

An Iridescence on the Water

*The Teachings of Chao Khun Nararatana Rajamanit
(Tryk Dhammavitakko)*

Chao Khun Nararatana, prior to his ordination, was a member of King Rama VI's personal staff, and was so trusted by the king that he received the rank of *chao phraya*—the highest Thai rank of conferred nobility—when he was only 25. After the king's death in 1926, he ordained at Wat Thepsirin in Bangkok, and remained a monk until passing away from cancer in 1971. From the year 1936 until his death, he never left the wat compound. Even though the wat was one of the most lavishly endowed temples in Bangkok, Chao Khun Nararatana lived a life of exemplary austerity and was well known for his meditative powers. He left no personal students, however, and very few writings. The following piece is a synopsis of some very basic teachings he would give to lay visitors. These teachings are especially suitable for young people. English phrases given here in italics were in English in the original.

§1. Personal Magnetism

To receive the sympathy and compassion of others depends on a combination of our own good qualities, such as energy, industry, perseverance, strength, resilience, together with a heart of sympathy and compassion toward others, without conceit or pride. This is what will cause those around us to feel sympathy, compassion, and love toward us and to want to give us help.

People with gentle manners—polite and kind—are bound to attract the love of those who meet them, along with their cooperation and help. This is personal magnetism. For this reason we should try to maintain the qualities mentioned above. They will become a means of helping us attain all of our objectives, both now and in the future.

§2. Sympathy

'Don't fear. Keep yourself pure, and nothing will be able to harm you.'

Remember: If you want the sympathy of others, send thoughts of sympathy in their direction, and you will receive their sympathy in return—this is a law of mental dynamics—and all the success you wish for will without a doubt come your way.

§3. Cheerfulness

‘Discouraged’ is a word we shouldn’t use and a thing we shouldn’t allow in our hearts. *Let it go and get it out.* If you see it arising, let it go. Don’t take it in. If you are careless and let it sneak into the heart, then as soon as you are aware that discouragement has snuck in, you must immediately get it out. Don’t let it feed on the heart. Otherwise it will become a habit, and you will become weak and debilitated, upset over every trifling mistake. Discouragement is an enemy, an obstacle. It makes the mind restless and the nerves disordered. This in turn causes the body to become disordered—diseased and restless—as well. The brain becomes dull and murky. Discouragement is a bad habit, a block to clear intelligence and discernment.

We must practice putting the mind back into shape. Before we do anything, while we’re doing it, and after it’s done, we have to practice keeping the mind cheerful and bright, with a constant sense of well-being. This will help us to gain strength of body and strength of mind and to enjoy living. The mind will blossom, and whatever we have to learn we will understand and remember with ease, just as a blossoming flower opens itself to welcome drops of dew and fresh air.

§4. The Pleasure of Peace

The Lord Buddha taught, *N’atthi santi param sukham*: No other pleasure is greater than peace. What this means is that there are other pleasures, such as the pleasure of watching a play or a movie, mixing with society, having a spouse, the pleasure of gaining wealth, status, and praise. These things are actual pleasures—
but

they all contain hidden stress, they all require continual contriving, adjustment, and repair—

which is where they differ from the pleasure that comes from peace, a pleasure that is cool and tranquil, without any hidden pain, without any need for a great deal of contriving—a pleasure that is easily attained, right here in our own body and mind. We can give rise to it while sitting alone in a quiet place or while surrounded by society, as long as we have a sense of how to make a separation, inclining the heart toward the pleasure of peace so that while the body may be involved in turmoil, the turmoil doesn’t reach into the heart.

Even when we are seriously ill, with pain racking the entire body, if we have a sense of how to put the mind in the pleasure of peace, the pain won’t be able to disturb the mind.

And once the mind is calm—

it can calm the body and cure its pain, at the same time experiencing the pleasure of peace—

and there is no greater pleasure.

The Lord Buddha taught us to practice in three ways:

1. To begin with, he taught us to put our words and deeds at peace through virtue, not allowing any gross faults or dishonesty to arise in word or deed.

2. He taught us to give rise to the pleasure of peace in the heart through concentration, training the mind not to think thoughts of lust,

anger,
greed,
delusion,
fear,
restlessness,

or uncertainty—things that make the mind irresolute and indecisive. Once these things can be abandoned, the heart is calm, giving rise to the pleasure of peace within.

3. He taught us to put our views at peace through discernment, reflecting so as to see that:

All things are undependable and inconstant (*aniccam*).

They can't last. They must alter, deteriorate, and disband. (Thus they are said to be *dukkham*, or stressful.)

They don't lie under our power or control. We can't force them or plead with them to follow our wishes. (Thus they are said to be *anattā* or not-self.)

When we see these truths, the mind becomes strong, resilient, stable, and resolute, unaffected by events—

because we have seen the truth, with our own discernment, that such things are undependable and unstable; that they have to change, deteriorate, and disband; that they don't lie under our power.

Don't waste your strength of mind trying to force them. Keep the mind free and stable at all times, unaffected by events—and this will keep the mind firmly established in the pleasure of peace.

