Naval Hospital at Puggalo)

(On November 11, 1959, the Naval Hospital at Puggalo received permission from the Defense Ministry to change its name to Somdet Phra Pin Klao Hospital, one day after I was re-admitted.)

When I had finished the letter, I thought to myself: "At the very least, we should get 30,000 baht to help the hospital." So I had my intentions announced to my followers, and beginning that very day people started to donate money.

On November 16, a group of people from Samut Prakaan came to see me at the hospital to tell me that (a) there had been another car crash at "Death Curve" on Sukhumvit Road in Bang Ping; and (b) a number of people had seen all sorts of frightening spirits appearing at the curve. I decided it would be a good idea to make merit and dedicate it to people who had died in accidents along the road.

I went to consult the deputy governor of Samut Prakaan and a group of my followers, and we agreed that we would have to make merit. The proceedings began the evening of December 18. A group of monks chanted in a temporary pavilion set up by the side of Sukhumvit Road near the office of the Samut Prakaan Roads Bureau. Fifty *phaa paas* were presented and the names of the curves on the road were changed as follows:

Bodhi Tree Curve was renamed Bodhisattva Curve.

Death Curve was renamed Safe Curve.

Mido Curve was renamed Victory Curve.

This finished, I returned here to the hospital that afternoon, and have continued staying on for nearly a month since. The doctors and nurses have been very attentive and helpful. For example, Admiral Sanit Posakritsana, the director of the hospital, has been very attentive, bringing food to donate early each morning and looking after me as if he were one of my followers.

During this period I wrote a book, *A Handbook for the Relief of Suffering*, to be distributed free of charge. I had no difficulties in having it printed. Two of my followers helped print 2,000 copies: Khun Nai Lamai Amnueysongkram, 1,000 copies; and Navy Lieutenant Ayut Bunyaritraksa, the other 1,000. It seems that my aims have been realized fairly well. For instance, I wanted to collect money to help the hospital, and today — January 10, 1960 — as I leave the hospital after staying here 45 days, we've collected 31,535 baht, which shows that even when ill, I can be of use.

Even when I die, I'd like my remains to be of use to those still living. I've seen one example: Khru Baa Sri Wichai, who is revered by people up north. He had made plans to build a bridge across the Mae Ping River, but died before the bridge could be finished. So some of his followers took his body and placed it in a coffin near the unfinished bridge, with a notice that whoever wanted to help with the funeral,

please help finish the bridge first. In the end, even as he lay there rotting, Khru Baa Sri Wichai was able to be of use to the people.

And so in my life I've aimed at being of use all along, ever since I first went out to practice meditation in 1926 up to the present. I've taught students in a number of provinces, and have helped set up monasteries for the convenience of Buddhists at large. In setting up monasteries like this, I've helped in two ways:

**1)** When my followers had set up monasteries on their own, but were still lacking in some way, I've offered assistance and encouragement.

**2)** When my friends were thinking of building monasteries but hadn't yet completed them, if they needed monks I'd send some of my followers to live on a permanent basis. As for monasteries that my teachers had built while passing through from place to place, I've continued visiting and helping train the people living there.

In Chanthaburi there are eleven monasteries I helped to set up. In Nakhorn Ratchasima there are two or three. There's one in Srisaket, and more in Surin — all are friends in meditation. In Ubon Ratchathani there are many places. In Nakhorn Phanom, Khon Kaen, Loei, Chaiyaphum, Phetchabun, Prajinburi, Rayong, Trat, Lopburi, Chainat, Tak, Nakhorn Sawan, Phitsanuloke are monasteries where I've taught on a temporary basis, without setting up any monasteries of my own. In Saraburi I've helped set up one monastery. Uttaradit is a place where I've trained people while passing through. Lampang, Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Nakhorn Nayok, Nakhorn Pathom and Ratchaburi I've passed through and taught people, but without setting up monasteries. In Prajuab some friends have begun setting up a monastery in Hua Hin district. In Chumporn there are two or three monasteries I've helped set up. Surat Thani I've passed through, but haven't started a monastery. In Nakhorn Sri Thammarat I stayed for a while and helped start a monastery that has since fallen vacant. Phattalung some of my followers have passed through, but as of yet there's no monastery. In Songkhla there are a lot of forest monasteries. In Yala some of my followers have started establishing a base, and I myself have been there twice.

During the dry seasons I've made it a point always to go visit old students of my teachers. Sometimes I've gone off to meditate on my own. After I was reordained in the Dhammayut Sect in 1927, I spent my first Rains Retreat in Ubon Ratchathani province. I then spent the rains in Bangkok at Wat Sra Pathum for three years, then one rainy season in Chiang Mai, two in Nakhorn Ratchasima and one in Prajinburi. After that I built a monastery in Chanthaburi and spent

fourteen Rains Retreats there. From there I went to India, where I spent one rainy season. Returning from India, I passed through Burma and then spent the rains at Wat Khuan Miid in Songkhla province. After that I returned to Chiang Mai for one rainy season, and then spent three rainy seasons at Wat Boromnivasa. Since Somdet Mahawirawong (Uan)'s death, I've gone out to spend four Rains Retreats at Wat Asokaram, the fourth Retreat being in 1959.

As I dictate this, I'm lying in bed at Somdet Phra Pin Klao Hospital, Thonburi.

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## Epilogue 📖

The thirteen-spired chedi Ajaan Lee mentioned in his plan for the Festival Celebrating 25 centuries of Buddhism was never built during his lifetime. Shortly after the festival, his followers — fearing that he would leave the Bangkok area and return to the forest once the chedi was finished — insisted that Wat Asokaram needed an ordination hall before it needed a chedi, and so arranged to have that built first. After the ordination hall was completed in May 1960, Ajaan Lee held a meeting with some of his major supporters to discuss plans for the chedi, but again they found reasons for not going ahead with the project.

Meanwhile, Ajaan Lee's health worsened. After the end of the rainy season he returned to Somdet Phra Pin Klao Hospital, but realizing that the doctors would not be able to cure his illness, arranged for his release from the hospital in early April, 1961. Soon afterwards, on the night of April 25-26, he passed away in his hut at Wat Asokaram. The doctors' verdict: a heart attack.

When the initial funeral services were over, his followers decided to delay the cremation until after they had finished the chedi as their final gift to his memory — much like the story of Khru Ba Sri Wichai that Ajaan Lee mentioned towards the end of his autobiography. However, after the chedi was finished in 1965, a poll of Ajaan Lee's followers revealed that the vast majority did not want to see him cremated at all, so ever since then his body has been kept at Wat Asokaram, where it is now enshrined in a large and lavishly designed sanctuary finished in 1987. Even today, huge numbers of people come to pay their respects to him on a regular basis.

Toward the end of his last stay in the hospital, Ajaan Lee dictated the following piece on the theme of making the Dhamma — and oneself — one's refuge by practicing mindfulness of the four frames of reference: the same theme as one of

the Buddha's sermons in the final year of his life. Since this is Ajaan Lee's last recorded sermon, I feel it makes a fitting conclusion to his life story.

\* \* \*

## A Refuge in Awakening

*ye keci buddham saranam gatase  
na te gamissantī apaya-bhumim  
pahaya manusam deham  
deva-kayam paripuressantīti*

"Those who have gone to the Buddha as refuge will not go to the realms of deprivation. On abandoning the human body, they will fill the ranks of the gods."

I will now explain this verse so that you can practice in a way leading to the supreme attainment, capable of eliminating all your suffering and fears, reaching the refuge of peace.

We come into this world without a substantial refuge. Nothing — aside from the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha — will follow us into the next life. These three are the only things in which we can take refuge both in this life and in lives to come.

There are two levels on which people take refuge in the Triple Gem. Some take refuge only allegorically, on the level of individuals, whereas others take refuge on the level of inner qualities, by developing the steps of the practice within themselves.

### I. On the level of individuals

**A. *Buddha*.** Buddhas are people who have attained purity of heart. There are four types:

- 1. *Rightly self-awakened Buddhas*:** those who have attained Awakening on their own, without anyone to teach them, and who have established a religion.
- 2. *Private Buddhas*:** those who have gained Awakening without establishing a religion. On attaining the goal, they live by themselves.
- 3. *Disciple Buddhas*:** those who have practiced in line with the teachings of a Buddha until they too have gained Awakening.

**4. *Learned Buddhas*:** those who have studied the teachings in detail, have followed them, and have attained the goal.

All four of these types are individual people, so to take refuge in them is to take refuge on the level of individuals. They can give us refuge only in a shallow and not very substantial way. Even though taking refuge on this level can be advantageous to us, it helps us only on the level of the world and can give only temporary protection against falling into the realms of deprivation. If we lose faith in these individuals, our mind can change to a lower level — for all individuals fall under the laws of all conditioned things: They are inconstant and changing, subject to stress, and not-self — i.e., they can't prevent their own death.