The mind will be free and gain power—mind power—which we can use to make all our duties and affairs succeed in accordance with our goals.

N'atthi santi param sukham: No other pleasure is greater than peace.

It takes a peaceful mind to support a peaceful body, and a peaceful body to support a peaceful mind; and both a peaceful mind and a peaceful body to attain all the success that you wish.

§5. To Do No Wrong is to Do Nothing

Our mistakes are our best teachers. We should be grateful to ourselves for our mistakes and take cheer in the fact that we have met with a special counselor, our mistakes, in line with the saying, 'Once burned is twice forewarned.' We have to act

on our own and make our own mistakes. These are our best teachers and our best lessons, so that we will remember and be careful not to repeat them. We can make a fresh start, mindful and uncomplacent. Our past mistakes are a thing of the past, but our special counselors are still with us, ready to whisper their warnings at every instant: ‘Be careful. Don’t be complacent. Don’t repeat that error again.’

Once wrong, remember
to prevent twice wrong in the future.
Thrice wrong and you’d better think carefully,
my friend.
Four times, five, and six—
What forgiveness can there be?

Think carefully and you'll notice that all scientific researchers, as well as all outstanding teachers of the Dhamma, have without exception overcome the obstacle of their own mistakes countless times.

§6. Composure and Self-awareness

In avoiding mistakes, the important point is composure. If we have composure guarding our thoughts, words, and deeds at every moment, we won’t make any mistakes at all. The mistakes we make are due to lack of composure. We’re forgetful, absentminded, heedless, complacent, exuberant, or deluded—and thus we make mistakes. Remember the maxim, ‘Keep your composure as a protective shield, and you’ll do bravely in the field.’

Every form of life—human, animal, even plant life—survives through struggle, in line with the saying, ‘Life is struggle.’ At whatever moment we can no longer keep up the struggle, we have to die. So as long as we keep our composure, then even when death comes, only the body dies—just as with the life of the Lord Buddha and the arahants: They had full composure with every mental moment, so that they never made mistakes. That was how they reached deathlessness, the state of immortality. Thus their death was called *parinibbāna*: the disbanding and extinguishing of nothing more than the physical and mental phenomena termed the five aggregates (*khandha*): body, feeling, perception, mental processes, and consciousness.

Thus we should develop composure (mindfulness before acting, speaking and thinking) and self-awareness (alertness while acting, speaking, and thinking). Once we are done, we should use mindfulness to check back and consider if anything is defective or if everything is in proper order. If anything is defective, then immediately make corrections so as to be perfect the next time around. If everything

is already in order, keep trying to have things in even better order until reaching the ultimate.

§7. The Efficacy of the Triple Training: Virtue, Concentration, & Discernment

It's through the efficacy of the Triple Training—virtue, concentration, and discernment—that the enemy—defilement in its gross, intermediate, and subtle forms—can be overcome.

1. The gross forms of defilement that transgress in the area of word and deed can be overcome through virtue.

The intermediate forms of defilement that arise in the heart—liking and disliking, deluded love and deluded hatred—can be overcome through concentration.

The subtle forms of defilement—misunderstandings, misperceptions, and misconceptions concerning the true nature of natural processes—can be overcome through discernment.

2. A person who studies and practices fully and completely in line with the Triple Training—virtue, concentration, and discernment—is sure to gain release from all suffering and stress without a doubt. Thus we should be interested, earnest, and intent on studying and practicing in line with the Triple Training at all times.

§8. The Jasmine

The jasmine is agreed to be the most fragrant of all flowers and the purest white.

The life of human beings is like a play. Try to be the hero or heroine with the best reputation, just like the jasmine. Don't be the villain. And remember that the jasmine blooms fully only for two or three days and then withers away.

So make yourself your best. Make your life, as long as it lasts, the most fragrant, like the jasmine just beginning to bloom.

Choose to do only the good.

§9. Do Good Rather than Ask for Blessings

Choose to do only the good.

A warning to prepare yourself for the future conduct of your life is the best substitute for a blessing and the most reasonable. If you do good, then even if you don't receive blessings, you'll have to do well. If you do evil, then no matter what blessings can be contrived, they can't make you do well. To do evil is like tossing a rock in the water: It will have to sink immediately. No one, no matter how charismatic, can come and charm or plead with the rock to float back up to the

surface. If you do evil, you will have to sink, spoiling your dignity, your character, and your reputation, like a heavy rock sunk down into the mud.

To do good is like light oil: When you pour it on water, it is bound to float as an iridescence over the surface. To do good adds to your dignity and to your reputation. People will be sure to praise and respect you, to exalt you like the oil that floats over water. Even if you should have enemies intent on hating you, reviling you to make you sink, they won't have any effect and will simply fall victim to their own efforts.

So make up your mind to be courageous in doing only the good, without fear or apprehension for any obstacle whatsoever. The person who trusts in the Triple Gem, the person with true happiness, the person who prospers, achieving his or her desired goals, is the person who does only the good.