So if you go to a Buddha as refuge on the level of individuals, there are only two sorts of results you'll get: at first gladness, and then sadness when the time comes to part — for it's the nature of all individuals in the world that they arise, age, grow ill, and die. The wisest sages and the most ordinary people are all equal on this point.

**B. *Dhamma*.** For many of us, the teachings in which we take our refuge are also on the level of individuals. Why is that? Because we see them as the words of individual people.

Sages of the past have divided the teachings in the Buddhist Canon into four types:

**1. *Sayings of the Buddha*.**

**2. *Sayings of his disciples*.**

**3. *Sayings of heavenly beings*.** There were occasions when heavenly beings, on coming to pay respect to the Buddha, said truths worth taking to heart.

**4. *Sayings of seers*.** Some hermits and yogis uttered truths from which Buddhists can benefit.

All of these sayings were organized into the three parts of the Buddhist Canon: the discourses, the discipline, and the Abhidhamma. If we take refuge in the Dhamma on this level, it is simply an object: something we can remember. But memory is inconstant and can't provide us with a safe, dependable refuge. At best it can help us only on the worldly level because we are depending allegorically on individuals, on objects, as our refuge.

**C. Sangha.** There are two sorts of Sangha.

**1. *The conventional Sangha:*** ordinary people who have ordained and taken up the homeless life. This sort of Sangha is composed of four sorts of people.

**a. *Upajivika:*** those who have taken up the ordained life simply as a comfortable way of making a living. They can depend on others to provide for their needs and so they get complacent, satisfied with their ordained status, without looking for any form of goodness better than that.

**b. *Upadusika:*** those who, on being ordained in Buddhism, destroy the Buddha's teachings through their behavior — not abandoning the things they should abandon, not doing the things they should do, damaging their own capacity for good and that of others, being destructive, falling away from the Buddha's teachings.

**c. *Upamuyhika:*** those who, on being ordained in Buddhism, make themselves blind and ignorant, who don't look for tactics for bringing their behavior into line with the Buddha's teachings. They don't pull themselves out of their useless ways and stay continually deluded.

**d. *Upanisaranika:*** those who, on being ordained in Buddhism, are intent on studying and practicing in line with what they have learned, who try to find themselves a secure refuge, and who don't let themselves become heedless or complacent. Whatever the Buddha says is good, they behave accordingly. Whether or not they attain that goodness, they keep on trying.

All four of these count as one type of Sangha on the level of individuals.

**2. *The Noble Sangha.*** This has four levels: those who have practiced the Buddha's teachings until they have reached the attainments of stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, or arahantship. All four of these are still on the level of individuals because they are individual people who have reached the transcendent attainments in their hearts. Suppose, for example, we say that Aññakondañña is a stream-winner, Sariputta a once-returner, Moggallana a non-returner, and Ananda an arahant. All four of them are still individuals in name and body. To take refuge in them is to take refuge on the level of individuals — and as individuals they are inconstant and unstable. Their bodies, sense faculties, and mental phenomena by nature have to age, grow ill, and die. In other words, they are *anicca*, inconstant and changeable; *dukkha*, subject to stress and suffering; and *anatta*: They themselves can't prevent the nature of conditioned phenomena from taking its course with them.

When this is the case, anyone who tries to take refuge in them is subject to change as well. We can depend on them only for a while, but they can't provide us any true refuge. They can't keep us from falling into the realms of deprivation. At best, taking refuge in them can give us results on the worldly level — and the worldly level is changing all the time.

This ends the discussion of the Triple Refuge on the level of individuals.

## **II. On the level of inner qualities**

Taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha on the level of inner qualities means reaching the Triple Gem with the heart through the practice.

To reach the Buddha on the level of inner qualities, you first have to know the virtues of the Buddha, which are of two sorts: causes and results. The causes of his Awakening are mindfulness and alertness. The result of his Awakening is the transcendent: the stilling of all defilements and mental fermentations.

So we have to develop these qualities within ourselves. *Buddha-sati* — mindfulness like the Buddha's — is what wakes us up. Full alertness is what makes us correctly aware of cause and effect. The way to develop these qualities is to practice in line with the four frames of reference. This will enable us to reach the Buddha on the level of inner qualities.

**A. Contemplation of the body as a frame of reference.** This means being firmly mindful of the body, using mindfulness to wake up the body and mind both by day and by night — sitting, standing, walking, lying down. We use mindfulness and alertness to be fully conscious throughout the body. *This is the cause for reaching the Buddha on the level of inner qualities — i.e., reaching the Buddha by oneself and within oneself, without having to depend on anyone else. When you depend on yourself, that's when you're on the right track.*

Before focusing mindfulness on the body so as to wake yourself up, you first have to know that there are two ways of looking at the body:

- 1.** The body, i.e., all four physical properties gathered together as a physical object: the earth property, or the solid aspects; the water property, or the liquid aspects; the fire property, or the warm aspects; and the wind property, i.e., such things as the in-and-out breath. When all four of these properties are in harmony, they intermingle and form an aggregate or object we call the body.



**2.** The body in and of itself — i.e., any one aspect of any of these four properties. For example, we can take the wind property. Focus your mindfulness and alertness on nothing but the wind property and keep them there. You don't have to get involved with any of the other properties. This is called the body in and of itself.

From there you can go to wind in and of itself. There are six aspects to the wind property: the breath energy flowing down from the head to the spaces between the fingers and toes; the breath energy flowing from the spaces between the fingers and toes up to the top of the head; the breath forces in the stomach; the breath forces in the intestines; and the in-and-out breath. These six aspects make up the wind property in the body.

When you focus on wind in and of itself, be mindful to keep track of only one of these aspects at a time — such as the in-and-out breath — without worrying about any other aspects of the breath energy. This can be called focusing on wind in itself. The same principle applies to earth in and of itself, water in and of itself, and fire in and of itself.

When you have mindfulness and alertness constantly established in the body, the body in and of itself, wind, fire, earth, or water in and of itself — whichever seems easiest and most comfortable — keep with it as much as possible. When you do this, the body will wake up, for you aren't letting it simply follow its natural course. To bring mindfulness into the body helps keep it awake. The body will feel lighter and lighter as we keep it in mind. Alertness is what enables us to be aware throughout the body. When these two mental qualities enter into the body, the body will feel agile, pliant, and light. In Pali this is called *kaya-lahuta*. The mind will also be awake and give rise to knowledge in and of itself through its own "*sanditthiko*" practice — i.e., the person who does the practice will see the results for him or herself in the here and now.

People who awaken from their slumbers are able to see things and know them. The same holds true for people who practice mindfulness immersed in the body as a frame of reference: They are bound to see the true nature of their own bodies. To penetrate in, knowing and seeing in this way, is to reach the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha — which differ only in name, but are one and the same in their essence.

**1.** Whoever *doesn't* practice in this way is asleep, both in body and mind. A person asleep can't see or know anything at all, which is why we can say that people of this sort have yet to reach the Buddha on the level of the inner qualities.

**B. Contemplation of feelings as a frame of reference.** Be mindful of feelings as they arise within you. Feelings are results that come from your own past and present actions. There are three sorts:

1. Feelings of pleasure
2. Feelings of pain
3. Feelings of equanimity.

To practice contemplation of feelings, be mindful of each of the various kinds of feeling that occur in the body and mind. For instance, sometimes there's physical pleasure but mental distress; sometimes physical pain but mental pleasure; sometimes pleasure both in body and mind; and sometimes pain both in body and mind. So focus in on being mindful of feelings as they arise. Examine them closely. This is called contemplation of feelings.

As for feelings in and of themselves, this means focusing on one type of feeling. For instance, wherever there's pleasure, focus right there. Make the mind firm and one-pointed. You don't have to get involved with feelings of pain or equanimity. If you're going to focus on pleasure, keep focused right there. Or, if you want, you can focus on equanimity without getting involved with pleasure or pain. Don't let the mind jump around in such a way that any other preoccupations come in and interfere. Keep monitoring the feeling you've chosen until you know its true nature through your own awareness.

Whichever type of feeling is easiest for you to focus on, keep your mindfulness and alertness right there as much as you can. This is what will enable you to awaken from the feelings within you. Whoever does this ranks as having developed the inner quality of "*buddha*" that is the cause for coming awake.

**C. Contemplation of the mind as a frame of reference.** Be mindful of the state of your own mind so that you can awaken it from the slumber of its delusions. When your mind awakens, it will be able to see and know the various things occurring in the present. This will enable it to become firmly centered in the factors of concentration and *jhana*, or mental absorption, which in turn lead to discernment, skilled awareness, and release.

There are three basic states of mind you can focus on:

1. *Passion*: The mind hankers after sensual objects and sensual moods that color it, making it intoxicated and oblivious to other things. This prevents it from experiencing states that are brighter and clearer.

**2. Aversion:** The mind at times gets irritated and angry, causing whatever internal goodness it has to deteriorate. Aversion is thus a way in which the mind destroys itself.

**3. Delusion:** absent-mindedness, forgetfulness, mental darkness, misunderstanding.

These states of mind arise from preoccupations concerning what we like and dislike. If you have mindfulness watching over your mind with every moment, it will enable the mind to awaken and blossom, to know the truth about itself.

Whenever passion arises in the mind, focus on being mindful of the mind in and of itself. Don't focus on the object of the passion. Pay attention solely to the present, and the passion will fade. Or, if you want, you can use other methods to help, by contemplating the object of the passion in certain ways. For example, you can contemplate the unattractiveness of the body, focusing first on the insides of your own body, seeing them as filthy and disgusting. Your mind, which has been attached, will then be able to free itself from the passion in which it is immersed and to become more blooming and bright.

Whenever aversion arises in the mind, focus on being mindful exclusively of the present state of your mind. Don't focus attention on the external object or person that gave rise to the anger and aversion. Anger in the mind is like a burning fire. If you aren't mindful and alert to the state of your own mind, and instead think only of the object or person that incited the anger, it's like setting yourself on fire, and all you can do is end up getting burnt. So you shouldn't preoccupy yourself with the outside object. Instead, focus on being mindful and aware of the state of aversion in the mind. When mindfulness reaches full strength, the state of aversion will immediately disperse.

Aversion and anger are like a cover over a fire that lets the fire keep smoldering away, providing heat but no light. If we remove the cover by doing away with the aversion, the light of the fire can brighten the mind. The "light" here is discernment and skilled awareness.

Actually, there's nowhere else that we have to look for goodness other than our own minds. That's how we'll be able to gain the freedom from suffering and stress that is termed *citta-vimutti*, mental release, i.e., a mind beyond the reach of its preoccupations. This is one way in which we reach the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha on the level of inner qualities.

As for states of delusion, in which the mind tends to be absent-minded and forgetful: These come from there being many objects crowding in on the mind. When we find this happening, we should center the mind on a single preoccupation where we can gather strength for our mindfulness and alertness, in the same way that we can take diffused light rays and focus them on a single point: The power of the light is sure to get brighter. In the same way, when we are constantly mindful of the mind and don't let it get involved with various outside perceptions and preoccupations, mindfulness will give rise to a powerful light: skilled awareness. When skilled awareness arises within us, our minds will grow shining bright, and we'll awaken from our slumber of unawareness. We will have attained a quality of secure refuge in our own hearts. We'll know for ourselves and see for ourselves, and this is what will enable us to attain the noble qualities of the transcendent.

**D. *Mental qualities as a frame of reference.*** Be mindful to focus on the mental qualities that occur in the mind with every moment. Mental qualities are of two basic sorts, good and bad.

**1.** Bad mental qualities, which obstruct the mind from attaining higher levels of goodness, are called the Hindrances (*nivarana*), and there are five sorts.

**a. *Sensual desire:*** hankering after sensual objects — sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas that you like and find appealing; and a hankering after sensual moods, such as passion, anger, aversion, and delusion — assuming good to be bad and bad to be good, right to be wrong and wrong to be right. A hankering for any of these things is classed as sensual desire.

**b. *Malevolence:*** ill will for people or objects, hoping that they will be destroyed or come to a bad end.

**c. *Torpor & lethargy:*** sleepiness, sloth, lassitude, laziness, and depression.

**d. *Worry & distraction:*** being upset at failure in your aims, lacking the mindfulness to put a brake on your worries and concerns.

**e. *Uncertainty:*** indecision; doubt about the various things or qualities you are working to develop in your practice.

These five Hindrances are bad mental qualities. If you fall into any of them, you're in the dark — like a person at the bottom of a well who can't see anything on the surface of the earth, can't move around as he likes, can't hear what people at the top of the well are saying, can't see the light of the sun and moon that

illumine the earth. In the same way, the Hindrances obstruct us from developing goodness in many, many ways. They close off our ears and eyes, keep us in the dark, put us to sleep.

**2.** This is why we should work at developing the good mental qualities that will awaken us from the slumber of our unawareness. For instance, we should develop the four levels of *jhana* or mental absorption, which are the tools for suppressing or eliminating all of the Hindrances.

**a.** The first level of *jhana* has five factors. *Directed thought*: Think about any one of the objects of meditation that exist within you, such as the in-and-out breath. Make the mind one, keep it with the object you are thinking of, and don't let it slip off to anything else: This is called *singleness of preoccupation*. *Evaluation*: Carefully observe the object of your meditation until you see its truth. When you are thoroughly aware of the object — this is called alertness — the results will arise within you: *pleasure* or ease; and *rapture* — fullness of body and mind.

When mindfulness fills the body like this, the body feels saturated, like soil saturated with moisture: Whatever you plant stays green and fresh. Plants flourish. Birds and other forest animals come to live in their shade. When rain falls, the soil can hold it instead of letting it wash away. *A person who has mastered the first jhana is like a holding-place of goodness for other human and celestial beings* because *jhana* and concentration can have a cooling influence not only on oneself, but also on others as well.

When mindfulness and alertness are stay focused on your mind, the mind feels saturated and full with an unadulterated sense of rapture and joy at all times. As for the pleasure and ease that come from the first level of *jhana*, they give you a sense of freedom with no worries or concerns for anyone or anything — like a person who has attained enough wealth that he no longer has any worries or concerns about his livelihood, and so can relax in peace.

When you attain the pleasure and ease that come from the first level of *jhana*, you are freed from the Hindrances of indecision and worry & distraction. So you should work at developing these factors in your mind until it can stay steadily in *jhana*. Your heart will then be blooming and bright, giving rise to the light of discernment, or liberating insight. And if you have developed your capabilities enough, then on attaining the first level of *jhana* you may gain entry to the transcendent. Some people, though, may go on to the second level of *jhana*.

**b.** The second level of *jhana* has three factors: rapture, pleasure, and singleness of preoccupation. The power of the mind gets stronger step by step, so try to keep your mind in that state simply by focusing down and keeping mindfulness firmly established right there. The mind will grow even stronger and this will lead you on to the third level of *jhana*.

**c.** The third level of *jhana* has two factors: pleasure and singleness of preoccupation. Keep focusing down through the power of mindfulness and alertness, and you will be able to shed the factor of pleasure and enter the fourth level of *jhana*.

**d.** The fourth level of *jhana* has two factors: equanimity and singleness of preoccupation. On this level of *jhana*, the mind has great strength, based on its strong focus accompanied by mindfulness and alertness. The mind is firm and unmoving — so completely unmoved by past and future that it lets them both go. It keeps track solely of the present, steady and unwavering like the light of a Coleman lantern when there's no wind. *When the mind attains the fourth jhana, it gives rise to a brightness:* discernment and the skill of liberating insight. This is what enables it to gain understanding into the four Noble Truths, and so to proceed to the transcendent — the truly safe refuge.

People who have done this experience nothing but an inner brightness and happiness in their hearts, for they dwell with the quality they have given rise to within themselves. They reach the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha on the highest level, the level of release or ultimate attainment, a quality free from defilement and mental fermentations.

People who train their hearts in this way have reached the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha on the level of inner quality. In other words, they have reached refuge in their own hearts. They have absolutely closed off the route to the realms of deprivation. At the very least, they are destined after death to go to the higher realms of happiness. At best, they will attain *nibbana*. All of them are certain to attain *nibbana* within at least seven lifetimes, for they have reached an inner quality that's steady and certain. They won't fall into anything low. Anyone who has yet to attain this quality, though, has an uncertain future.

So if we want the peace and security that the Buddha's teachings has to offer, we should all try to find ourselves a dependable refuge. If you take refuge on the allegorical level, the level of individuals, find people of worth so that your conviction in them will take you to the happy realms. As for refuge on the level of

inner qualities, which will really be of substantial value to you, practice so as to give rise to those qualities within yourself.

To summarize: On the level of inner qualities, the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are all one and the same thing. They differ only in name.

So you should "*opanayiko*" — bring these qualities into your heart.

"*Sanditthiko*" — When you practice, you'll see them for yourself. "*Paccattam*" — You'll know them only for yourself. Things that other people know about aren't safe.

If you want peace and refuge that are substantial and sure, you should give rise to them in your own heart. The result will be *nibbana*, liberation from defilement, from all birth, aging, illness, and death in this world and any world to come.

*nibbanam paramam sukham*

"*Nibbana* is the ultimate happiness.

There is no happiness higher."

This is "*buddha*" on the level of results: freedom from sleep, total Awakening.

And this ends our discussion of the verse on refuge.

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## Glossary

### Part I: Personal Titles 🇹🇭

People in Thailand are rarely referred to simply by name. Usually the name is prefaced by a term that can indicate either the person's formal rank, his/her relationship to the speaker, or the speaker's feelings about him/her at that particular moment. A number of these terms, as used in this book, are explained below.

In the days of the absolute monarchy, high-ranking civil servants were given ranks and titles of conferred nobility. The ranks given to commoners, in ascending order, were Khun, Luang, Phra, Phraya and Chao Phraya. The wife of a Khun, a Luang or a Phra was called Khun Nai. The wife of a Phraya or a Chao Phraya was called Khun Ying. Other ranks and titles were conferred on members of the royal family in government service, but none of these are mentioned in this book.

A similar system of conferred ranks and titles was, and still is, bestowed on monks. The two basic ranks, in ascending order, are Phra Khru and Chao Khun, although each rank has several grades. The highest grade of Chao Khun is Somdet. The recipient of any of these ranks is also given a new name that is supposed to be in keeping with his status and position. This was especially important back in the days when people might be named "Dog," "Grub" or "Pig" at birth. The conferred names are recyclable. For instance, the Somdet at Wat Boromnivasa mentioned in this book was named Uan (Fatty) at birth. When he was given the rank of Somdet, his official name was Mahawirawong (in Pali, Mahaviravamsa — "In the Line of the Great Hero'). After his death, the rank and title Somdet Mahawirawong went to the abbot of Wat Makut Kasatriyaram, whose original name was Juan (Almost). Officially, the two are differentiated as Somdet Phra Mahawirawong (Uan) and Somdet Phra Mahawirawong (Juan).

Other titles used in this book:

*Chao Jawm*: A king's concubine.

*Khun*: A polite term placed before the name of a man or woman with no particular rank. This "khun" and the "khun" that is the lowest rank of conferred nobility (usually given to district officials and lower-ranking military officers) are spelled differently in Thai and pronounced with different tones. Unfortunately, there is no way to indicate this in English without special tonal markers, but the reader should have no trouble telling which is which from the context.

*Luang Phaw*: Venerable father. 1) A prefix to the name of a senior monk, indicating respect and affection. 2) A prefix to the name of a Buddha image.

*Luang Ta*: Venerable Maternal Grandfather. A prefix to the name of an aged monk, indicating somewhat less respect and more affection than Luang Phaw. Usually, but not exclusively, given to monks ordained late in life.

*Mae*: Mother. Also a prefix to the name of a woman or a girl, indicating friendship and respect.

*Maha*: A prefix to the name of a monk who has passed the third level of Pali exams. The prefix sticks even if the monk disrobes, but if he remains a monk and is given an ecclesiastical title, the prefix is dropped.

*Nai*: Mister. Used before the name of a boy or a man of no particular rank.

*Nang*: Mrs.



*Phra*: Venerable. Used as a prefix to the name of a monk, a Chao Khun or a nobleman (see the note on conferred nobility, above). Again, there should be no trouble telling which is which by the context.

*Thao*: A title of rank for lady attendants in the Royal Household.

*Than*: Reverend, venerable.

*Than Phaw*: Reverend Father. The Chanthaburi equivalent of Luang Phaw (see above).

## **Part II: Terms** 📖

*Abhidhamma*: Part of the Buddhist Canon, seven treatises dealing with the analysis of categories, terms and their relationships.

*Ajaan*: Teacher; mentor.

*Asalha Puja*: A Buddhist holy day, on the full moon in July, commemorating the Buddha's first sermon and the events surrounding it.

*Bhikkhu*: A Buddhist monk.

*Chedi*: A spired monument, containing relics of the Buddha, objects related to the Buddha, or copies of Buddhist scriptures.

*Dhamma*: The teachings of the Buddha; the practice of those teachings; the truth of things as they are.

*Dhutanga*: 1) Ascetic practice, such as going for alms, eating only one meal a day, etc. 2) Wandering monk.

*Gatha*: A verse or short passage in the Pali language.

*Jhana*: Meditative absorption in a single sensation or mental notion.

*Karma (kamma)*: Intentional act, in thought, word or deed, holding consequences for the doer of the act.

*Kathina*: A gift of cloth to a group of monks who have observed the Rains Retreat together in one place.

*Khanom tom*: A Thai boiled sweet made of a flour paste formed into balls around a sweetened coconut stuffing and rolled in grated coconut.

*Magha Puja*: A Buddhist holy day, on the full moon in February or early March, commemorating the Buddha's sermon called the Ovada Patimokkha, a summary of the basic tenets of his teaching, given on the afternoon of that day to an assembly of 1,250 arahant (fully Awakened) disciples.

*Naga*: A deity in the form of a large serpent, gifted with magical powers and great strength.

*Nibbana*: Liberation. The extinguishing of passion, aversion and delusion in the mind, resulting in complete freedom from suffering.

*Parinibbana*: Total liberation; the passing away of the Buddha and his arahant disciples.

*Phaa paa*: A gift of cloth and other requisites placed on small tree and presented to a monk. This is a remnant of an old tradition — from the days when monks were not allowed to accept gifts of cloth, and could make their robes only from thrown-away cloth — in which donors who wanted to give new cloth to monks would "throw it away" by placing it on the branch of a tree near a path where the monk was sure to pass.

*Sala*: 1) A public meeting hall. 2) An open pavilion where travelers may rest.

*Samadhi*: Concentration. Centering the mind in a single preoccupation.

*Tripitaka*: The Buddhist Canon, consisting of three "baskets": Vinaya (disciplinary rules), Suttas (discourses) and Abhidhamma (abstract analysis of categories and terms).

*Vinaya*: The disciplinary rules for Buddhist monks.

*Visakha Puja*: A Buddhist holy day, on the full moon in May or early June, commemorating the Buddha's birth, Awakening and parinibbana (see above).

*Wai*: A gesture of respect in which the hands are put palm-to-palm over one's heart, in front of one's face or, in extreme cases, over one's head.

*Wat*: Temple; monastery.

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## Notes 📖

**1.** A traditional custom in Thailand was for a woman to lie by a fire after giving birth, for any number of days up to a month. In simpler households this meant little more than that: lying next to a fire that was kept burning day and night. In more elaborate households, it involved herbal steam baths and massages as a way of restoring the woman to health.

**2.** Monks are not allowed to eat food during the period from noon until dawn of the following day. There are several reasons for this rule, one of them being that it helps keep the monks from being burdensome to their supporters.

**3.** A major event in rural Thai villages at the end of the rains was to have monks deliver the Mahachaad, or "Great Birth" sermon, a narration of the Buddha's next-to-last life as Prince Vessantara, telling of the hardships he endured in living by the principle of generosity and of the rewards he ultimately won by being true to this principle. The recitation of this sermon lasted an entire day, and was given in thirteen installments. There are a few places where this tradition is still observed, but it is fast dying out.

**4.** Chao Khun Upali Gunupamacariya (Jan Siricando), a childhood friend of Ajaan Mun's, was one of the highest ranking monks in Thailand in the early years of this century, although he was once temporarily stripped of his title and placed under "monastery arrest" for making public remarks critical of King Rama VI's request that monks encourage their followers to donate money for a battleship for the Royal Thai Navy. He was also the preceptor and teacher of the Somdet Mahawiarwong (Tisso Uan) mentioned later in this book.

**5.** Funeral services in Thailand may last for many days — even months or years — before the actual cremation takes place.

**6.** Many of Grandfather Phaa's activities — wearing lay man's clothes, planting and gathering crops, buying and selling goods — are forbidden by the monastic discipline.

**7.** There are not a few people in Southeast Asia who, like the father and daughter in this incident, regard well-behaved monks as ideal eligible bachelors. It is thus up to each monk to decide whether he wants to devote himself full-time to his meditation, and thus remain celibate, or to oblige such people by becoming an eligible bachelor after all.

**8.** There have been cases where people with a grudge against a monk have arranged for a woman to visit him frequently, get on familiar terms with him, and then accuse him of having molested her sexually. Since Buddhists are very

concerned that relationships between monks and women be pure, and since such accusations are almost impossible to prove one way or another, they are often judged by a form of mob mentality that is swayed more by prejudices than the facts of the case: Women who *have* been molested have sometimes been ostracized by the community, and perfectly innocent monks have sometimes been driven out of town. This was the basis for Khun Nai Kimlang's fears.

**9.** Lighting a fire to warm oneself — except for reasons of health — is forbidden by the monastic discipline, because fires of this sort are often an invitation to sit around talking rather than meditating.

**10.** People have asked why Ajaan Lee devotes so much space to describing the Festival Celebrating 25 Centuries of Buddhism, and in particular to the amount of money donated and spent. Three points seem relevant: 1) Many of the people involved in the celebration were still alive when Ajaan Lee wrote this book, the celebration still fresh in their memories. They would have enjoyed seeing that their efforts were not forgotten, and at the same time Ajaan Lee may have wanted to remind them of one of the purposes of the celebration that had not yet been fulfilled: to build a chedi at Wat Asokaram. 2) The whole question of fund-raising — or lack of it — for the festival makes for a good read. Many of his followers felt that only by appealing for funds from the public and the government would they be able to carry out the ambitious program. Ajaan Lee stood fast by his insistence — and in the end was proven right — that they could depend on the purity of their intentions to see them through. 3) Several other groups, including the Thai government, held celebrations of the year 2500 B.E. at the same time as Ajaan Lee's, and in some cases — the government's in particular — there were unresolved questions as to where all the donations went. Ajaan Lee may have wanted to show that in his case, at least, all funds were well accounted for.